Male Sexual and Mating Behavior

Man, all the kids from the corner are getting’ married!
Sure. They forgot to buy safes.

--Senior Bandits

The role of sex, mating, and parenthood in the lives of Midcity males differed both in quality and significance from the role of these same activities in the lives of females. For females, the mating-childrearing couple “was of central concern; attracting mates, handling relationships with the other sex, bearing, raising, and supporting children were fundamental objectives of existence. These pursuits were also, of course, of concern to men, but they neither commanded the same intensity of concern nor assumed the same meanings in the overall sphere of life. Differences between the sexes in the relative weightings of these concerns and in the meanings attached to them derived not only from obvious differences in the nature of physiological involvement in the various stages of the childbearing process, but also from the differential perspectives furnished by the respective subcultural systems of male and female. What was central to the system of one was often peripheral to the other.

Within the context of the female subculture, a major basis of achieving eminence as a “woman” was through effective participation in the mating and childrearing complex. Midcity males, in contrast, actualized themselves as “men” by
demonstration of competence, prowess, and knowledgability in several major life arenas: engagement with other men in competition or co-operative activity; producing, obtaining, and distributing economic goods; fabrication, maintenance, and repair of material objects and structures, ordering authority relationships among non-kin collectivities; formulating and enforcing regulatory codes governing collective endeavor. Male participation and concern was not confined to these areas, nor did all of them involve males only—but most men conducted their basic life activities within these major spheres, and the conditions and preoccupations of these spheres engendered the essential character of the male cultural system.

Male involvement in the sex, mating, and parenthood complex derived much of its quality and coloration from concerns granted primary within the context of male subcultures. Sexual involvement in particular, as will be shown, was frequently oriented far more to “prowess” or “honor” concerns of male culture than to “relationship” concerns of female subcultures. The issues of dependency and autonomy, intimately involved in male-female relations, were also of high concern to the male corner group. Group definitions of appropriate and inappropriate behavior in these areas thus affected even the most fundamental aspects of sex and mating relationships.

The nature and intensity of male involvement in sex and mating varied during different phases of the life cycle, and under different circumstances during any given phase. In important respects these activities figured more directly in male life during the twelve to twenty age period than during any subsequent period. Two high priority concerns of male adolescence were achieving identity as a man and establishing initial mating relationships. Females served as one means to the first end, and were, of course, indispensable to the second. Since this was also the age of maximum “gang” solidarity, membership in a corner group created both opportunity and conflict of interest; opportunity in that the corner group provided an effective arena for establishing and testing out mating relations; conflict in that the demands of the “gang” and “girls” were often directly at variance.
Females as Agents of Actualization and Contamination

Sexual intercourse, for men and women alike, serves both as an end in itself and as a means to other ends. For Midcity females, the “ends” for which intercourse was a “means” were generally more important than the act as such. The occasion of impregnation was one event in a larger sequence which included childbearing and childrearing—events whose significance was equal to or greater than that of physical intimacy. In addition, the frequency, quality, and circumstances of intercourse often served for females as an important barometer of the current state of relations between oneself and one’s mating partner.

For Midcity corner boys, in contrast, sexual intercourse had more of the quality of an end in itself. Under most circumstances, intercourse was not explicitly conceived as an avenue to fatherhood, or a component of a larger procreative sequence. Males were better able to focus directly on the sensual pleasure and tension-release involved in sexual intimacy, and to approach intercourse as an objective in its own right. This is not to say, however, that male participation in sexual intimacy served exclusively the purposes of physical gratification. In fact, within the context of corner-group culture, the symbolic significance of the sex act was of great importance.

As already shown, achievement of the status of “man” was a prime concern of Project boys. Involvement with women, whatever physical and psychic functions this fulfilled, was employed as one means to the high priority end of actualizing masculinity. Femininity could be actualized both by sexual involvement and by parenthood; masculinity, in contrast, was little enhanced by parenthood. This contrasts with some other societies; in Latin countries, for example, the capacity to “make many babies” is a sign of potency and virility. It may be that the relatively low prestige-conferring power of fatherhood in the Midcity community put commensurately more stress on sexual intimacy as a symbol of manliness.
One type of “intimate” involvement was the “conquest” pattern. For Project males, in common with males in other sectors of the society, an integral component of “masculinity” was the ability to locate, overcome, and “conquer” non-kin females. The tangible badge of victory was sexual intercourse; this furnished indisputable evidence of the capacity to out-scheme, outwit, cajole, and seduce female quarry. Demonstration of skill and competence as a “lover”—overcoming female defenses by superior exercise of manly skills and appeal—was a major avenue to masculine prestige.

The corner boy, engaged in this sort of “conquest” activity, was frequently more concerned with the impact of his efforts on his reputation among his peers than with his “relationship” with the girl. This attitude is graphically described by Phil Foster in his account of male-female relations in Brooklyn corner groups:

...After a while it was time to take the girls home. That’s why we fellas useta go to dances, to take girls home...Useta be one girl, she’d say goodnight to a fella in the street. In the street she’d say goodnight to a fella! Ah—ha, ha! I’ll kill ‘er. Here the guy’d been schemin’ all night, and she’d say, “Goodnight!” and the guy says, “Wha-a? Wha’ you kiddin’? It’s early! It’s only foura clock! Talk ta me for about an hour!...I may not see ya tomorrow. And besides, what’m I gonna tella fellas ona corner?!?”

The “conquest” pattern and its relation to other forms of mating will be discussed further in subsequent sections on the “pick-up” and “going steady.”

For males, no single enterprise or activity had the capacity to establish masculinity in the way that “motherhood” could establish femininity. Masculinity was actualized by effective control of a variety of skills and behaviors conceived of as “masculine.” Relations with females served this end in complex ways. Paradoxically, one’s masculinity could be enhanced by two sharply contrasting forms of involvement—extreme intimacy and strict avoidance. The “conquest” pattern just cited was one way of enhancing masculinity through achieving close

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physical intimacy with a female; in other situations the demands of masculinity called for stringent avoidance. The term “mama’s boy,” as used by gang members, reflected this latter emphasis. This phrase, of high controlling potency as an epithet, implied that a male was unable to disengage himself from the orbit of female concerns and activities.

How was it possible that both intimacy and avoidance had the power to enhance masculinity? This apparent contradiction can be resolved by dividing the range of male activities into two separable spheres: one in which masculinity was enhanced by association with females, and another in which it was subverted. There were also, of course, other activities in which female presence had relatively little relation to masculinity concerns.

Activity spheres in which masculinity was enhanced by female association included the “pick-up” expedition, public dances, “mixed” private parties, “mixed” public affairs such as dinners or ceremonial banquets, and certain phases of nightly “hanging out” activity. Spheres of activity in which female presence was taboo included the poolroom, athletic practice, “stag” parties, congregation at the local bar, and most “club” meetings. The operation of the sex segregation and integration principle in several customary spheres of activity will be discussed briefly. The poolroom represented the “purest” example of the “male-only” milieu. Female presence in the poolroom was seen as contaminating, and even the proximity of women aroused considerable discomfort. In one instance, girls tapping at the front window of a poolroom in an attempt to entice away some of the players were referred to angrily as “rotten bitches.”

Under most circumstances, the “clubroom” of male groups was a “male-only” preserve, and the “club meeting” a male-only activity. The clubroom was maintained as an exclusively male domain most stringently by the moderately delinquent white Outlaws, less stringently by the black Kings, and least by the lowest status, most delinquent, Senior Bandits. Influential members of the Senior Bandits were able to overcome initial opposition to “letting girls in the clubroom,”
and this group adopted the policy of admitting girls at certain times. In contrast to the Outlaw groups, which defined the clubroom as exclusively male and a refuge from females, the Senior Bandits attempted to recreate in their clubroom certain conditions of the two-sex household; selected girls were permitted to frequent the clubroom at certain times and engage in domestic tasks such as housecleaning and mending the boys’ clothes. During the study period, the policy of admitting girls was one factor which led to a police raid on the Senior Bandit clubroom and its subsequent closing. Following this event, other male groups became even more stringent in prohibiting female presence. Aside from the practical factor that girls in the clubroom provided a basis for possible police action on grounds of illicit sexual activity, there was a feeling that the closing of the Senior Bandit clubroom represented fated retribution for the violation of the “no-women” taboo.

The rule governing female presence in the case of the poolroom and clubrooms was quite simple; females were prohibited. But the sex-segregation principle was also operative in situations where female presence was customary. Three such situations were the public dance, “hanging out,” and organized athletics. The public dance provided males a direct opportunity for demonstrating prowess in approaching, securing, and spurring females. Adeptness in persuading girls to be one’s dancing partner—especially non-local or unusually attractive girls—paid off handsomely in intra-group prestige, since the boy could base his claim to irresistibility on events observed by all rather than on possibly exaggerated reporting of private conquests. Dancing skill as such was not explicitly commended (One boy remarked, “Only punks and sissies dance.”), but competent dancing was recognized as something that pleased girls, and thus was a valuable asset in “making out” with a girl.

However, despite the fact that association with females was an integral feature of the public dance, the amount of genuine “mixing” was limited. During most of the dance, the boys positioned themselves in tightly packed clusters located at different parts of the dance floor. These all-male islands served as staging areas,
from which an individual would detach himself from time to time to engage a
selected girl, and after having danced with her or having been refused, would return
again to the cluster. Boys seldom came to a dance with “dates,” and seldom
maintained a “couple” pattern for any extended period during the dance. For the
older boys, especially among the blacks, there was a greater tendency to operate
somewhat more independently of the male group.

This pattern of initial congregation in a one-sex group, sporadic detachment
for cross-sex association, and subsequent return to the group was also observed in
the “hanging out” situation. One recurrent “hanging” pattern was as follows: five to
ten boys would assemble at their part of the “corner” and spend up to an hour in all-
male conversation, cardplaying, “ranking,” sports discussion, etc. Meanwhile, a
group of girls would assemble at another part of the “corner” area. At some point in
time, the girls’ group would move to join the boys, and for a half an hour or so cross-
sex interaction would occur. Then the groups would separate, the boys would go off
together in a group, and the girls would reassemble as a group or return home. It is
interesting to note the parallelism between these associational patterns of the
“gang” and the mating pattern subsequently described wherein the male, during
late adolescence, relinquishes the corner group as his primary associational locus,
spends some period of time as a member of a husband-wife household, gradually
shifts his associations back to the all-male group, re-tries the husband-wife type of
unit—contrasts quite sharply with the image of extensive male-female intra-
household interaction (“togetherness”) sometimes presented as an ideal by middle
class women’s magazines. It contrasts less sharply, however, with actual middle
class practice.

Rules governing the presence of women were especially important in the case
of collective athletic activity. Different rules were maintained for the athletic
“practice” and “contest.” “Practice” involved either rehearsal of specific techniques
or competitive engagement between teams chosen from within the same group. The
“contest” involved formal competitive engagement with groups from other areas (“enemy turf”), generally with outside officials and non-group spectators.

In the case of the contest, females were not only permitted but desired. This situation provided an opportunity for males to win female admiration through public demonstration of physical skill and prowess. Girls affiliated with the boys’ group frequently served as a “rooting section.” This was especially important when athletic contests were held in “enemy” territory, where most of the audience would be rooting for the “home” team. However, the place of females in such engagements was in the stands, not on the playing field. The “battleground” as such was maintained as male-only terrain.

The presence of females on the playing field conveyed to Midcity corner boys a rather different connotation from that conveyed by the usual female “cheer leader” squad of high school athletic contests. A Junior Bandit, during a meeting of the football team, suggested that the team employ their female affiliates as cheerleaders, on the model of the high school pattern. This proposal was firmly and unanimously rejected on the grounds that this would lay the group open to charges of homosexuality. The proponent of this measure, however, continued to argue for his proposal—not on the grounds that having girl cheer leaders was not necessarily homosexual, but rather that this in fact would universally be seen as homosexual, and if their opponents thereby concluded that the Bandits were “faggots,” they would mistakenly consider them pushovers, and be thrown into confusion by the discovery that they were actually real men.

In the case of athletic “practice,” the “no-women” taboo was maintained with some stringency. The presence of females during “practice” was clearly felt to be out of place. One reason for this was that athletic practice entailed the expression of tough and aggressive “masculine” behavior in a form not ordinarily permitted in a public situation. Particularly important was free rein for active and vigorous profanity. Since this was defined as language not to be employed in the presence of females, proximity of girls would have been seriously inhibiting.
The girls, for their part, did not appreciate the boys' insistence on maintaining one “male-only” nature of these activities. Boys were annoyed and provoked by repeated efforts of girls to gain admittance to practice sessions. Adult coaches or team managers were frequently importuned to use their authority to “keep those _____ girls away” from practice sessions in basketball and other sports. The black girls were somewhat more successful than whites in gaining entry to all-male activities—perhaps because the black boys were somewhat less reluctant to admit them—and relished the opportunity to observe the boys’ intense involvement in athletic activity and to comment and gossip to one another about the behavior of various boys. Such male concessions, however, were rare, and the “no-girls-allowed” rule generally remained in force.

Dividing collective endeavors into sex-segregated activity spheres reflects long-established cultural practice. This device probably derives from an ancient social invention to accommodate the fact that human males do not have a period of rut, nor females a period of heat; in the absence of such basic physiological incentives to sexual involvement, male sexual appetite is aroused primarily by visual and tactical stimuli associated with the direct proximity of females. Given this arousal mechanism, the direct involvement of females in a range of collective activities customarily executed by males would constitute a source of serious distraction. Such activities have generally involved “male” arenas of warfare, economic production, religious ritual, and others.

The exclusion of women from certain competitive athletic activities of Midcity boys reflects stringent taboos found in many primitive societies which prohibit female involvement in warfare and related activities. In Bantu Africa and Algonquian America, for example, warriors were strictly forbidden any contact with women during periods of combat activity, as such contact was believed to doom battle enterprises to failure. Since all stringent prohibitions in “primitive” societies are buttressed by magical or religious sanctions, the belief in the capacity of women to magically debilitate males was undergirded by a set of beliefs as to the specific
ways in which male enterprises were vitiated by female presence. Menstrual blood, for example, was felt to have magical powers of contamination, and the capacity to kill crops or predestine military defeat.

The traditional Hebrew practice of banning female participation in major religious ceremonies finds current parallels in other social institutions which incorporate Judeo-Christian conceptions. Up to quite recently, major universities in the United States have continued to apply the sex-segregation principle to educational activity. This is not surprising since the Hebrew notion that scholarship and theology are intimately related played an important part in the initial establishment of numerous United States universities. The Midcity poolroom or clubroom as an all-male sanctum reflects the British all-male “club” for the higher classes and the all-male “pub” for the lower. The practice of permitting females in the stands or on the sidelines during athletic contests reflects the traditional European practice of having women as camp followers or nurses in times of war but excluding them from the battlefield itself.

In light of the great antiquity of sex-segregated activity spheres and taboos on female presence, the existence of these devices in so well developed a form in contemporary Midcity is noteworthy. It is not hard to recognize the utility of the sex-segregation principle in societies whose economies were based on hunting or where limited-scale warfare was frequent. However, the presence of female-tabooed spheres of activity in a highly urbanized community in a modern industrialized society testifies both to the persistence of these ancient inventions and to their continuing utility in modern life.

The sex-segregation principle, however, does not apply with equal force in all sectors of our society. Since the delineation of separate “male” and “female” spheres of activity is found in every cultural system, it of course occurs in other social sectors of the United States. But on a relative scale, this device appears to be better developed within the lower class—or, conversely, more poorly developed within the middle class. This would appear to relate to class-connected differences in
occupational conditions. A substantially greater proportion of lower class male occupational enterprises involve all-male work groups. Occupational groups such as firemen, loggers, construction gangs, miners, stevedores, machinists, and beat crews are predominantly or exclusively male. In many middle class occupational spheres, in contrast, direct female participation is increasingly prevalent. Contemporary middle class emphases on harmonious male-female interaction in the home parallels the increasing inclusion of females in the orbit of “male” work—particularly in the “office;” much American humor, for example, centers around the parallelism of the boss-secretary and husband-wife relationships.

As the capacity to concentrate on occupational demands despite female proximity becomes more important, the pre-adult training of middle class males has come to provide increasing opportunities for the practice of this ability. “Coeducational” college level institutions provide one such opportunity. In lower class Midcity, however, with its “Men’s Bars,” pool halls, all-male “Social and Athletic Clubs,” corner gangs, and female-based households, the principle of sex segregation remains strong. As in many non-Western societies, there is fairly good acceptance by both sexes of the idea that there are separate spheres of endeavor appropriate to males and females and that such separation accords with the conditions of lower class life, just as the emphasis on cross-sex interaction accords with the conditions of middle class life.

Corner Girls, Sisters, Lovers, Wives, and Mothers

The Midcity corner boy moved into the “gang” phase from the orbit of one woman—his mother—and left that phase to enter the orbit of another—his wife. During his life in the “gang,” his male companions provided for him a large measure of the nurturance, affection, support, and control provided by females during prior and subsequent periods. But despite the fact that the boy’s basic emotional allegiance was commanded by males, opportunities for physical and emotional affiliation with females were always available. Some authors have represented “gang” life as stringently and exclusively male—a picture which is inconsistent with
another picture of gang life—sometimes presented by the same authors—as a continued sex spree. As already shown, neither of these conceptions was supported by data. While the dominant preoccupations of street-corner life were those of the “masculine” world, and a dominant concern of corner boys was the actualization of masculinity, association with females under appropriate circumstances did not vitiate these objectives. In fact, as has been shown, demonstrated skill in the ability to “handle” females was a most effective way of proving masculinity. The subcultures available to the corner group provided an ingenious system whereby masculinity could be enhanced both by association with and avoidance of females. This was arranged by defining certain spheres of activity as appropriate to female presence and others as inappropriate.

The nature and circumstances of the corner boy’s association with females was markedly influenced by these definitions. His relations with females were also influenced significantly by a set of conceptions as to the essential nature of “women”—a term used to refer to all non-child females. These conceptions, delineated within the subcultural systems shared by gang members and supported by the general tenets of lower class male culture, provided for the adolescent boy a fairly simple and clear-cut set of devices for coping with the difficult problem of establishing and maintaining relations with females during adolescence as well as later life. At least five differentiated images of “women” were current.

One prevalent conception pictured “women” as essentially evil—as contaminating, misanthropic, greedy, self-seeking, untrustworthy, and harmful to fundamental male interests. This was reflected in remarks such as “they’re all a buncha hags and bitches”; “Get married? I wouldn’t do a dirty thing like that!”; “You think your broad is any different from the others? She’ll shack up with anyone, just like all the rest”; “Ah, they’re a buncha pigs”; “They keep ya broke, always wantin’ you to buy somethin’ for ‘em”; “No matter how much ya give ‘em, they ain’t never satisfied.” This hostile perception of the opposite sex was, as has been noted,
paralleled by a similar female definition of men as worthless, deceptive, philandering, undependable, etc.

A second conception pictured females as objects of great value, highly desirable, and worth much effort to “get” for oneself. For purposes of group consumption, the desirability of “women” was phrased most frequently in terms of physical-sexual appeal (“What a babe! Would I like to bang her!”). The conceptualization of “women” purely as sexual outlets was reflected in a prevalent reference term which utilized a single female anatomical feature to refer to the person as a whole. It was also seen in the idea that masturbation could substitute directly for female association. When asked what girl he was taking on an outing, a Junior Outlaw replied by making a gesture of masturbation. This evoked laughter, not scorn; being “married to one’s hand” was not seen as particularly stigmatizing. In addition, however, to such exclusively sexual references, definitions of women as desirable could also denote appreciation of more generalized female qualities (“They are really a fine bunch a broads.”).

A third conception defined females as agents of limitation and control. Women were pictured as firmly opposing a range of customary male behaviors such as the use of “profane” language; drinking; hanging out on the corner, in bars, or in poolrooms; fighting; and not “working.” While often complaining of these female attitudes, men in fact expected women to take firm and direct action to forestall male participation in such activities. Thus, while the explicit content of the male complaint pattern indicated persistent dissatisfaction with the obstinacy or intransigence of female opposition to “masculine” activities, on a more implicit level it was the failure of females to act effectively in the “controlling” role which produced discontent. In order to facilitate female performance in this role, males often attributed to them a degree of physical and psychological power which they did not command.

A fourth definition pictured females as agents of nurturance. They cooked a man’s meals, mended his clothes, arranged and maintained his physical environs,
doctored him when injured, nursed him when sick, and comforted him when troubled. Despite the importance of this conception, the image of females as nurturing agents was seldom articulated explicitly. The functions of females acting in this capacity resembled those performed by mothers for their dependent infants. Since the achievement of manly autonomy and independence was a major concern of the adolescent corner boy, it was particularly difficult during this phase to openly admit one’s desires for dependency on females.\textsuperscript{300}

A general reason for this emerges clearly from data. The practice of allocating women to distinct categories or types, reported as common in other areas, was poorly developed in Midcity. Clear-cut distinctions on the basis of “reputation”—such as “good girls-lays,” “respectable girls-cheap girls”\textsuperscript{301}—while familiar as concepts, exerted little real influence on male sexual and mating behavior, and even as concepts, as already noted, were maintained more explicitly by women than by men.

Similarly, sharp conceptual differentiations based on age differences or kinship status were not nearly as well developed in Midcity as in most other reported situations; the boundaries between the roles of sister, lover, wife, mother tended to blur into one another to form a kind of diffuse image of a generalized female. By comparison with societies in which roles based on age and kinship status determine much of the quality of relations between male and female, males in Midcity appeared to respond to females less in terms of well-defined roles such as “sister” or “mate” or “bad girl,” and more in terms of their conception of things that “women” in general did for “men” in general. The various qualities or role-functions associated with females—nurturance, affection, sexual intimacy, control, allegiance,

\textsuperscript{300} Adult lower class males can be considerably more open in admitting desires for dependency and control. A 1959 popular song composed and performed by rock and roll singer Lloyd Price includes these lines: “I need someone to own me/ I need someone to control me…/ I need love… I need someone to understand me/ I need someone to demand me/ I need a shoulder to cry on…/ I need love…” (Lloyd Price, “You Need Love,” ABC-Paramount Record, 45-9972).

\textsuperscript{301} For example, W. F. Whyte, “A Slum Sex Code,” \textit{American Journal of Sociology} July, 1943.
support—could be provided by varying categories of females at different times and under different circumstances.

A major factor in determining what “role” or group of functions would be performed by females for corner boys was the age period they were passing through. During the course of their lives as corner boys, the role played by their female peers evolved through a series of definite stages. The shifting nature of these role relationships can be illustrated by tracing the evolution of the boys’ female peers from “affiliates” to “steady girls” to “spouses.” Up to the age of eleven or twelve, a major portion of the boys’ lives were passed within an orbit of female nurturance and control. As discussed in more detail in the treatment of kinship behavior, fathers were present—sometimes consistently, more often sporadically—in the homes of many of the boys, but male parents were not nearly as concerned with or influential in the rearing of children as were female parents or parent surrogates. In the few instances where fathers did appear as relatively influential figures, it is significant that they tended to be Italian rather than Irish, Negro, or French.

During the pre-“gang” phase, mothers communicated to their sons two apparently conflicting messages; one message urged the boy to remain within the orbit of maternal nurturance and control; the other signaled him to leave that orbit and enter another where he could learn to become an autonomous “man,” so that he could become a source of dependency and support. Although mothers attempted to the best of their ability to acquaint their sons with an image of estimable manhood, their capacity to present a consistent model of customary male behavior or to teach specific masculine skills and behaviors was necessarily limited. Thus, while on one level mothers deplored the tendency of their pubescent sons to spend an increasing amount of time out on the corner with “them bums,” on another level they recognized that the gang was able to provide for their sons superior training in the difficult task of becoming a “real man.”

The boy’s life as an active member of a functioning street-corner group spanned about seven years—from the ages of twelve to nineteen. These seven years
can be divided into three phases with respect to relations with female peers. The first, from age twelve to fourteen or fifteen, involved primarily a collective relationship with the girls affiliated with the male group; the second, fourteen or fifteen to about eighteen, involved “going steady” with one or more girls; the third, eighteen to nineteen or twenty, was the period of “first wave” marriages. The age boundaries of these phases were not fixed or clear-cut, and phases could overlap as given individuals moved more slowly or rapidly in taking on the new pattern. At any one time, most members maintained a relationship to females appropriate to that phase.

The boys’ relationship with their female “affiliates” was important and highly meaningful. The girls started to “hang out” on the corner at almost the same time as the boys; they were about the same age or slightly younger; girls’ groups averaged about nine “steady” members, with about three or four being consistent “hangers.” Both groups maintained a clear sense of mutual affiliation; the boys referred to the girls as “our girls,” and the girls spoke of “our boys.”

There was, during this phase, a degree of closeness between male and female which would never re-occur in the lives of either. Boys and girls shared a clear sense of being age mates, united by a set of peculiarly adolescent concerns relating to problems of achieving independence from parents and finding suitable mates. During these years, an age-based community of interest constituted a strong bond between male and female—a bond which would progressively weaken as childbearing and rearing became dominant concerns for women. This closeness also derived from the fact that a single set of sex-based prestige standards was clearly dominant for both sexes. The subculture of the male adolescent was vivid, well defined, highly visible, colorful, rich, and persuasive, and the superior power and prestige of the boys’ group was recognized and accepted by the girls. The desire to associate themselves with this locus of evident power and prestige was an important reason for the girls’ affiliation with the male group. Another reason, of course, was the desire for proximity to a reservoir of potential mates.
During this phase, the girls tended to measure much of their own behavior against male standards of eminence and to adopt similar patterns of behavior in areas such as fighting, theft, language, dress and drinking. A sixteen year old member of the Molls, discussing how they used to behave when they were fifteen, used these words:

Ya know something? Now this is the truth now. Some of the things that the boys did, we went out and did the same things. Remember when they started hoppin’ trucks? We started right after they did. And when they hooked pickles, we went and hooked pickles...You understand, like when somebody does somethin,’ you wanna do the same as they do...If one kid does somethin’ and if the other kid don’t do it, they’re gonna think you’re chicken and all that and then they start callin’ ya chicken, and nobody likes that. Nobody likes that!

This reveals that fear of being accused of cowardice—a major spur to action for boys—was also cogent for the girls. Members of the Queens were ranked, both by the boys and by one another, on the basis of their prowess and technique as fighters:

Suzy is a mean fighter; watch out for her. Betty Lou is a bad scratcher. Pearlie has a strong punch. Ellie is yellow; she’ll cut and run when a fight starts.

Since the boy’s groups had greater cohesion and stability, they formed the associational canter around which the girls’ groups revolved. The cohesion of the girls’ groups depended to a greater degree on the relationship of individual girls to individual boys and of the girls as a whole to the boys than on centripetal forces in the girls’ group. The prestige of the girls’ group depended primarily on that attained by their affiliates, thus giving the girls a direct interest in the boys’ achievements in athletics, fighting, and other activities which formed the basis of male prestige. Both boys and girls were aware of this. At one point, the female affiliates of the Junior Bandits became angry at them for flirting with girls from another neighborhood, and talked of abandoning a plan to hold a supper to raise money for the football team. On hearing of this, a Junior Bandit remarked, “Let ‘em do it!
They ain’t nuthin’ without us and they know it!” However, at a subsequent group meeting, the boys decided that the girls had been extremely loyal, and that a greater attempt should be made to consider their feelings.

The loyalty of girls to boys was clearly evident. The same girls, after they had secretly raised money for their affiliates, slid the money under the door of the boys’ meeting place accompanied by a note which read, “To the Junior Bandits, the handsomest and sexiest boys in all of Midcity.” A Moll used these words in an attempt to justify to the worker her participation in violative activity with the boys—“Ya know what I mean, like, if you were in hangin’ with them kids as long as we have—every night—you wouldn’t wanna be outcast or anything; you don’t wanna be outcast!”

What role did the girls play for the boys during this phase? Did they not act essentially as sisters? As “pals?” As mothers? As lovers? In line with the “generalized –female-role” principle already cited, the role actually assumed by the girls does not fall readily under any of these customary role categories, but incorporates some aspects of each. During this period of the boys’ lives, it was their female affiliates who, in large part, acted for them in the capacity of “generalized female”—performing for the boys a wide range of “female” role functions. Under different circumstances and in different degrees, the girls served, among other things, as sexual objects, hostility targets, controlling agents, and loyal supporters.

The “collective affiliation” phase was the phase of initial sexual exploration for both boys and girls. An important mode of expressing affection during this period was externally aggressive interaction—both physical and verbal. Particularly prevalent was a pattern of boy-girl physical aggression—manhandling and roughhousing were used as affectionate expression, and sometimes workers were even shocked at the degree of violence involved, but it was seen as perfectly appropriate by both boys and girls. During the time the Junior Bandits’ affiliates were angry at them for flirting with outside girls, one of the girls complained to a social worker that the boys were too rough with them. The worker took seriously
this displaced expression of dissatisfaction, warned the boys against such behavior, and reported his warning to the girls. Instead of being grateful, they were angry, and one remarked, “If we didn’t like it, we wouldn’t let ‘em do it!”

The practice of expressing affection in the form of physical assault was one device for coping with the problem of learning how to engage in heterosexual intimacy. Contrary to conceptions of corner youngsters as sexually bold, uninhibited, and aggressive at an early age, both boys and girls experienced considerable trepidation at the prospect of establishing intimate physical contact with the other sex. An otherwise dauntless member of the Junior Outlaws confided to the worker, “I’m afraid of dancing up close to a girl! I just can’t make myself do it!” One way of accommodating this anxiety was to utilize a mode of expressing affection already prevalent within the male group. Although relations among male group-mates were intimate and emotionally meaningful, direct expression of tenderness was ordinarily tabooed. It was permissible, however, to express affectionate feelings in the form of mild physical assault—punching, slapping, poking. Since these actions were aggressive in form, they did not violate group prescriptions against overt affection.302

The corner-group definition of physical aggression as signifying affection appears as a specific case of a more general relation between “aggression” and “affection” in the culture of Midcity. In general terms, ostensibly “aggressive” behavior, either physical or verbal, did not signify the same degree of anger or hostility as similar forms of behavior in a middle class community would denote. For example, Midcity residents could engage in verbal arguments of apparently great heat and intensity with little subsequent residue of hostility. Acts of physical assault—beating children, fights between males, husband-wife violence—conveyed neither to assaulter or assaulted the degree of “real” anger which would accompany such actions among middle class people. Another aspect of this phenomenon, related

to the process whereby small children frequently prefer angry attention to no attention at all, was the direct equation of physical assault with positive affection. This concept was articulated quite explicitly in the sentiment “when he beats me, it means he loves me,” sometimes expressed by Midcity women.

Girls frequently took the initiative in helping boys overcome their timidity in making sexual approaches. In each group there were one or two girls in particular who played the role of provocateur. Provocation was often quite direct. A Moll remarked to a member of the boys’ group, “If you buy me a soda, you can have me tonight.” Another girl, teased by a boy about wearing too much lipstick, retorted, “Why doncha come and wipe it off then?” A Queen teased a King by saying, “Don’t you look up under my skirt now!” Girls sometimes employed quite deliberately the knowledge that boys felt more comfortable in making physical contact with a punch or bear hug by semi-explicitly inviting playful assault as the next best thing to and a probable precursor of more intimate forms of interaction. It is not likely, as already mentioned, that such overt provocation actually resulted in any considerable degree of sexual intimacy during this phase. However, these signals of readiness or availability given to one another by both girls and boys helped to overcome the anxiety attendant on assuming a pattern of intimate contact, and laid the groundwork for subsequent mating phases.

The role of the girls as “agents of limitation” during this phase is of special interest. As already noted, the boys perceived females in general as opposing a range of distinctively “masculine” behaviors such as drinking, fighting, gambling, and the use of obscene language, and even the proximity of a female could serve to inhibit such behavior (“Watch your language! There’s a lady present!”). In the case of the girls who “hung out” with the boys, however, a different set of definitions came into play. Since these girls themselves adopted many of the very behavior patterns females were expected to inhibit, their utility as agents of restriction was seriously limited. In each girls’ group there were three or four girls who were especially active in adopting “male” patterns of language, dress, drinking, and so on,
and these girls tended to spur rather than inhibit male involvement in these activities. Thus, during this phase, the girls' desire to act as male allies and supporters, and to seek personal prestige in terms of “masculine” criteria, seriously diluted their effectiveness in inhibiting certain forms of male behavior which, when they later assumed the roles of wives and mothers, would be against their own interests.

Were there any “logical” reasons behind the phenomenon of young girls identifying so strongly with masculine concerns, assuming masculine patterns of behavior, and adopting masculine perspectives and bases of prestige? As already noted, in a household where the mother is the dominant parent, it is she who must perform major parental functions for children of both sexes. This means that she must be able to provide for her male children an adequate basis for establishing masculine identity. During adolescence, it is the “gang” which assumes major responsibility in this area, but during childhood, it is the mother whose job it is to convey to her sons what it means to be a “man.” In communities where girls stand a good chance of becoming mothers in female-based households, it would appear to be extremely useful for girls in their early teens to pass through a phase of strong identification with masculinity and experiencing life from a male point of view as preparation for their future task of acquainting their sons with essential masculine attributes. This period of “practice in masculinity” also relates to the fact that adult females in female-based households must assume functions generally assumed by males in the mother-father household—acting, for example, as breadwinner, protector, and primary disciplinarian.

During this same phase, however, the boys’ female affiliates performed for them a set of functions more traditionally associated with the female role. They mended their clothes, sewed buttons, helped, where permitted, to clean the local clubhouse, brought flowers and furnishings for the clubhouse, prepared meals and arranged decorations for club banquets, and frequently appeared with sandwiches and drinks following athletic practice and other collective events. In the event of
injuries resulting from athletic contests or gang fights, the girls assumed responsibility for nursing the injured.

The boys, for their part, assumed the role of protector for “their girls”—especially in regard to any attention, either hostile or amorous, by other male groups. Improper behavior by outside groups to one or several of “our girls” was one of the most prevalent and legitimate reasons for undertaking a gang fight. In the context of their relations with outside males, the girls were pictured as fragile and vulnerable blossoms, extremely sensitive to the slightest suggestion of insult. The boys were thus honor-bound to shield these delicate creatures from any exposure to harshness or vulgarity. The statement “He used bad language in front of one of the girls,” provided ample justification for retaliatory attack by boys who used identical language with the same girls.

Both girls’ and boys’ groups were extremely jealous of one another. When either group paid attention to opposite-sex groups from other areas, their affiliates manifested patterns of collective sexual jealousy similar to those of individual lovers. Girls in several of the groups expressed feelings similar to those of one of the Molls—“We didn’t fool around with no other boys until they went out and played around with them other girls. Then we went out and found other boys.” The girls made no attempt to conceal their hostility to “outside” girls who were approached by or made overtures to “their” boys. They scorned and derided their rivals with intensity and passion. When a group of “outside” girls were attentive to the Junior Bandits, their affiliates, the Bandettes, went into great detail as to the physical unattractiveness and lax moral stature of the outsiders. One of the “outside” girls, seeing the words “Bandit Hearts” on the Bandette’s sweaters, remarked bitterly, “Bandit Hearts, huh!? Too bad they ain’t got no hearts!” Such hostility occasionally erupted into direct physical conflict between girls’ groups. A member of the Queens had her elbow dislocated in a fight with some “in-town girls” who moved in on the Kings at a dance. Occasionally hostility between girls’ groups reached sufficient
intensity as to result in a planned and organized fight, on the model of the male type of gang fight.

The “female affiliate” phase, during which boys related to girls collectively in a public, partly sexual, partly comradely fashion, lasted for three or four years. Most of the boys then moved, at the age of sixteen or seventeen, into a second phase—the phase of pairing off, or the “steady” relationship. “Steadies” could be chosen either from within the corner group, or from the ranks of non-“hanging” girls. Almost all, however, were local residents. There was little relationship between a girl’s “reputation” and her chances of being asked to go steady, or the kind of “steady” she got. One might have expected that those girls who had been most provocative or most outspokenly available or most unreserved in adopting “masculine” behavior during the “affiliate” phase would have made out badly in the pairing-off process—perhaps being overlooked or having to settle for a “steady” of low status. Careful examination of “steady” relationships of Project group members showed no such trend. In fact, some of the girls whose reputation had been “worst” from the female point of view became the “steadies” of the highest status members of the male groups.

The relatively direct transition from “collective” to “steady” relationships meant that, for most Midcity gang members, there was no period devoted predominantly to “playing the field”—in the tradition of the “rating-and-dating” system described for middle class adolescents during the 1920’s and 1930’s.\(^{303}\) This system, in which prestige for both male and female depended on the sheer quantity of acceptable “dates” one could tally up, and where going out two nights in a row with the same “date” was degrading, represented a passive phase among middle class youngsters. It is unlikely, as already noted, that this particular form of “dating” ever flourished to any great extent in communities like Midcity.

At the same time as Project boys were establishing “steady” relationships, they also engaged in another form of mating which in some respects did resemble

\(^{303}\) Reference to Willard Waller, Margaret Mead.
the “rating-and-dating” pattern. This was the practice, already cited, called the “pick-up.” It involved the establishment of multiple, short-term relationships with female peers who were not part of the groups’ interactional orbit. The basic objective of the “pick-up” was to establish contact with an unknown girl in such a way as to achieve a maximum degree of intimacy in the shortest period of time. Efficient performance in this area demanded a high degree of skill, and it was during this phase that the boys acquired training in the required techniques.

The capacity to “pick up” and “make out” with a strange girl engaged qualities of daring, initiative, craft, and resourcefulness which were also useful in other forms of male endeavor. The sequence of events and general strategy involved in effecting a successful “pick-up” resembled those of two traditional forms of male activity—hunting and warfare. As hunter, the male locates his prey, pursues it, circumvents its attempts to escape, and moves in for the capture or kill. As warrior, he locates the enemy, develops a plan of attack, foils countermeasures by superior strategy, overpowers defenses by strength or cunning, and affects the capture or kill. Although a successful campaign finds culmination in quite different sorts of things in the two instances—killing or capture in the case of war and hunting; sexual intimacy in the case of the “pick-up”—prior operations are quite analogous and represent a generalized set of skills highly useful to males in a variety of situations.

Sexual engagement with prostitutes does not achieve these “implicit” purposes of the “pick-up” since simple payment of the requisite fee eliminates the necessity of executing the pre-“conquest” maneuvers. Many lower class “bar girls” recognize this and rather than approaching men directly with an offer of love for money, enhance their desirability by leading them to feel that they must be “sweet-talked” and overwhelmed by irresistible male force before being seduced. It is noteworthy, in this regard, that Midcity gang members made very little use of prostitutes—either as sexual outlets, or as a means of learning sexual skills under the aegis of older experienced women—despite the fact that streetwalkers in a
reasonable price range were quite common in Midcity. Sexual intercourse with a prostitute contributed little to one's stature as a “man;” intercourse with a “pick-up” contributed much.

The development of skill in the rapid establishment of short-term intimate relationships with women, in addition to conferring prestige and providing practice in a set of generalized male skills, also had a practical use more immediately related to the occupational circumstances of lower class males. A range of occupations actually or potentially available to lower class men involve fairly extended periods of absence from one’s “home” locale—and one’s wife or lover. The most obvious such situation is military service, which most lower class males experience as young men, whatever their later occupational involvement may be. The young soldier or sailor frequently finds himself in the position of being in a strange locale, having been away from women for varying periods of time, and being in the company of numerous other males in a similar situation and with similar desires.

Under such circumstances, the capacity to establish intimate relations rapidly and efficiently is evidently of high direct utility. In the case of foreign service, the ability to move from the role of “stranger” and “outsider” to that of “lover” must even be able to transcend language and cultural barriers. The male occupational pattern of spending long periods of time in isolation from women with intermittent excursions into “town” for drinking, gambling, and sex is also found in non-military occupations such as cowboy, logger, mariner, and fisherman.

In Midcity the automobile played an important part in the execution of the “pick-up,” serving several useful purposes in this regard. It provided a mode of transportation to non-local areas where unknown girls could be found. Boys would “cruise” these areas in search of “pick-ups.” Once girls were located, the car could be used for purposes of relationship-facilitating conversation. The car could also be used to transport girls to various activity locales—movies, hamburger stands, drive-in restaurants—serving both to involve the pair in pleasurable activities, and to
enhance the boy’s stature as a “spender” or as being knowledgeable about where to go. Finally, the automobile served as a mobile love-making chamber—both in the case of the “muggin’ up” (necking, petting) which almost invariably occurred, and in the case of sexual intercourse which frequently resulted.

The “pick-up”—while learned and practiced during this phase—was neither as meaningful nor as intrinsic to gang culture as the practice of “going steady.” The “steady” relationship in many ways resembled a marital relationship, and a boy’s “steady” was frequently referred to, semi-jokingly, as his “wife.” The relationship entailed at least two features generally associated with marriage—the expectation of faithfulness, and sexual intimacy. The establishment of a “steady” relationship entailed an explicit agreement that the “steady” not “go out with” or pay special attention to another person during the period of the agreement.

The duration of “steady” relationships varied, but those which lasted for years were at least as common as those which lasted for months. During the three or four years between the commencement of the “steady” pattern and the first wave of marriages, many of the boys had only one steady; others had two or possibly three; more than three was rare. In each male group, however, there was one boy (but usually not more than one), known as the “lover,” who did not restrict himself to a limited number of “steadies” but who sought instead to establish intimate relations with a large number of girls, often simultaneously. This was not the same as the “pick-up” pattern where relations were transient and girls were not part of the local social orbit; girls engaged by the “lover” were generally known to the group, and the relationship could be one of considerable intensity. The “lover” was regarded with a mixture of admiration and disapproval by most of the other boys. Their disapproval, expressed rather frequently, was based both on jealousy and on the fact of the “lover’s” violation of an important standard of the “steady” phase—that enjoining “faithfulness.”

An agreement to “go steady” was usually accompanied by an exchange of rings, bracelets, or other gifts. Although no ritual analogous to the public “pinning”
ceremony of the college fraternity was observed, the fact that a boy and girl had decided to “go steady” quickly became known to the group. Group members then undertook to enforce “faithfulness” by both partners. Although girls assumed major responsibility in this, pressures were also exerted by boys. In a cross-sex situation where opportunities to “cheat” on one’s steady could easily be found, the group-supported expectation of “faithfulness” helped buttress one’s ability to resist temptation.

It is significant to note that the group exerted more active pressure on partners to remain mutually faithful during the “steady” phase than during the later phase of “marriage.” One reason for this was a desire by group members to maintain the essential outlines of a mating network with which they had become familiar; rapid shifting of partners forced overly frequent re-mapping of the “who-is-going-with-whom” terrain. A more important reason, however, related to the solidarity of the adolescent peer group. As will be discussed in further detail, group members were beginning at this point to put their support behind a set of practices which were antithetical to group cohesion and which ultimately would lead to the complete or partial disintegration of the gang. Strengthening pair-bonds by enforcing “faithfulness” concomitantly weakened the solidarity of the one-sex group. Following marriage, an opposite set of pressures came into prominence—pressures operating to reconstitute the solidarity of the group and weaken ties between mates.

Boys were subjected to a good deal of teasing about their “steadies”—with particular reference to unfortunate defects in the girl’s looks and personal qualities, and the completeness of the boy’s subjugation to his girl’s will. This teasing, however, was benign, and of a type frequently employed in the corner group which conveyed approval of a practice in the guise of condemning it. Having a “steady,” in fact, was a major basis of prestige, as will be discussed.

Boys were also teased about the frequency and intensity of intercourse with their “steadies.” How well grounded were these allegations? As in the case of the girls, accurate evidence was difficult to obtain. Boys also surrounded this area with
some secrecy—although not to as great a degree as the girls, and for different reasons. It was generally assumed by one’s group-mates that a boy with a “steady” was “shackin’ up with her every night,” and there was little reason for doubting that this assumption was based on actuality. The fact that a high proportion of “steady” relationships moved into marriage via the route of non-marital pregnancy was one convincing form of corroboration. While the boy himself seldom offered any direct denial of such allegations, neither did he offer any public confirmation. One explicit reason for keeping secret the occurrence of sexual intimacy was a practical one: “if I let ‘em know I was getting’ it from her, they’d all start comin’ around for some, too…”

One might suppose that a less explicit reason for vagueness as to the intimacy of one’s relation with a “steady” arose from a desire to protect the “reputation” of a girl who might become one’s wife. This reason was never explicitly forwarded, and there is little reason to believe it had much force. As already shown, common knowledge that a girl was sexually intimate with a boy did not particularly jeopardize her chances for marriage—either to him or someone else. In fact, knowledge that intercourse was occurring could serve to enhance the legitimacy of the relationship in the eyes of the group. In one case, a high-status member of the Junior Bandits was committed to a correctional institution, and the issue of the disposition of his club jacket arose. Two girls entered a claim—one had been his “steady” for some time, but had broken off with him just prior to his commitment; the second had become his girl quite recently. The Junior Bandits met as a quasi-juridical body to discuss the rival claims and decided to award the jacket to the second girl—on the explicit grounds that she had been engaging in sexual intercourse with the boy and that this gave her claim greater legitimacy than the fact that the prior relationship was of long duration. In this instance, public recognition of the fact of intercourse served as a de facto basis for granting validity to the relationship. Further evidence that public knowledge of intercourse with one’s steady was not considered as damaging to her “reputation” was contained in a
remark by a Junior Bandit to a social worker. He had recently undertaken a “steady” relationship with a girl whom he planned to marry. This prospect did not prevent his serious assertion, “I ain’t made out with her yet, but I’m sure workin’ on it. And as soon as I make it—I’ll tell ya!”

The attitudes and activities of the “steady” pattern were quite different from those of the “lover” or “pick-up” patterns. However, effective performance in any of these could provide a basis of prestige; getting and remaining “faithful” to a “steady,” prowess and scope as a “lover,” or skill as a “fast pick-up man” could all win admiration from one’s group-mates. Determining which of these patterns provided greater prestige and under what circumstances depended on a complex of factors, including the season of the year, the phase of the mating cycle being experienced, and the special emphases of the particular group. For example, during the latter part of the “steady” phase, remaining faithful to one’s girl generally commanded greater prestige than skill as a lover or pick-up artist, and as already mentioned, overly active involvement in these latter forms could provoke considerably censure.

There were, however, differences between whites and blacks in this regard. For example, success as a “lover” was granted relatively greater prestige by blacks. In addition, the practice of exploring other neighborhoods in quest of short-term mating relationships was both more prevalent and better developed. Among the Kings, in fact, the existence of two distinctive forms of mating practice was granted explicit recognition by the division of the year into a two-phase mating system. One boy explained, “During the winter we stick with our steadies and don’t play around. Then when the summer comes, we drop them and go off to other places and find other girls. Then after the summer is over we go back to our regular girls again.”

There appeared to be several reasons for the greater prevalence among the blacks of this “exploring” pattern. One related to the distribution of “gang” neighborhoods in Port City. White lower class communities were located in relatively separate neighborhoods scattered throughout the central urban area; the
corner groups which frequented these neighborhoods maintained a strong sense of locality affiliation and consequent antagonism to groups from other neighborhoods, so that any venture outside of one’s “home” locality was seen as dangerous. The bulk of the black community, by contrast, was located in three roughly contiguous geographic areas. Although free movement out of these areas by youngsters was limited, within the three-area “community,” movement was quite free and frequent. This gave the black boys a much larger “ranging area” than the whites, and while each local neighborhood within the Negro community was guarded by its own corner group, most black groups were known to one another, and there was relatively less risk of inadvertently approaching girls who were explicitly affiliated with a hostile local group.

Another reason related to a successful “pick up” involved unusual enterprise and daring. Very high prestige was accorded the group member who could report that he had “made out” with a white girl. This meant leaving the relatively familiar confines of the black community and crossing not only locality but ethnic boundaries as well. Although the risks were great, the rewards were high enough to support rather frequent “pick-up” excursions into “white” territory. The relatively greater stress on the “lover” and “pick-up” patterns also related to the fact that the female-based household, and its concomitant pattern of shorter-term marital alliances, was somewhat more prevalent among the Negroes.

For both white and black, however, the existence of two major forms of adolescent mating practice—the “steady” relationship, with its stress on constancy, and the “pick-up” pattern, with its opportunity to practice facile establishment of new relationships—paralleled the two major forms of childrearing unit of the adult community: the extended-duration husband-wife household and the female-based unit. Both male and female cultural systems provided opportunities for adolescent training and practice in the conditions and requisite behaviors of these two adult forms.
Many of the boys moved directly into marriage from the “steady” phase. Of 114 male group members for whom information was available, 50 boys, or 43.8% were married or living with a female conjugal partner within three years of the termination of the intensive contact period. Proportions of “married” group members ranged from 25% for the Junior Bandits to 62.5% for the Senior Bandits. Among groups at the same age level, there was a higher proportion of marriage in those of lower social status. One-tenth of the married couples were separated or divorced within the same three-year period. Average age at marriage was 19.7 years. The lower the social status of the group, the earlier the marriage age. Lower-status group members, then, married earlier and in greater numbers. Most of the married couples produced a child within a year of marriage. At least five of the couples married for three years produced one child a year.

As in the case of many other forms of corner-boy behavior, the motives and circumstances surrounding marriage were closely related to the conditions and concerns of corner-group life. During the “steady” phase, marriages were rare. Then, as the boys approached the age of twenty, a substantial proportion of the group suddenly “took the plunge”—as if in response to a signal which said, “Now is the time for group members to take a wife.” In the case of the Senior Outlaws, the signal appears to have been tripped off by a social worker himself. Shortly after he had announced his own marriage plans to the group, the first of a flock of prospective bridegrooms rushed excitedly into the area clubroom shouting, “Man! I’m gonna do it!” The boy’s wedding, in fact, occurred within two days of the worker’s. A large proportion of these “first wave” marriages took place within a few months of one another.

Furthermore, in many of these marriages a baby was born within nine months of the wedding. This was not seen as unusual, and deviations from the pattern were remarked upon. The marriage of one of the Kings was reported in these terms—“He got married and the baby didn’t come for eleven months! Nobody (in the King neighborhood) could believe it!” A member of the Senior Bandits who
had just married his pregnant girlfriend boasted of the fact that by so doing he was 
obeying the group-issued signal for “first wave” marriages—“They’re all gettin’ 
mARRIED!” A not-yet-married companion added quickly, “Sure. They forgot to buy 
sAFES.” The comment “They forgot to buy safes,” indicates that the idea of the “forced 
mARRIAGE” was used by group members as an acceptable explanation of “first wave” 
mARRIAGES. One “forgot” to use contraception, one’s girl became pregnant, and one 
was then obliged to marry.

But was this “forgetting” accidental? And how binding was the obligation? 
The simple “forced-marriage” explanation has a number of flaws. In the first place, 
the boys were familiar with contraception and had been employing it for some 
years. Despite the fact that most gang members were Catholic, they customarily 
used rubber condoms which they called “safes.” Having a package of “safes” on one’s 
person at all times was a badge of manhood. A fourteen year old about to leave for 
an overnight outing where girls would be present was teased by his group-mates for 
not including “safes” in his suitcase, and teased still more when he displayed some 
uncertainty as to their nature and use. He was later told very firmly by several 
group-mates, “Always carry safes on you!” Since group members were thus familiar 
with the use of condoms, it would seem unlikely that about half of them would 
“forget” such use at just about the same time.

A second flaw concerns the assumption that impregnation “forced” marriage. 
As already shown, girls controlled few really effective devices to compel the fathers 
of their babies to marry them. It will be recalled that none of the fathers of the 
babies of the seven girls who became pregnant felt sufficiently obliged to do so. The 
argument “My reputation will be ruined,” had limited force, since, as has been 
shown, a reputation for sexual “looseness” had little real influence on one’s future 
chances. Nor would an argument based on providing a home for the baby be 
particularly persuasive, since males know that babies could be and were 
accommodated quite readily within the female-based household. In particular, the 
paternally forced “shotgun wedding” type of pressure was infrequently applied since
for many of the girls there was no one playing an active “father” role, and fathers who were in the picture generally did not see their daughters’ non-marital impregnation as a sufficient cause for taking active measures.

It would thus appear that the first wave marriages, rather than being “forced,” in fact represented an essentially voluntary act on the part of the males. In the face of the weakness of coercive sanctions, the limited prestige conferred by fatherhood, and the powerful gratifications of corner-group life—why this collective self-arranged rush into marriage? Males, in common with other young men in their own and other societies, were motivated to marry on the basis of a variety of factors: the desire to establish a non-parental residence, the desire to actualize an existing heterosexual attachment through a legalized and/or extended-duration alliance, pressures by one’s girl, and other reasons. For Midcity corner boys, however, there was an additional set of highly influential factors—factors related to the special conditions and circumstances of “gang” membership.

As the boys approached the age of twenty, they were subject to a variety of pressures to leave the physical, psychic, and social status of “adolescence” and assume the status of “young adult.” The boys’ corner gang and its particular way of life was defined, both by adults and the boys themselves, as appropriate to adolescence but inappropriate to adulthood. However, making the transition from “gang” life to “young adult” life presented serious and difficult problems. Membership in the “gang” demanded a high order of allegiance; “making the grade” according to gang standards and bases of prestige required the development of a particular set of demanding skills and qualities; involvement in gang life entailed a powerful emotional investment. Since many of the concerns and emphases of gang culture were directly geared to maintaining the cohesiveness of the group itself, it was necessary for the boys to seek out external levers to help them to break away from the gang. But the hold of gang values was such that these levers themselves had to accord with these same values and enable a boy to make the break without incurring group censure. Marriage was one such lever.
Marriage alone, however, could neither provide a fully satisfactory substitute for “gang” life nor a completely acceptable reason for leaving the corner group. Other events such as entry into the armed forces, leaving school for a “job,” or, in rare cases, entering a post-high-school educational institution, often accompanied or served in lieu of marriage as devices for effecting separation. But marriage had certain special advantages as a method for arranging the break from the group, and was supported on at least two levels: a less explicit “psychic” level and a more explicit “social” level.

As already noted, a major function of the corner group was to provide for its members a vehicle of restriction and limitation as well as a climate of nurturance. With the weakening of the solidarity of the gang in prospect, its members were impelled to seek out new environments which provided similar elements of nurturance and control. While these elements could be and were found in institutions such as the armed forces, the correctional institution, and the factory, the device most generally available, and most frequently utilized in conjunction with others, was marriage.

The post-adolescent pro-tem dissolution of the corner gang was thus the product of a complex of related factors—pressures to move out of the cultural phase of “adolescence;” the military draft and other forms of recruitment into armed services; involvement in the world of “jobs;” college entrance for a few. Within this complex, marriage was neither cause nor effect; the simple explanation, “those wedding bells are breaking up that old gang of mine,” could just as well be phrased, “the breakup of that old gang of mine is bringing on those wedding bells.” As already noted, females were conceived as agents of restriction and nurturance; the boys attributed to their steadies or wives a consistent propensity to exert strong controls over their actions; while openly complaining about the “ball and chain,” the boys in fact demanded of their wives that they assume many of the nurturant-restrictive functions furnished first by their mothers and then by their gang.
The concept of the “forced marriage” provided a particularly useful public rationale for lessening one’s loyalty to and affiliation with the gang. Explaining one’s marriage in terms of a desire for alternative sources of nurturance and control would have been inadmissible. It was, however, quite admissible to represent one’s marriage as the product of forces over which one had no control. “Knocking up” a girl was understood and sympathetically regarded by all; picturing one’s entry into marriage as an inevitable consequence of this event, and independent of any personal volition, made it possible to reduce the risk of being branded a willful traitor or deserter while in the process of shifting one’s allegiance. Boys who followed the route of the “forced marriage” as a method of weakening corner-group ties were often those who had been most deeply committed to the gang and its values.

Once married, the image of the “old lady” as an inflexible agent of control could be utilized as a device for limiting participation in corner-group activities. One recently married Senior Bandit said, “Sure, I’d like to go out drinkin’, but the old lady would kill me! She’d drug me out by my ear if I went into the barroom!” The legitimacy of the “old lady’s” demand power was recognized by the group. Shortly after the marriage of the Outlaw worker a member of the Juniors asked him why he had failed to appear on the corner the night before. Another Junior very solemnly explained the worker’s changed status in these terms: “He’s a married man now! He don’t haveta account to us no more. The only one he has to answer to is his wife!”

Since the boys implicitly demanded of the girls that they function as agents of limitation and control, they attributed to their wives and girlfriends a degree of coercive potency which they did not in fact possess. The wife of the Senior Bandit who used wifely displeasure as a reason for turning down the drinking invitation was not, of course, strong enough to “drag him out by his ear.” On the other hand, the degree to which these women did in fact play limiting roles reflected considerably more than male projection.
Concomitant with changes in what the boys expected of the girls, the girls themselves, as they moved away from the role of “affiliate” toward the role of “mother,” changed their expectations of the boys. Around the age of fourteen the girls began to show less interest in the earlier type of collective-affiliate roughhousing relationship and more interest in pairing off. With the growth of this interest, the boys’ group, formerly seen largely as a source of reflected status, now began to appear as a formidable competitor for the loyalty and energy investment of actual or prospective mating partners. The age of “steady” relationships roughly paralleled the age of maximum solidarity of male groups. It was thus necessary for the girls to exert progressively increasing pressure on individual boys if they were to loosen their ties with the gang. The “girlfriend-versus-corner-gang” opposition thus set up created a precedent for the “wife-and-family-versus-the-boys” conflict which would continue to play a major role in the lives of both—a conflict resolved sometimes in favor of the wife and sometimes in favor of “the gang.”

The essence of this oppositional dynamic was epitomized in a small drama which took place one evening as the Senior Outlaws sat in their area clubroom playing cards. The “steady” girlfriend of the club vice-president had been waiting for him outside in his car. Becoming increasingly impatient as he failed to appear, she approached the door of the clubroom and beckoned to him. When he continued to play cards, she boldly entered the “sacred” confines of the clubroom and pulled him by the arm. This unusual and demanding move at once engaged the attention of the boys. While urging him to “forget that broad” and continue the game, they watched closely to see what he would do. Pulled between the demands of the girl and gang, the boy responded primarily to the threat to his reputation in the eyes of his group-mates. He angrily berated the girl, took her firmly by the arm and led her back to the car saying, “Now just you wait there until I’m through.” He returned to the card game and told the boys, “that’s how you gotta treat ‘em”, thus saving his reputation as a man.
Although in this particular skirmish the demands of the “gang” triumphed, the war was ultimately won by the girl. When the two were married shortly afterwards, the boy, who was extremely loyal to the group, continued to participate regularly in group activities. The girl persisted in her battle to wean her husband from the gang; the campaign was slow and difficult, but finally terminated in victory when, three years following the card game incident, she persuaded him to move away from Midcity and out of the orbit of gang influence.

The inception of one’s first conjugal affiliation was, for most of the boys, accompanied by a legal-religious ceremony. The fact that in many cases it was generally known that a baby was due to arrive within nine months did not appear to indicate the propriety of small or private weddings. On the contrary, wedding ceremonies were generally large public affairs, with relatives, local residents, and, of course, all one’s corner-group mates in attendance. During the early period of marriage, most group members made a serious attempt to act responsibly in the role of the husband. In many cases, however, the conditions of marriage became increasingly difficult to tolerate, and after periods ranging from several months to a few years, pressures to reconstitute the conditions of corner-group life began to assert themselves. Corner-group members who participated in “first-wave” marriages tended to follow one of two different paths.

One group remained largely within the orbit of the husband-wife household, got “steady” work, assumed responsibility for the support and rearing of children, and pursued a way of life which was essentially “family” oriented, monogamous, and law-abiding. The fact, however, of sharing these attributes in common with most middle class men did not therefore make this way of life “middle class.” Patterns of speech, dress, recreation, and occupational involvement of most ex-corner boys remained “lower class,” albeit patterns of lower class adults rather than adolescents. In particular, many of these men continued to maintain a strong affiliation with all-male groups—in the context of the “job,” the local neighborhood, or both. Some small percentage of the “stable married” group did move away from
Midcity into higher status communities, and effected some changes in customary lower class modes of behavior.

A second group of married men, after varying periods of time, began to move back into the orbit of the all-male group. These young adult groups—having lost membership to the husband-wife household—encompassed a wider age-range than the adolescent version and frequently recruited members from a wider geographical area. The locale of congregation was generally a corner bar or local adult “club” rather than a street corner, and there was appreciably less involvement in specifically illegal activities. Despite these differences between the adolescent and young adult version of the “gang,” the two types of group shared many common characteristics.

Determining which of these paths a particular ex-corner boy would follow involved a complex set of inter-related factors, both psychic and cultural. One of many such factors was the amount and kinds of behavioral restrictions imposed by the boy’s wife. As has been shown, during the period when gang ties were weakening, the boys communicated to their girls an implicit command to impose upon them a set of controls over drinking, gambling, or hanging with the group. This implicit male demand was, of course, complemented by concerns arising from female self-interest. For wives the task of rearing children and maintaining a household was considerably facilitated by having a husband who brought money into the household rather than gambling it away, who kept jobs rather than losing them because of gang demands, who spent off-hours aiding in household maintenance rather than “hanging out,” and who stayed reasonably sober rather than engaging recurrently in heavy drinking with the “boys.”

The imposition of female controls on male behavior was thus supported both by explicit female interests and implicit male demands. It required, however, a very delicate balance between restrictiveness and permissiveness to accommodate the life needs of the ex-gang member. Too little control could produce a restless desire for a firmer restrictive milieu; too much could induce angry feelings of resentment.
at the “ball and chain” and impel the man to seek a return to the “freedom” of the gang milieu and its permitted “male” behaviors. Some of the wives were able to effect this delicate balance, others were not. Some were successful in persuading their husbands to move to another community, thus removing them from the direct temptations of gang life. Many ex-gang members assumed a pattern that was neither predominantly “family” oriented nor “gang” oriented. Involvement in both types of unit continued to play an important part in their lives, and during different life periods—or within the same life period - they would alternate allegiance and affilience between the two associational orbits.

Figures cited above showed that almost fifty percent of the males in Project groups were involved in “first wave” marriages. What of the other half? The unmarried appeared to comprise at least two groups with contrasting reasons for not marrying. One group included those who were, in effect, unable to enter into marriage, since their degree of commitment to the corner-boy way of life and/or criminal patterns made it extremely difficult for them to tolerate, even for a relatively short period, the conditions of the husband-wife relational system. A second group included those who aspired to elevate their social status. Among the black Kings, the group which contained the highest proportion of upwardly aspiring “college” boys, only 37.5% of the group participated in “first wave” marriages, in contrast to 58.6% for the white groups of the same age. An important reason for the later marriages of the “college” boys—in addition to obvious practical considerations relating to educational financing, time and energy demands of scholarship, etc.—was that these boys were not as yet in a position to assume a definite occupational commitment and the style of life appropriate to that commitment.

Most of the boys who remained within the lower class community assumed occupational roles which were relatively “unspecialized.” The conditions of their adult occupational life did not depart too radically from the conditions of adolescent corner life. As part of a pool of relatively low-skilled laborers whose periods of employment and unemployment would be determined by fluctuating rates of
industrial production, these men chose as wives girls whom they knew were already adapted to these generalized life conditions, conditions familiar to them as daughters of laborers and girlfriends of corner boys. The future occupations of the “aspiring” boys, in contrast, were bound to be more “specialized,” and to entail a set of life conditions quite different from those for which local corner girls had been prepared. It was thus expedient for the “aspiring” boy to defer marriage until such time as his occupational prospects were more clearly established, so that he could choose a wife whose background adapted her more directly to the life conditions of his actual occupational role.

In concluding this discussion of the role of females in the lives of Midcity corner boys, two major points should be reiterated. First, it was found that the boys did not turn to different “categories” of women for different purposes—“hanging out” with one type, having sexual relations with another type, and marrying still a third. On the contrary, all of these “female” roles—“buddy,” lover, wife, and others—were played by the same “category” of female, and very often by the same females. Nor was there any particular tendency for boys to avoid as marriage partners those girls known to have been sexually active, or to marry “nice” local girls or girls from other areas. The deep impact of street-corner life on both male and female, and the strong emotional involvement it entailed, may indeed have made it difficult for either corner boys or girls to marry a person who had not participated in this way of life or was unacquainted with its flavor and quality.

Secondly, the description of factors attending the dissolution of the adolescent corner gangs has provided the basis for an initial delineation of several possible life patterns for ex-gang boys. Early post-gang experience of Project group members indicated tendencies to assume at least six differing patterns, as follows:

- Low-abiding lower class; primary allegiance to “family”
- Law-abiding lower class; primary allegiance to “gang”
- Non-law abiding lower class; involvement in petty crime
- Non-law-abiding lower class; involvement in organized crime
- Higher social class position; “advanced” education as major avenue
- Higher social class position; avenue other than “advanced” education
These different life paths will be discussed more fully in future sections. At the time of writing it was not possible to know what proportion of Project group members had chosen each of these; some had not yet “settled on” one or another. Such information would require “follow-up” investigation.

Incest

Project data yielded little direct information on incest as such. This is not surprising since, in contrast with practices such as non-marital impregnation which is deferentially stigmatized in different societies and in different sectors of the same society, incest, with very rare exceptions, is in all societies considered to be seriously violative. However, several features of Midcity corner life had some bearing, direct or indirect, on incest, and indicated its relevance, on a deeper level, to sexual and mating practices more explicitly in evidence.

There are three major forms of incest with the male as actor. These are father-daughter, brother-sister, and son-mother incest. Project males were not yet old enough to have developed attitudes to father-daughter incest through personal involvement, nor was there direct evidence of explicit concern with this issue. Indirect evidence, however, would appear to support the speculation that this form of incestuous relationship, while granted little explicit attention, was actually the most frequently practiced of the three. Stories were told of drunken fathers who had accosted their teenage daughters. This was quite definitely regarded as wrong by both males and females. However, the nature of husband-wife relationships in Midcity would appear to lend credence to these reports. In those households where women had a series of male partners, the distinction between a girl’s “real” father and her “stepfather” could be rather tenuous. Since the incest taboo applies most unequivocally when the parent is the actual progenitor and remains in continuous proximity to his offspring, one would expect some ambiguity of definition, for
example, in the case of a man recently married to a woman with a fourteen year old daughter.

Certain other characteristics of Midcity kinship relations were relatively conducive to father-daughter incest. As already noted, many men did not perform actively in the role of “father,” so that their relatively weak sense of identity as “father” diluted the strength of the injunction against sexual intimacy with one’s daughter. Also, as has been cited, the sense of generational difference between mother and daughter was relatively weak, so that adolescent girls often acted like sisters to their mothers, and mothers like sisters to their daughters, especially in regard to competition for men. Given this tendency toward conceptual fusion of the roles of “wife” and “daughter,” one would expect some tendency by fathers, real or “step,” to exhibit toward their daughters, real or “step,” some degree of the type of sexual response considered appropriate toward one’s wife.

The role of the female “affiliates” of the male groups is also of some significance in regard to incest. In a familial brother-sister relationship, the incest taboo strictly forbids sexual intimacy in a situation where the opportunity to so engage is ample. That such intimacy so seldom occurs attests to the potency of this taboo. The role played by the female “affiliates” of the male groups in many ways resembled that of “sister.” This fact, however, did not constitute a barrier to sexual intimacy. Since the role of corner-group “sister” did not disqualify a girl as a sexual partner, it would follow that this role did not carry with it the incest injunction. It was thus possible for corner boys both to relate to the girls in a brotherly fashion and to be sexually intimate with them—a situation forbidden in the case of genuine sisters. This could mean that male-female relations in the corner group provided an acceptable outlet for sexual temptations generated by the familial brother-sister relationship, or that the brother-sister incest taboo was not as strong in Midcity as elsewhere, or both.

While father-daughter and brother-sister incest were seldom discussed openly, mother-son incest was an explicit and recurrent concern of the male corner
group. Sexual intimacy with one’s mother was a major theme of verbal interaction within the group—appearing primarily in the context of a form of patterned mutual deprecation practiced by group members. Although prevalent among both whites and blacks, this practice, and the persistent concern with mother-son incest it reflected, was better developed among the blacks, and better developed among lower status groups. Blacks referred to this practice as “The Dozens,” “Doin’ the Dozens,” or “The Dirty Dozens;” whites generally spoke of “Playing House,” a term also employed by blacks.\textsuperscript{304}

“Playing House” was generally practiced by two male antagonists who sought to best one another in insulting accusations, largely with respect to one antagonist’s math. Participation in this pattern was observed among children as young as five years. Among the younger groups, interchanges were based predominantly on traditional formulae resembling the standardized doggerel verses of children’s play culture (“Sticks and stones may break my bones...” etc.). The inception of a session of “Playing House” was generally signaled by a mildly derogatory reference to the moral stature of a group-mate’s mother. A six year old started a session with the established signal “Your mother plays house” (i.e., engages in non-marital sexual intimacy).

At older age levels, use of the more traditional epithets and formulae was scorned; here there was a high premium on inventiveness, rapid response, and originality in devising variations on the central theme of maternal sexual behavior. In the context of such interchanges, the allegation of simple genital intercourse between mother and son came to appear as unremarkable and commonplace; participants created endless variations on the theme of mother-son intimacy, postulating every conceivable form of sexual interaction and juxtaposition of every male and female erogenous zone in a wide variety of forms and combinations.

\textsuperscript{304} References to “Dozens” citations—Berdie, Dollard, etc.; also to Miller, “Milieu” paper, “Family Section”
Although older males when playing “The Dozens” sometimes attempted to propose an involvement so shocking and so outlandish as to cause one’s opponent to lose his temper, under most circumstances “Playing House” was conducted as a fairly routine form of aggressive interchange involving little real anger. For example, the ploys and counter-ploys of “Playing House” could be executed concurrently with involvement in athletic activity. One such dialogue among nine and ten year old baseball players involved these sentiments:

Boy 1: Cover first base, you m___f___!
Boy 2: I hear you b___ your mother last night!
Boy 1: Your mother’s a Greyhound Bus! (Viz., everybody get on.)
Boy 2: Your mother came to me and asked me to s___ her c___!
Boy 1: (To boy who has missed ball.) Get hip!
Boy 3: Get hip, shit! I got the infield!
Boy 2: Your mother’s a__ got caught in a swingin’ door!

Among the middle class boys the sexual behavior of one’s mother ordinarily receives little public attention. Why, then, did mother-son intimacy play so prominent a role in the customary interaction patterns of Midcity corner boys? As in the case of other forms of incest, data provides suggestive rather than conclusive evidence.

The prohibition of mother-son intimacy is the central incest taboo. It has been accorded considerable attention by psychoanalytic practitioners as well as Greek playwrights. The persistent concern with mother incest evinced by Midcity corner groups was in all probability related to the conditions of the female-based household system. In classic Freudian theory, the son’s amorous tendencies toward his mother are inhibited by the presence in the household of a stern and concerned father who is unsympathetic to the idea of sexual intimacy between mother and son. In many Midcity households, it will be recalled, fathers were absent, or when present, relatively unconcerned with matters relating to offspring. To the degree to which paternal sexual jealousy does serve to forestall sexual intimacy between son and mother, to that degree the conditions of the female-based household fail to impede such involvement.
Furthermore, as noted elsewhere, the emotional bond between mother and son was very strong; mothers frequently looked to their growing sons to become the man of the house as soon as they were old enough. Relevant to this expectation was the tendency toward conceptual fusion of generationally differentiated kin roles cited in the discussion of father-daughter incest; as there was a tendency for men to equate the roles of “wife” and “daughter,” so was there a tendency for females to equate the roles of “husband” and “son,” and in some measure to adopt similar sexual expectations of both. Given the conditions of the serial polyandry system, many females continued to practice the skills of mate attraction well into their childrearing years; it would be surprising if some of this “seductive” behavior was not also directed toward one’s son—especially in cases where adolescent motherhood meant that women were still quite young as their sons approached manhood. In some cases women were quite explicit about seeing their sons as “their” men. The mother of one of the Junior Bandits made this statement, “This is my boy. I’m going to see that he becomes a priest. That way the girls won’t be able to get at him.”

These conditions, among others, created a climate favorable to the development of intimacy between son and mother; actual submission to these pressures, however, would violate the central moral injunction of Western culture. It would follow that cultural devices to forestall this dangerous possibility were needed. As in other instances, such devices were provided, in part, by the cultural system of the male peer group.

The group-supported pattern of reference to sexual intimacy between mother and son served several functions. For one thing, it provided a vehicle for open discussion of a topic of widespread private concern, thus to some extent mitigating the aura of deep and secret stigma surrounding this issue. A more basic function of “Playing House,” however, probably involved the psychological processes of “substitution” or “displacement.” Assuming that the Midcity “family” system developed intense emotional bonds between mother and son but did not develop
adequate structural barriers for preventing the conversion of this emotional closeness into sexual intimacy, the opportunity to engage in collective public fantasies about mother-son intimacy could serve as a mechanism for dissipating the force of pressures towards incest.

The fact that these fantasies were not only permitted but were encouraged to be elaborate, ramified, imaginative, and wide-ranging provided ample opportunity to experience a vicarious but extensive immersion in incestuous experience. That this practice served functions of catharsis is supported by the fact that the expression of these public incest fantasies was carried out within the context of externally aggressive interchange. On the assumption that sexual and aggressive tendencies have common libidinal origins and are mutually related, it would follow that the expression of incestuous desires which could not realistically be acted upon simultaneously with aggressive tendencies which were being acted upon could serve to discharge the socially prohibited desire along with the socially permitted. The psychological mechanism of “projection” also suggests the possibility that the participant in “Playing House” was in fact expressing his own secret desire in the process of accusing his antagonist of extensive sexual intimacy with his mother. In this area, as in many others, the subculture of each corner group provided that cultural framework through which tendencies generated on the physical and emotional level could be played out in a regularized fashion.

A comparison of the three forms of male incest—father-daughter, brother-sister, and son-mother—would appear to support the idea that there was an inverse relation between actual practice and expressed concern. There was virtually no mention of father-daughter incest, but a good possibility of some practice. Brother-sister incest very occasionally became the subject of teasing, but was probably rare. Mother-son incest was a constant topic of explicit concern, but the likelihood of actual involvement was virtually non-existent.
Homosexuality

Just as sexual intimacy with members of one’s own immediate family was proscribed by the operative norms of Midcity, so was sexual intimacy with members of the same sex. But homosexuality was not stigmatized as severely as incest, a weighting which parallels that of other known cultural systems. With very rare exceptions, incest has been unequivocally condemned in all societies throughout human history; homosexuality, on the other hand, has been viewed more permissively. Many societies made formal provision for the role of “man-woman,” in one well-known instance (pre-Homeric Greece), homosexuality came to compete strongly with heterosexuality as a favored form of sexual intimacy among the warrior aristocracy. The lesser degree of stigmatization accorded homosexuality in Midcity reflected a similar tolerance in the larger society. This was evidenced by the fact that there existed in Port City, as in other major urban centers, an established “gay world” with numerous participants and a highly developed subcultural system which offered strong support to homosexual intimacy.

The role of homosexuality in lower class in general, and in the gang in particular, has been discussed by several authors. Such treatments frequently analyze certain “gang” practices (e.g., “colorful” forms of dress, relatively elaborate hair styles, careful attention to personal grooming, “grab-assing,” “line-ups,” “baiting” of “queers,” etc.) as manifestations of actual or “latent” homosexuality. The fact that male corner groups are solidary groupings of peers which play a major role in the lives of members means that gang life involves both close physical proximity and highly meaningful mutual emotional attachments. Given these two conditions, it is evident that many features of gang life could be interpreted as manifestations of “homosexuality”—if this term is given a very broad, non-specific connotation.

More pointed analysis of gang “homosexuality,” however, requires at least four important distinctions: first, a distinction between “homosexuality” (taking a

305 Ref. to Dynastic Egypt, Hawaii, others cited in Slotkin paper.
307 References to Bloch and Miederhoff, Whiting, Miller Reiss (“Milieu”), others.
member of the same sex as a sexual and/or love object) and “effeminacy” (male assumption of behavioral practices ordinarily associated with the female role); second, a distinction between “indirect” or “symbolic” or “latent” homosexuality and direct physical intimacy; third, a distinction between verbal attention to homosexual intimacy and actual engagement therein; and fourth, a distinction between assuming a “penetrating” role in homosexual intimacy and assuming a “receiving” role. The latter two distinctions can form the basis of a simple typology which makes it possible to compare the particular pattern of homosexual involvement of Project corner groups with that of other groups.

**Four Patterns of Orientation to Homosexuality in Male Groups**

- Little or no actual practice, little or no explicit attention
- Little or no actual practice, considerable explicit attention
- Actual practice; individual assumes “penetrating” role only
- Actual practice; individual assumes either “receiving” or “penetrating” role, or both

The predominant mode of involvement among Project group members was the second pattern—considerable verbal attention to homosexuality but little actual practice. This contrasts with most middle class male peer groups, which generally devote little explicit attention to homosexuality. The apparent absence of actual engagement in homosexual intimacy within corner groups does not accord with Kinsey’s finding that lower status males make more active use of “homosexual outlets” than those of higher status. Kinsey’s data indicate, for example, that adolescent boys in higher occupational status groups reported less “homosexual contact” than those of lower status groups, with about 15% of the boys in his two highest “occupational status” categories reporting such contact between the ages of sixteen and twenty, compared to about 30% of boys in his two lowest categories.\(^{308}\)

Kinsey’s figures, however, are only very roughly relevant to actual patterns of homosexual practice in lower and middle class groups. These data omit the lowest

\(^{308}\) Reference to Kinsey, op. cit., Table 114, page 438.
“occupational” stratum—persons with criminal involvements—due to small sample size; this means that those whose occupational status most resembled that of Project males were excluded from consideration. The fact that Project males talked openly about homosexuality while limiting practice may also be relevant to the higher incidence of reported involvement among lower status groups. Kinsey notes that higher status males were more reticent (“considerable cover up”) in discussing homosexuality, and that reported incidence figures would have to be “increased by some unknown quantity if they are to represent reality.” Kinsey’s incidence figures also lump together those whose homosexual “experience” may have involved only a single “experiment” or very infrequent involvement with those whose experience was more frequent and consistent.

In addition, Kinsey’s figures completely exclude blacks—a group comprising an important segment of lower status males, both nationally and in the adolescent “gang” population. Nor do his data specify the sexual “role” played by his respondents—whether the individual played a “penetrating” role, that is, interjected his penis into an anal or oral aperture, or a “receiving” role, that is, received a penis into an anal or oral aperture. As will be shown, this distinction is of great importance in considering homosexual activity in gangs.

Males exhibited one pattern of response to “homosexuality” among group-mates, another toward non-group peers, and a third toward adult males. Within the corner group, concern with homosexuality appeared in three primary forms: as a major theme of teasing or aggressive interchange; in the assumption by males, under certain circumstances, of behaviors generally associated with the female role; and as a device for indicating marked hostility to non-group-members.

Patterned teasing on the theme of same-sex intimacy was by far the most prevalent intra-group manifestation of concern with homosexuality. The form of these exchanges resembled those described for incest; they were ingenious, imaginative, and colorful, but, in general, did not evoke real anger, with a

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309 Kinsey, ibid., page 359.
particularly effective phrasing serving more as a “score” for the author than as a basis of umbrage for the target. These exchanges sometimes combined the themes of incest and homosexuality; the following occurred among the Junior Outlaws:

Outlaw 1: Where’d you get them red boots, man? They make you look like a girl!
Outlaw 2: Some people don’t think I am. Your mother knows I ain’t a girl!

When reference to sexual intimacy figured in these exchanges, the object of attack was always accused of acting in the “receiving” rather than the “penetrating” role. The standard form of accusation was “___ sucks!” or “You suck!” or “I’m gonna f___ you up the a___!” not “You [penetrate].” However, in the face of repeated mutual accusations of homosexual intercourse and recurrent threats by various boys to penetrate others, not a single incident of actual physical intimacy was reported for any of the 150 Project males during the entire study period. Not only was there no evidence of “contact resulting in orgasm” to use Kinsey’s terms, but neither was there evidence of quasi-homosexual intra-group practices such as collective masturbation (“circle jerk”), reported elsewhere as prevalent. Masturbation, in fact, was granted very little explicit attention either as practice or as an issue. Similarly, the practice of making playful grabs at one another’s genitals, while reported for one group, appeared as a relatively casual preoccupation and occurred rather infrequently. For homosexual intimacy, then, the relation between explicit attention and actual practice resembled that noted for incest; much smoke but little or no fire.

The second form of “homosexual” involvement—the practice of assuming behaviors generally associated with the female role—occurred primarily in connection with dancing. In general, especially in the younger groups, the boys displayed little hesitation about dancing with one another during “practice” sessions or in private, although “practice” dancing with a same-sex peer was not nearly as prevalent among boys as among girls. The partner who took the “female” part—viz., who was “led” rather than leading—was not ordinarily subject to teasing so long as
his behavior remained restrained. If, however, the “led” partner became overly zealous in assuming “female” mannerisms, even in a mocking fashion, he was subjected to angry rather than humorous censure. No Project group member was observed to participate in the (“Dirty Boogie”) type of dance, where one of two male partners explicitly assumes the female role of sexual intercourse. This phenomenon was observed, however, in a Midcity corner group—a Negro group of lower social status than any of the Project groups.

A third form of orientation to “homosexuality” concerned non-group members. While intra-group accusations of homosexual involvement were generally benign, similar accusations toward those outside the group carried a different tone. Actual or alleged homosexuality among non-group peers was regarded with great anger and distaste. The Senior Outlaws gave the name “Thelma” to a peer with effeminate mannerisms, and once he entered the poolhall (the male sanctuary), they teased and goaded him so relentlessly that he fled in tears. The Junior Outlaws justified a proposed gang attack on another corner group on the sole and explicit grounds that “One of them guys is a faggot!”

In the case of adult males, actual or alleged homosexuality was regarded with even greater bitterness than in the case of peers. In fact, the imputation of homosexual behavior was the most potent device customarily utilized by the group for indicating hostility to “outside” males of whatever age. Sometimes these allegations were fairly well grounded; more often they were not. Classing a person as a “homosexual” was a standardized device for indicating hostility, and use of this epithet could be quite independent of the individual’s actual sexual behavior. For example, in the eyes of many Project males, any boy who read “deep” books, aspired to college, or attended college was automatically a “faggot,” punk, or queer.

Adult “boys’ workers” were particularly apt to be categorized as “homosexual.” Virtually every adult male engaged in youth work as a career commitment—church workers, Priests, Recreational Department Workers, YMCA Workers, Parole and Probation Officers, correctional institution staff members—
was at some time tagged as “queer.” There was an a priori assumption that all such workers were practicing homosexuals; proof to the contrary had to develop through the workers’ own actions. The case of the Senior Bandit worker provides a good example of this process.

When the Senior Bandit worker first contacted his group, the message was circulated throughout the area that a “gay boy with a red Studied” had started to come down to the corner, and that he was a lush (easy mark) who could be conned into providing free transportation. About eight months following contact, he was told by group members of this initial definition, with the implication that now, of course, it was evident that they had been wrong. As detailed elsewhere, the group’s good will toward the worker dissipated rapidly during terminal phases of contact, and worker and group parted in an atmosphere of mutual bitterness. Four months after his departure the rumor was circulated throughout the Bandit area that the worker had been arrested in another section of the city for accosting two young boys. The rumor was completely unfounded; the worker in fact had been working in another state for several months. It did indicate, however, that the group had revoked their provisional exclusion of the worker from the category of homosexual and restored him to the status assigned to strangers and objects of hostility.

Reiss reports for Memphis and other cities a type of practice wherein gang boys offer themselves as homosexual partners to adult males primarily as a financial matter, assuming the role of “male prostitute” as a means of earning money during times when other means are less available.\(^{310}\) This practice, in this form, was not engaged in by Project males. There was some discussion of exploiting male homosexuals (a King reminisced about the times when they used to “roll them queers”), but such activity did not represent systematic practice. The type of involvement with adult homosexuals which did occur in Midcity will be discussed in a later section. There were at least two aspects of the orientation of Project males to

homosexuality which were inimical to participation in a “male prostitute” pattern. First, feelings toward non-group adult male homosexuals were sufficiently bitter as to make most unlikely the ready assumption of a relatively impersonal business-arrangement type of relationship. Secondly, while Reiss does not specify whether the boys assumed a “penetrating” or “receiving” role in these transactions (presumably they offered the penis for reception), the implication of “passive” reception involved in the concept of a “male prostitute” would clash directly with the severe stigma attached by Project males to the assumption of the “female” role in sexual interaction—a topic to be discussed more fully.

There was in fact little contact of any kind with practicing homosexuals or with members of the well-established “gay” culture which flourished in Port City. The primary locus of participation in actual homosexual intimacy was the correctional institution. Group members with correctional experience were unanimous in describing the correctional institutions as places where homosexual activity was rampant; this was generally reported in a tone of disgust and revulsion. The story was told of a core member of the Senior Bandits who gained a reputation as a “bad actor” at an adult prison (among other things, he acted as ringleader in one particularly violent prison riot) that he had been accosted as “pogue bait” by older prisoners when he first arrived at the institution as a new and youthful inmate, and that he had assumed the role of tough troublemaker in an attempt to purge the taint of receptive homosexuality.

The patterning of “homosexual” behavior in Project groups may be summarized briefly as follows. Group members evinced considerable concern with homosexuality, a concern manifested primarily through a prevalent pattern of verbal reference—appearing most frequently as joking and teasing, sometimes as angry accusation. However, there was no evidence whatever of actual sexual intimacy with males in the local community—group-mates, peers, or adults. Homosexual relations with “outside” adult males were infrequent, and conducted according to special rules, which will be discussed. Boys who had “done time” in
correctional institutions probably engaged in some homosexual intimacy within the context of this special institutional milieu. This was more likely to be penis-anus intercourse rather than the penis-mouth form favored by “gay” culture. The practicing homosexual was regarded with scorn and contempt, and the accusation of homosexuality was utilized by group members as a particularly pungent method of indicating antipathy to a wide range of disapproved personality characteristics.

How is this particular patterning of behavior in regard to “homosexuality” to be explained? Psychodynamically oriented explanations which attribute “homosexual” tendencies primarily to inappropriate object fixation at immature developmental stages, or see the adoption of “effeminate” behavior primarily in terms of the male child identifying with a female parent in the absence of a satisfactory male object of identification, are of limited utility in accounting for homosexual patterns in Project groups. While such explanations illuminate important mechanisms which generate certain personality tendencies when the developmental history of individuals is taken as the primary analytic field, such mechanisms constitute only one dimension of a large and complex system which forms the experiential matrix in which individual development occurs. Fuller understanding of “homosexual” behavior requires, among other things, careful consideration of what behaviors and occupational involvements are defined as appropriately “male” and appropriately “female” in the society as a whole, and how definitions of acceptably “masculine” and “feminine” behavior differ in different sectors of the society.

In order to understand why certain behaviors associated with sex roles were culturally permitted in Midcity while others were prescribed, it will be useful to elaborate a distinction, suggested above, concerning the nature of “feminine” behavior. Three major criteria of “femininity” can be distinguished. The first criterion involves a set of activities traditionally associated with the role of housewife and mother, and which may be designated “household task” activities. These include the tasks and subtasks involved in the production, preparation,
and/or maintenance of food, clothing, and household objects, and in the nurturing of dependent children. Among the many included subtasks are those involving food (obtaining, preserving, preparing, cooking, serving), fabrics (weaving, knitting, sewing, mending, laundering, ironing), household objects and utensils (dusting, mopping, sweeping, washing, scrubbing, waxing, polishing), and children (feeding, dressing, washing, protecting, nursing, teaching). There is nothing intrinsic to these activities which makes it possible for women to perform them more or less easily than men, or for their performance to be more “fitting” for women than for men; these tasks have been assumed by women under a system wherein a sex-based division of labor assigns to them those tasks more immediately concerned with homemaking and childrearing, and to men those tasks involved in wider economic, political, and military spheres. Nor does customary female performance of these tasks in any necessary way involve “sexual” activity. A woman who had no sex life whatsoever could perform all such “female” tasks. In fact, every single one of the tasks and subtasks cited here could and frequently does form the basis of a “male” occupational role, with the “household task” activity constituting the primary basis of the male occupation rather than, as in the case of women, being one of many component tasks of the role of “mother” and “housewife.” Such male occupational roles include those of cook, baker, dishwasher, tailor, launderer, furrier, weaver, male nurse, ward attendant, and others. This fact relates importantly to gang “homosexuality,” as will be shown.

A second criterion of “feminine” status involves a set of behaviors or practices which are related, sometimes closely and sometimes indirectly, to female participation in sexual activity, but do not in themselves entail sexual intimacy as such. These have to do largely with matters of bodily adornment and physical movement. In matters of dress and adornment, adult females in the United States wear their hair longer than men, and are permitted and/or expected to perform various operations which will alter the natural texture, color, and conformation of hair. Women may and do apply coloring matter to the face—lips, eyes, lashes,
brows, and cheeks. Clothing appears in a wider range of color than for men, with certain colors seen as particularly “feminine.” Skirts rather than trousers are ordinarily prescribed for public daytime wear, and various types of lace, ruffles, and frills often adorn clothing. Certain kinds of fabric are seen as more appropriate for female than male clothing, especially in regard to under clothes. Women may and do apply perfume, so defined, directly to the body.

In the “partner” pattern of ballroom dancing, females customarily assume the role of being “led”—irrespective of which partner is more skilled in dancing—and a set of bodily movements, associated particularly with walking and upper body postures, are seen as “feminine.” Women may kiss or embrace one another in public to a greater degree than is permitted for men. Certain inflections or tone patterns in speech are considered appropriate to women and not men, and certain vocabulary items, particularly adjectives, are used more frequently by women (e.g., divine, gorgeous, scrumptious, cutest, sweetest little, adorable, darling, dear, precious).

While all of these behavioral practices are associated with femininity in our present society, none are intrinsic to women either as a physiological entity or sexual object. This is shown by the fact that all of them may be assumed by males—either in humor or play (comedians, party entertainers, dramatic roles) or seriously (transvestites, homosexual “Queens”). As attributes of “femininity,” therefore, these practices are to a large extent culturally arbitrary in that they are regarded, in our time and under specified conditions, as “feminine,” but in other cultures at present and in our own in the past all have been seen as appropriately “masculine.” The ruffles, powdered wigs, silk pantaloons and stockings, long waved and perfumed hair of the 18th century French “gentleman” represent a particularly well-known example. These forms of behavior can be called “feminine practices.” When manifested by women, they are designated “feminine,” with a favorable connotation; when manifested by men, except under specified circumstances, they are designated “effeminate,” with an unfavorable connotation.
A third criterion of “feminine” status is more directly associated with biological femininity; this is the practice of assuming the “receiving” role in sexual intimacy. Physical structure is relevant here, since a penis-vagina orgasm can occur only if one partner is biologically female. On the other hand, cultural definitions also figure importantly even in regard to this most distinctively “female” aspect of the female role. The male body also provides apertures which can receive the penis, although the female body provides three in contrast to two for the male. Female anatomy, in turn, provides projections which can penetrate bodily apertures. Thus, the physiological structure of male and female does not in itself determine that partners in sexual intimacy be of different sexes, as the prevalence of homosexual intimacy testifies. This aspect of “female” behavior can be referred to as assuming the “receiving” role in sexual intimacy. The terms “active” and “passive” used in this connection are misleading and will not be used; male homosexuals, for example, may seek “actively” to “receive,” while their partners may “passively” assume the “penetrating” role.

The patterning of “homosexual” behavior in Project groups involves all three criteria of “female” behavior: “household task” activities; “feminine” practices; and assuming the “receiving” role in sexual intimacy. In Western culture, a traditional division of labor has developed wherein males customarily assume occupational roles involving the fabrication, maintenance, and repair of stone, wood, and metal objects, administration of collectivities, and other occupations as arenas of male endeavor, while females traditionally assume roles involving “household task” activities. Cultural conditions where “the home” as a childrearing unit involves active participation by both male and female, males are in a position to participate regularly in activity spheres which include biological females who customarily perform activities of the “household task” type. This is the situation which generally obtains in “middle class” sectors of our society, where the primary such sphere is, of

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311 Modern stenographic and clerical roles as possible exceptions.
course, “the home,” but where, as has been noted, the “office” is increasingly becoming a both-sex activity sphere.

In lower class communities, as already noted, one-sex activity spheres are considerably more common. The “home” units tend to be more exclusively female, and the “work” units more exclusively male. Under cultural conditions where important associational units are composed primarily of members of one sex, and where members of such units may spend fairly long periods in isolation from the other sex, the allocation of occupational roles cannot be derived from a division of labor based on sex-role differentiation. In all-male groups, males assume task roles traditionally associated with “female” status (e.g., cooks, bakers, clothiers), and in all-female groups, females assume “male” task roles (e.g., driver, armed guard, administrative executive). Good examples of this process may be found in all-male units such as military or naval units, the prison, the logging camp, the hunting expedition.

Army units, for example, include in their “Table of Organization” a set of occupational roles whose incumbents perform primarily “household task” activities (cooks, bakers, tailors, “medics” [male nurses]). Also common is the practice of assigning those in lower echelons to “household task” duties—making beds, sweeping floors, waiting on tables, cleaning bathrooms and kitchens, and so on, both for one another and for officers. But it is not only in the army or prison or submarine service where males engage widely in “household task” occupations. The whole occupational structure of the contemporary United States incorporates this same sort of role division. In the total male labor force in 1970, between ten and fifteen percent of all workers in the six lower status occupational categories held jobs of the “household task” variety, as compared with fewer than one percent of those in the five higher status categories. This means that about three million males in our current labor force are engaged in tasks associated with the traditional “female” household role—almost all of them in the lower status occupational
categories. The greater involvement of lower class males in “household task” occupations is, of course, related to the fact that effective performance in roles such as sweeper or dishwasher does not require as high a degree of specialized training as “middle class” roles such as engineer or doctor.

A major function of the lower class adolescent street-corner group is to help prepare its members to assume those occupational positions which are available within the lower class labor force, and to help them accommodate to the nature and conditions of these positions. One aspect of this accommodation—which will be treated in further detail in the discussion of the world of work and jobs—relates to the degree of stigma attached to various manifestations of “feminine” behavior. From a “masculine” perspective, involvement in any of the three types of “feminine” behavior—“household task” activity, “feminine” practices, and playing a “receptive” sexual role—can provide a basis for stigmatization as “effeminate.” Group members, however, in common with other lower class males, did not regard extra-household involvement in “household task” activity as particularly stigmatizing. Since between ten and fifteen percent of the occupations customarily followed by lower class males are of this type, there was a fair probability that any given group member might himself assume such a role as an adult occupation; there was, furthermore, a much higher probability that he would have to execute these “female” tasks during his armed forces career—or, if he were excluded from service because of criminality, in the prison, correctional institution, or forestry camp. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that the assumption of “household task” roles was subject to little stigma. Correctional officials are sometimes surprised at how readily lower class boys volunteer for and engage in activities such as cooking and sewing.

Middle class males, in general, can assume such roles without stigmatization only under carefully defined circumstances—as, for example, when acting as cook on a camping trip or during a backyard barbecue. Even in such instances, however,

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the “male as cook” often receives a certain amount of teasing along “You’d-make-some-man-a-good-wife” lines. In the upper middle classes, current definitions permit greater involvement in cooking and some other “household task” activities without stigmatization; for example, most professional men are expected to be proficient in at least one culinary specialty which they can prepare for social affairs. However, middle class males who assume adult occupational roles which incorporate “household task” or “feminine practice” elements (e.g., ballet dancer, couturier, interior decorator, milliner) are generally regarded as effeminate. A similar aura of effeminacy does not apply to the lower class male roles of short-order cook, press man, or dishwasher.

The life milieu of Project males thus incorporated a set of conditions conducive to the assumption, by males, of certain behaviors traditionally associated, in Western society, with the female role. One of these was the occupational system just described. Another related to the circumstances of adolescent “gang” life, which entailed both physical proximity and mutual emotional attachments of high intensity. A third condition related to socialization in the female-based household; males raised in childrearing units in which females assumed or were perceived to assume the dominant parental role were subject to pressures to “identify” with the female parent.313

A major function of the corner group was to acquaint its young members with the requirements of adult “masculinity,” and to inculcate those habits and practices which were perceived as unequivocally masculine. Since the “gang” operated within a cultural milieu which generated certain pressures to assume “feminine” behaviors, it was necessary for the culture of the corner group to accommodate apparently conflicting forces. What was the nature of this accommodation?

First, on the assumption that the three above-cited criteria of “female” status—“household task” activity, “feminine” practice, and sexual receptiveness—

are, in the order given, progressively more “feminine,” it is of interest to note the degree of stigmatization assigned to each. Performing “household task” activities was subject to little stigmatization, and involvement in tasks of this type was condoned under a considerably wider range of circumstances than is the case in middle class culture. Behavior associated with “feminine” practices and mannerisms was also given wider latitude than in most middle class situations. For example, males could wear their hair quite long, assume more elaborate hairstyles, utilize a wider range of color and style in shoes, jackets, and other forms of clothing when “dressed up,” or be “led” in dancing with another male without being stigmatized as “effeminate.”

However, as behaviors moved toward the “more feminine” pole of the “femininity” scale, inhibitive sanctions of increasing severity were brought into play. In the area of “feminine” practice, careful and sensitive distinctions were made. For example, as already mentioned, a boy was permitted to be “led” in dancing but not to assume overtly “feminine” bodily movements. The “red boots” example from the Junior Outlaws shows that the greater latitude for “color” in male clothing might permit suede shoes to be blue, but would not allow rubber boots to be red. But the full force of corner-group sanctions was not brought to bear until movement along the scale of femininity reached a critical point. This point, significantly enough, was not simply involvement in homosexual intimacy as such. The major stigma of “effeminacy” was applied and the most persuasive inhibitive sanctions of the group were mobilized at the point where, by receiving a penis into his body, the male actually assumed the receptive “female” role in homosexual intimacy.

Gang definitions were relatively silent as to the permissibility of assuming the “penetrating” role—allowing one’s penis to be received by an older male “Queen” or outside peer. Actual instances were rare, but corner-group culture made it possible to represent one’s involvement in this practice so as to reduce the risk of stigmatization as homosexual or effeminate. Several such reputation safeguards
were available. First, since the corner boy was approached by the “queer” rather than soliciting him, he could picture himself as sought after rather than seeking. Second, even though he was the object of solicitation, he played the “masculine” part in intimacy by assuming the “penetrating” rather than the “receiving” role. Third, he could remain overtly “uninvolved” in the interaction itself, with the “Queen” taking the “active” part. Fourth, he was able to represent himself as “exploiting” the homosexual, picking up an “easy buck” with little or no effort—“I let some queer blow me for ten bucks.” Fifth, since money changed hands, such an involvement would be represented as a financial transaction—one of a group of “hustles” utilized by gang members as auxiliary sources of income, akin to pocketbook snatching or taking a lush (sucker, mark) in cards or pool.\(^{314}\)

If it were especially important for the boy to establish the “exploitive” and “commercial” aspects of the transaction, he might beat up and/or rob the “queer” following sexual intimacy. This would further reduce the risk of “effeminacy” stigmatization by incorporating the act of sexual intimacy within a behavior sequence which also included assault and theft—both unequivocal indications of masculinity. Even with the availability of these safeguards, however, engagement in homosexual intimacy with non-group members was infrequent. In no group did this practice serve as a customary method of obtaining money. There was some evidence that boys who engaged more frequently in baiting “queers” were beyond the immediate orbit of “gang” sanctioning mechanisms—being either marginal to a corner group or not members at all. There was also some evidence that lower status, more criminally inclined Negro boys were more likely to involve themselves with “Queens.”

Standards of the corner group, then, provided considerable leeway in defining behavior as “homosexual,” up to a point. But that point was delineated with unmistakable clarity. The intensity of scorn, bitterness and derision attending the accusation “You suck!” left no doubt as to where along the scale of “femininity” the

\(^{314}\) Reference to Reiss paper, op. cit, Theft chapter.
corner group drew its line. Why was the line drawn so clearly and emphatically at this point? One reason relates to the strictures placed on homosexual activity throughout Western culture. If indeed the world of the corner group generated a set of pressures which impelled males toward the “extreme” manifestation of femininity—taking the “receiving” role in sexual intimacy—then that same culture would have to provide a set of counter pressures if it were to forestall a situation where males would look to other males as important objects of sexual intimacy. Any extensive use of homosexual outlets by so large a sector of the male population as that represented by urban corner groups would be dysfunctional in the long run, since such practice would have adverse effects on the fertility of this group.

It is quite possible that the classical Hebrew horror of homosexuality, from which our current legal and moral position on homosexuality derives, was based on the Hebrew obsession with fertility. The prevalence of this practice among their Greek neighbors may well have appeared to the biblical Jews as a terribly dangerous example which, if imitated, would seriously weaken their national ambition to become “as numerous as the sand which is upon the seashore,” thus influencing them to institute stringent moral prescriptions of homosexual practice.315

As in many other instances, the subculture of the corner group played an important role in furnishing and maintaining the requisite set of counter-pressures. In severely stigmatizing the practice of receptive homosexuality, the corner group brought to bear its most stringent and compelling sanctions precisely at the point where the danger of dysfunctional violation was greatest. As in the case of incest, the mechanisms incorporated by corner-group culture to limit homosexual involvement were effective and ingenious. The most important of these—the pattern of mutual accusation of receptive homosexuality—served three purposes at once. It defined the exact nature of the prescribed behavior, it indicated the severity of the

315 Reference to Homer Smith, Man and His Gods, op. cit., pp. 100, 425.
associated stigma, and it provided an opportunity for vicarious experiencing of the forbidden act through public and collective imaginative fantasy.