

FINAL NARRATIVE REPORT

February, 1979
LEAA Grant #77-NI-99-0066
Office of Juvenile Justice and
Delinquency Prevention

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Delinquency and the Gang

or

Masked Intimacy: Adult
Delinquent Gangs in a
Chicano Community

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Many studies of gangs¹ view gang membership as a transitional period between childhood and adult status which terminates with increasing commitment to more adult activities -- jobs and families of their own -- which confirm their manhood (Matza, 1964; Briar and Piliavin, 1965; and Neiderhoffer, 1958) and/or with the dissipation of the group's ties through lack of strong internal cohesive mechanisms (Klein and Crawford, 1968 and Jansyn, 1966). The gang is seen as having few utilitarian pay-offs for its members as they mature; consequently, as its utility for demonstrating masculinity or as a youthful reaction to social-structural inequalities decrease, the gang will tend to break up. "Utilitarian" is used here to indicate a process of coming to a decision based on the most effective and/or efficient means for achieving a particular end, a type of cost/benefit analysis of means to an end. In addition to assuming the largely utilitarian payoff of gang membership, these studies assume a scarcity approach to human time, energy and commitments (Marks, 1977). They do not envision the possibility of maintaining gang membership while taking on adult roles as husbands, fathers and wage earners. Adult roles are seen to obviate gang membership, though there is much evidence that single sex peer groups play important roles with lives of many working and lower class men (Gans, 1968; Kobrin, Puntill and Peluso, 1967; and Suttles, 1968).

This paper examines the role of the gang in the lives of its members now on their mid-twenties who live in an inner city Chicano² community, 32nd Street. We will analyze the paradox of the minimal utilitarian payoff of membership and the much greater payoff in the expressive meaning of membership. By expressive meaning we mean the symbols by which persons represent to themselves and to others, why it is gratifying to be a particular kind

of a person i.e. a person with distinguishing moral qualities. The utilitarian function of gang membership explains only a minimum of the reasons for its continuation. By examining the expressive meaning of gang membership it is possible to understand the continuity of its membership and why it remains a gang when it is only minimally utilitarian to do so as they have obtained prima facie evidence of manhood and there are only a few structural blockages to their integration into either legitimate or illegitimate spheres of adult activities.

This is a follow-up study (1977) of a gang, the Lions, whom I had studied for two years (1971-73). The Lions, aged twenty-two to twenty-six were still sitting on the same bench in the same park only slightly fatter and more with mustaches. Though the members frequently wear "painters' pants" now and have grown their hair, instead of their dark "silk" pants and Italian knit shirts which readily identified them as gang members, they frequently wear their "colors" on some article of clothing (shoes or shirt). Several of them continue to wear their gang sweaters and have even bought new ones with a more complex emblem. They greeted me with "where have you been?", as though I had been absent for a month instead of three years.

On my return, I observed and interviewed in the two parks in the 32nd Street community -- at softball practices, during games and while relaxing afterwards; and, in addition, at a bar operated by one of the Lions. In addition, I informally interviewed a number of local community workers who knew the group well and had been in contact with them for many years in a number of different contexts.

Senior gangs (members in their twenties and thirties) in the community have a relatively short history (two existed in 1971-74 and another had prior to that time). This was the first group of Senior Lions. Most of

the gangs in the community were differentiated into age-graded segments as Tinys, Midgets, Littles, Juniors and Seniors. The communications among the segments of the group varied, many not knowing what the others did or not agreeing with the validity of the others' activities. In the three years between 1974 and 1977 the Littles and the Junior Lions became the Seniors while others filled their places.

(Table 1 about here)

We can see from Table 1 that the highest drop-out rate occurred in 1973-74 when most were eighteen or nineteen years old and then membership stabilized. An increasing percentage have married and/or fathered children and there has been a movement into the work force; however, many are not steadily employed, yet are able to balance marriage, job and the gang. Most have obtained what would be considered prima facie evidence that they are adults.

Most studies argue that the gang is a purely adolescent style of peer group, which breaks up or is transformed into another type of group when its members achieve alternative indicators of their manhood or when the range of alternatives becomes greater. These studies assume that the gang is a "beneficial" response to their position in society (as youth or as economically and socially underprivileged) and will reevaluate the need for gang membership when their situation changes.

According to Miller (1966:98), "...involvement in violent crimes was a relatively transient phenomenon of adolescence and did not presume a continuing pattern of similar involvement in adulthood." Block and Niederhoffer (1958) conceive of the gang as a universal response to crises in the transition from childhood to adulthood. A gang career terminates with adulthood

when the crisis is over. Briar and Piliavan (1965) claim that increasing commitments outside the gang as the members mature succeed in ending gang involvement.

According to Matza (1964), adulthood, when indicated by prima facie evidence such as full physical size, marriage, fatherhood and wage earning, should be enough evidence of a young man's manliness to allow him to move away from gang activities which he used as a youth as an indicator of his manhood. Movement away from delinquency is facilitated as youth are rarely committed to law violation but have shared misunderstandings about the others' commitments to their acts of delinquency. Delinquency occurs through misuses in which, because of the "situation of company," we believe that the others are committed to delinquency. Masculine "anxieties" are assuaged with adult roles and the move away from delinquency. These conceptualizations of delinquency and the gang assume that alternative sources of masculine status necessarily mean forsaking gang membership or that numerous commitments outside the gang in the adult world negate the possibility of continuing in the gang. These arguments all assume a scarcity of available time, energy and commitments (Marks, 1977), so that it would be difficult to simultaneously hold a job and be a gang member. In addition, they assume a purely utilitarian notion of involvement -- the gang is a substitute means for demonstrating manliness and when an alternative, less costly means becomes available they will take it.

Several studies have argued that the gang is not a cohesive group or does not have the same cohesion mechanisms as "normal" groups and, consequently, does not survive with the same members over an extended period of time (Jasyn, 1966; Klein and Crawford, 1968; and Yablonsky, 1961). Yablonsky (1961)

sees "violent gangs" as "near groups" whose stability and organization is minimal, whose members are sociopathic and whose membership shifts continuously. Whatever the definition of cohesiveness -- attitudes toward the group (Festinger, 1950), amount of group interaction (Klein and Crawford, 1968) or the amount of time the group spent together (Jansyn, 1966), the gangs are seen as lacking the necessary constituent elements of "normal" cohesive groups.

Klein and Crawford (1968) locate the factors which maintain the cohesiveness of the gang as external to it -- the poverty of the community, low educational preferences, lack of job skills, social disabilities, etc. which "lead to withdrawal symptoms." This withdrawal is reinforced by police behavior, teacher reaction, and lack of acceptance by adults on playgrounds and local business establishments. In addition, the threat of rival groups enforces the cohesiveness of the group. "Adolescent behavior, adult and rival group reactions thus reinforce each other, and the range of alternatives open to these youngsters is decidedly restricted. The result is delinquent group cohesiveness, however tenuous" (Klein and Crawford, 1968:226). Cohesiveness in "normal" groups, according to Klein and Crawford (1968), stems from internal sources such as group goals, membership stability, group norms, role differentiation and group names. These sources exist minimally in gangs. Here cohesion is seen as bonds developed for the purpose of survival in a harsh environment with few opportunities. It is purely utilitarian in its purpose. When those conditions change, the gang will dissolve, having developed no internal sources of cohesion.

Other studies have found that while juvenile gangs generally disband as the young men enter their twenties, many of these same youth join social-athletic clubs (SAC's) though not necessarily as a group (Suttles, 1968; Kobrin, Punttil and Peluso, 1967).³ According to Suttles, the younger SAC's (nineteen to thirty) whose members are Italian, engage in different activities than the younger gangs when it became nonutilitarian to continue as a gang. They have new members, use different names than the younger age-graded gangs, rent storefronts in which they hang out, behave as though the younger males were nuisances who encroach on their "rights" rather than as rival gangs, and are not forced to stay in the area (which might provoke fights) as they have cars. On the other hand, like the juvenile gangs, few were married and none had children. There was, according to Suttles, a stake in maintaining law and order (1968:110) as they needed three cosigners to have a charter and they had to be careful not to irritate their landlords. Misbehavior becomes costly. There were also older Italian groups (members were over thirty) who had some members involved in organized crime but as a group they only drank, gossiped and played cards. They never had parties, athletic events or identifying clothes and there was no public hierarchy of fighting or criminal skills. The Italians had a long history of such groups; however, the Mexicans, Puerto Ricans and Blacks in the same area did not. The Mexicans had attempted to set up a SAC but failed because several of the members could not afford to pay the rent on the storefront so that the others would not pay. As a consequence they lost the club house and did not stay together. Suttles (1968:48) states that "with residential stability and better employment possibilities, there seems no insurmountable barrier to the development of adult groups among the

Mexicans." When the benefits outweigh the costs, Mexicans too will have social-athletic clubs.

The same group of Lions are still involved in maintaining their reputation on the street as a gang and are also involved in some illegal activities as a group, in addition to illegal activities as individuals. Unlike Suttle's SAC's, they are married and working but do not have a store front, though they have the money. If the largely utilitarian purposes for remaining a gang are over, how and why do the Lions stay together and remain as a gang? First, we will examine the utilitarian "pay-off" of remaining in the same gang. The gang, we will argue, allows its members to prolong the period in which they "hedge their bets" for the future by maintaining access to and encouraging participation in both legitimate and illegitimate spheres of action.

Hedging Future Bets: The Utilitarian Pay-off of the Gang

Though opportunities are limited both in the legitimate and illegitimate spheres, membership in the Lions provides opportunities in both spheres and, through its members' expectations and interactions, limits over-commitment to either sphere while demanding participation in both. Respect for a member with a well-paying job or a good "hustle" is given; however, both are limited by the demand for accounts⁴ when an individual is becoming over-committed to one sphere or another and by the public nature of most of their interactions. Failure to curb over-commitments means expulsion from the group and is used as an excuse to leave.

The gang members balance their time, energy and commitments differently between their families, jobs or school, the gang and "hustling." Some spend much of their time with the gang playing softball and drinking, while others are found less frequently "hanging with the dudes." Rich spent more time with his family than others and was holding down a full-time job until he was reduced by a company cutback from forty to thirty hours a week. In spite of these commitments he always showed up for and organized baseball practice several times a week and kept the records at the games. The team was ranked second in their league of eight teams. He still could be counted on, the others claimed, if he was needed and had been involved in their last inter-gang conflict. He would frequently stay around drinking with them after the games. Harry also spent less time than most with the group. He ran his older brother's tavern, which the group drank at sometimes in colder weather and provided the group with softball shirts with the name of his tavern on one side and "Lions" emblazoned on the front -- all in the Lions' own colors. He was not much of an athlete and never played on the team. Others such as Ronny and Sam (who had a full-time job) spent many hours during the summer with the group playing ball, "rapping" and drinking. Tico, on the other hand, played no baseball and spent quite a bit of time away from the group engaged in illegitimate activities.

It is expected that young men work and those with good jobs are well respected, frequently commanding the center of attention. However, as many of the Lions have not finished high school, the variety of interesting and well-paying jobs/are limited, though it is possible to obtain a job, claimed one of the gang members. "You can't just go looking for one

or two days and expect to find one. But if you try for more than a week you can." All had either worked at a legitimate job or attended school in the past year. Nico's work pattern is typical, though his jobs have more status than most of the others have been able to obtain. He worked for a large bank as a computer operator for two and a half years, starting at eighteen, after training in a government funded program. When he quit he remained unemployed for a year and then took a job with the post office. It was good pay, he claimed, but he quit after a year. He is married and has a son. Jim, for example, worked for over a year installing heating and air conditioning units and earned extra money repairing furnaces of area residents in the evening during the winter. Several of the Lions, Pete, Jaime and Tico, attended an experimental school program for the past year. They were all thought to be very bright by the teachers in the program, though none had completed the ninth grade. Others of the group had completed or almost completed high school. Though not a topic of every day conversation, members with good jobs or doing well in school were commended for their earning ability or their educational attainments.

On the other hand, while skills in "hustling" were respected, well-paying opportunities in illegitimate enterprises are limited. Most of the large profit making illegitimate opportunities are in the illegal drug market; however, while they are largely family enterprises, a number of the gang members have managed to become involved to varying extents -- from small time pushers of marijuana to a few who frequently earn up to one thousand dollars a week selling heroin and cocaine. For example, Sam, it is alleged, frequently makes "a grand" (\$1,000) a week, and in addition,

he has a steady factory job. Others only sell when they need some extra cash. A few have recently participated in armed robbery, though not many. Jaime is awaiting trial on charges of armed robbery and aggravated assault. He talked as though he was convinced he would not be convicted but never denied the validity of the charges. Those who earn significant amounts of money from their illegitimate "hustles" are respected, however, they do not have to be very involved. They must be able to survive financially on their own.

Not only do the normative expectations of gang members structure gang activities in order to allow its members to be involved in several spheres of activities, →

but they are also structured so as not to allow the members to become over-committed to one set of activities. If a gang member is seen as over-committing himself to one sphere of action an account of the concentration is demanded. Those who remain in the group are expected to be involved in both legitimate and illegitimate activities; and, whenever they are not actively participating in one sphere, they are expected to account for their actions. Dropping out of school or quitting a job requires an account of the activity. Generally, the youth attempt to excuse, i.e., the act was wrong but they were not responsible (Lyman and Scott, 1963) their actions. The acceptable account is constructed in terms of lack of sufficient time to spend with the gang. For example, Tico who had been doing well in school developed a poor attendance record, because, he claimed, the school activities were taking too much time away from the group. "If I go to school, then I have to do

my homework in the afternoon and then go out to meet the dudes. Then we start drinking and stay up late so I can't get up in the morning so I don't go to school." Nico said he gave up his post office job so he could spend more time hanging around and could come and go as he pleased. The job placed too many time constraints on him, particularly as he had to work on Saturdays. He had had the same problem with the bank as they would not transfer him off the night shift. These excuses never deny the importance of work or school.

On the other hand, those who are becoming overcommitted to illegitimate activities are asked to account for their behavior. Few community members actually live solely on their illegitimate incomes. One local man was making enough money selling drugs to support his wife and children. He had a legitimate job, in addition, which he would not quit, though he could have earned more money by doing so. Several gang members worked full time while they were earning money selling drugs on the street -- asserting that the illegal money was not for support of their families.

This account unlike that given when limiting legitimate activities is a justification (Lyman and Scott, 1963:47) in "which one accepts the responsibility for the act in question, but denies the pejorative quality associated with it." As the money is not for the support of family members, there is nothing wrong with obtaining funds illegally. In addition, the gang's extensive public interaction actually serves to limit the amount of illegitimate activities of its members, both existentially and as an excuse to those who do not wish to risk apprehension. The amount of time spent in a highly visible location may be detrimental both to a full time criminal and to someone who wants to avoid any risk of getting into trouble with the law. With the continual drinking and smoking on the same bench in the park that they have been on for more than six years,

the group is well known to the police. The evening after a young (fourteen year old) gang member was shot and killed by a member of the Little Lions (the police did not know that at the time but were suspicious) a pair of detectives drove around the inside of the park and stopped in front of the Lion's bench. They called Sal over and said to the others:

We've known him since he was a kid. Where have you been?

(Sal was given no chance to reply.) In jail, huh? (Silence)

You killed your old man, didn't you? We'd like to ask you something. Take your beer and get in the back. We'll bring you right back.

Sal got in the car and they took off. To be in public where one can be found by the police would be detrimental to those who would like to keep their visibility minimal, such as Juan who was always under suspicion by the police for the latest "rip-off" or for dealing methadone. He cannot afford to be easily located by the police. In addition, full-time criminals among their ranks might draw police attention towards them and make it increasingly difficult to remain involved in their part-time criminal activities.

On the other hand, public exposure is dangerous to those who do not ^{risk} ~~want~~ to risk arrest. Len, who is intent on providing for his family, prefers not to be there because of the constant risk of trouble occurring, either from attacks by other groups who do shoot at them, or problems with the police when area residents call and complain about the amount of noise and the drinking. Anyone who wants to minimize the possibility of police arrest claims he must stay away.

Those, who in the eyes of other members, have allowed the over-commitment to proceed too far into activity patterns which do not include the expected

range are excluded from "hanging" with the group if they do not exclude themselves -- whether they have become involved in full-time criminal activities (Juan, a heroin addict) or spend too much time and energy with their family and on the job (Len concentrates on his family and Lou on school and politics). Even when these men wanted to spend time with the group drinking, they are generally ignored as they cannot be counted on to take risks for the group. The Lions show little interest in the activities of these former members; however, the former members remain curious about the activities of the group and the individuals involved.

Through normative expectations and the patterns of interactions of gang members, the gang members hedge their bets by not focusing their locus of commitment -- keeping their options open. The members start families, hold legitimate jobs, attend schools and are involved in illegitimate money making schemes. The young men have the autonomy to shift their commitments, yet the boundaries for over and under-commitment are set by the gang. They have, as they matured, shifted some of their involvements towards marriage, the family, and conventional jobs, yet have maintained their involvement in illegitimate enterprises. The socio-economic benefits obtained by "hedging bets" does not seem to be a sufficient pay-off for either maintenance of group ties or maintaining the group as a gang. The persuasiveness of the account for quitting a job which is highly evaluated by the group -- "I didn't have enough time to spend with the gang" cannot be explained by the utilitarian notion of maximizing options." In addition, the utilitarian functions performed by the gang cannot explain why it has continued as a gang. In order to better understand the meaning of the gang to its members, we must examine the expressive values it embodies.

Expressive Values: The Honorable Warrior

Many studies have failed to examine the expressive values which give meaning to human experience and make situations and social relationships gratifying or not. Those values are embodied in the unique ways of viewing oneself presenting oneself to others and their meanings connect and complete the solidarities which make one group distinct from others. Expressive values are reflected through cultural symbols which give form and meaning to human solidarities.

These solidarities, made meaningful through expressive values are not equal to the solidarities which are built into primordial ties (Shils, 1957) or in communal ties (Schmalenbach, 1961) ^{in which} _A One is born into a social group and cannot break these ties. Even if an individual does not like the others in that group, it would not ^{destroy} the relationship. Reintegration after ^{absence} _A would be unproblematic. In most groups in modern society, solidarity is not built into the bonds which unite the group as the group membership is based on choice of affiliation and ^{consequently,} _A are much more tenuous. The choice of affiliation embodies the kind of person one sees oneself as being. The meaning of these solidarities are not given or fixed by blood ties or long traditions but are created and maintained through a negotiated process mediated by cultural symbols which express ways of feeling and moral qualities while integrating personal experiences and activities. These expressive values are the primary means by which people represent to themselves and to others what makes it worthwhile to be a particular kind of person.⁵

In an honor based subculture a man's moral qualities are linked closely with his and others evaluations of himself in terms of location on a dominant/subordinate continuum and an autonomy/dependency continuum. A

man of honor is particularly sensitive to any inferences of lack of autonomy or failure to dominate. He must, according to the value of honor, be ready to return any discerned slight to his claim to precedence. This sensitivity to perceived slights creates an element of tension in all human experiences.

Honor and shame are the constant preoccupation of individuals in small scale, exclusive societies where face to face personal, as opposed to anonymous, relations are of paramount importance and where the social personality of the actor is as significant as his office (Peristiany, 1966:11).

What is considered honorable for a man varies among communities. "It possesses a general structure which is seen in the institutions and customary evaluations which are particular to a given culture" (Pitt-Rivers, 1966:21). Honor is an expressive value necessitating direct action with little attention given to considering the future consequences. It means that one must invest one's entire character in the action in order to enforce one's claim to precedence. Honor reflects not only one's personal decisions and judgments and is an individual attribute but also the integrity of one's physical being (Pitt-Rivers, 1966). The inability to back one's claim to precedence among equals frequently through physical means is experienced as dishonor.

The code of honor followed by these young men concentrates on the cherished nature of their manliness, (1) defining breaches of etiquette, such as failure to show respect in face-to-face interactions, (2) being placed in another's debt or (3) giving in to a woman's demands for autonomy and potential domination as placing a man in a demeaning position. Any

act which is seen as challenging a man's claim to precedence can be experienced as a slight on his manhood and must be redressed. Breaches in interpersonal etiquette such as violations of the standards of ordinary decency and good manners have been discussed elsewhere (Horowitz and Schwartz, 1974). Second, maintaining one's claim to precedence also entails the ability to pay for others. "Paying is a privilege which goes to a man of precedence since to be paid for places a man in a situation of inferiority" (Pitt-Rivers, 1966:59). The same is true for other favors as it is humiliating to owe others and is experienced as dependency and, consequently, a loss of honor may be incurred. Ideally, a man must never let himself be placed in a situation in which he cannot pay for himself or handle something alone. In addition, a loss of honor may be experienced through a man's failure to retain authority over his family. This entails the man's ability to be the sole support of his family through legitimately obtained funds and the protection of the sexual purity of the women in his family. A wife who openly displays her sexuality or who financially plays an important role in the support of the family would be tantamount to a man's dishonor. This would reflect poorly on a man's autonomy and dominant position relative to his family, placing him in a situation in which he could easily see himself and others see him as dishonored. In addition, dependency and subordination are symbolic of femininity.

Not all breaches of the code of etiquette are interpreted as insults, nor are all insults responded to violently. Community members are well skilled in the usage of conventional etiquette and use those skills to resolve infractions of interpersonal space. However, to be a man of honor as honor never depends on how a person performs the duties or a role and

involves the integrity of one's physical being one must be ready to respond aggressively to a perceived insult — any attempt to place a man in a dependent and/or subordinate position. A man of honor has qualities like those of a warrior -- tough aggressivity and readiness to fight consequently there is almost constantly an underlying tension in social relationship in which a man's identity may be revealed as not having the true moral qualities of a man of honor.

Intimacy in an Honor Based Subculture

In many groups, intimacy -- revealing affection and insecurities -- is achieved within a family or family like situation or between lovers; however, in an honor-bound subculture, the male-female relationship is frequently marked by fears of revealing dependency and subordination. Intimacy with a woman may be too great a risk in the eyes of many of these young men. Any sign of dependency is usually publicly accounted for or behavior is manifested which actively seeks to reaffirm the husband's autonomy and domination. For example, many wives work. Their salaries, according to their husbands, go just for supplementary items but are not necessary to support their families. The men claim that "I gave my wife permission to work."⁶ In this way they attempt to maintain their dominant position. In addition, their behavior frequently reflects attempts to maintain a dominant position by the physical abuse of their wives and maintaining their autonomy by staying away from home. This behavior is frequently supported by the woman's expectations. Christina reveals her expectations about men in describing why a husband (Dino) was justified in leaving his wife (Margie).

← You can't control what a man does and you got to accept him the way he is. Men are free spirits and as

long as they come home to you why should you worry. If they bring in some money and you cook, clean, sew, and are ready for them, why should they leave? Margie made a mistake that night at their party. She shouldn't have left when they had that fight, because she should have known that Dino would just stay there with one of his girlfriends. She holds him in too tight.

Men must maintain an image of themselves as dominant and autonomous or risk poor evaluation of their moral character. Laying one's intimate feelings bare to a wife may be judged as placing too great a risk on one's sense of who one actually is. This leaves few situations or relationships where intimacy can be experienced without a potential high risk of loss of honor. Only among equals and persons whom one trusts is it possible. The gang is one place where it is a possibility. Empirically, it is difficult to demonstrate these ties exist but there are some types of occasions where intimate ties are revealed. However, there can be no explicit cultural symbols which are directly expressive of intimacy, as revelation of intimate ties would constitute an experience which is inconsistent with the image of themselves as tough and autonomous. By carefully examining the group's demeanor, we can see some of the feelings and understanding they express for each other. Most talk among the members is rough and, like many street corner communities, the common mode of interaction among young men, even good friends, is to "rap-on" each other -- that is to verbally attack the other's masculinity (Liebow, 1968; Matza, 1965 and Rainwater, 1970). A physical fight is the only manner of terminating the tension for the individual whose skill at "rapping on" others is less which assures his masculinity. However, on a few occasions where the participant who was

losing the battle (between members of the same gang) was obviously less strong physically and was looking miserable, his antagonist would quietly withdraw from the confrontation without focusing attention on the other's loss. This demonstration of understanding and compassion has been further shown through the gang members' consideration of those who "walked the line." As punishment for breaking a rule of the gang, members must run between ^{of members} two lines and are hit quite hard with sticks and bats. When one member cried, he was permitted to leave the park without notice and return the following day without mention of the event. There are numerous other occasions in which strong feelings among the members allow them to deal with the humiliation of their fellow members by ignoring the situation which they would never do with those not in the gang. No one ever "lost" a fight who was a member of the gang. It was always an "unfair fight."

Though there can be no explicit cultural symbols which mark the intimate relations of gang members, there are symbols of expressive values which are consistent with the manner in which the gang members wish to view themselves and have others view them and which elaborately veil the meaning of their solidarity (intimacy). The mutual obligation network supplies the symbols consistent with that image of their moral qualities, which helps to integrate their experiences and publicly partially veils the meaning of their ties.

Mutual Obligations: A Veil for Intimate Ties

In this section we will examine why the Lions have stayed together — the meaning of the group to its members. The mutual obligation network has only marginally utilitarian functions. However, this style of social relations provides a veil for intimate relations which is consistent with the way the Lions view themselves and the way they wish others

to see them -- as tough and independent warriors who have a long similar history together and can trust each other in times of need.

The mutual obligation network, which consists of a continuous equalitarian exchange of goods and services among gang members, functions only minimumly as a utilitarian measure. Gang members would receive greater financial benefits by staying on their job or selling more drugs, for example. In addition, the mutual obligations network is not a rationally calculated exchange of goods and services with attention focused on the costs and benefits of each exchange (i.e. last week I bought you three beers, this week you buy me three of equal cost). The exchanges are sporadic and unequal in values and frequently never completed or remain incomplete over a long period of time. Obligations range from a beer to over one hundred dollars, to helping someone settle an old "debt of honor." No explicit accounts are kept of debts. It is understood that they will be returned when and if the lender needs the exchange completed.

Consequently, the mutual obligations network plays only a marginal role in the social and economic survival of the group members. However, as a public expression of solidarity which veils the meaning of the gang's solidarity which explains the importance of the group, it is consistent with the way they view themselves and wish others to view them -- as tough warriors who on occasion, like compa_des in arms, help each other out. In order to maintain the continuity of their images of themselves they must trust others not to reveal the meaning of the continuity of their solidarity and not to use information gained from that relationship to place another member in a potentially demeaning situation. In order to develop and maintain this trust, it is necessary to maintain the perception of the equality of moral qualities of members and to maintain a continuity of social experiences which confirm and reaffirm these characteristics.

Equality: In the reality of material exchanges some debts are not settled for many years, if ever and no attempts are made to demand a settlement. Only should an exchange be experienced as one-sided does the relationship become tenuous and may be finally attenuated or terminated. Equality does not exist in terms of the actual exchange of goods and services among gang members, it is expressive of equality of the moral qualities valued by the group. If members fail to demonstrate those qualities, they cannot be trusted in an intimate relationship with others as they may violate the delicate balance which intimate relations require. For example, Sal violated their trust in him by getting into worthless trouble -- trouble which stemmed not from his defense of honor or need for money, but his "craziness." He had gone much too far in murdering his father and, on his release from Detention, his continual provocation of conflicts were seen as not those of a man of honor. He had caused trouble for the group a number of times by continually doing things which would bring the police to the park. The confrontation, however, is expressed largely in terms of his failure to reciprocate when others helped him out. When he needed a place to stay after getting out of jail, he had been taken in by Sam's mother. Most of the members felt that he had gone too far without making an effort to return what he owed. It was expressed that he was becoming too dependent on the favors of others. When he was picked up with a sawed-off shot gun, only a few weeks after he had gotten out of jail, no one bothered to bail him out. Usually, this is done immediately. Sometimes groups will hold dances to get enough money together to bail someone out. Others needing similar help had been permitted much greater leeway in reciprocation but his frequent dishonorable behavior, in the eyes of other members, indicated

that his moral qualities were not equal to others, consequently, he could not be trusted with intimate knowledge ~~of the others~~. The potential for violation was almost too great.

Like a male-female relation in which the man must retain his dominant status, thereby excluding the possibility of intimacy which might reveal a weakness, a parallel situation occurs among males of unequal status. No intimacy can occur without perceived equality of moral qualities. Any perceived outstanding debt by a person whose moral qualities are brought to question will place the debtor in a dependent position and subordinate status. No one of dominant status would risk losing that by involvement in intimate relations with someone of questionable moral qualities. Therefore, in order for intimacy to occur, there must be equality of moral worth which is materially expressed and veiled by a perception of equality of exchange. This is the culturally acceptable model of solidarity.

Continuity of social experiences: Mutual obligations are experienced as continuous movement towards an equilibrium of debts and non-hierarchical social relationships of exchange among friends. Tension is easily produced if the exchange is seen as potentially discontinuous; however, as we have discussed, there are many debts which are left unsettled for many years but no one expresses any urgency in settling them. It is not around the continuity of material exchange which trust develops but around the continuity of moral qualities of members. Those who leave the group voluntarily are seen as indicating that they no longer desire to be the kind of people that the Lions are. They want an identity based on different moral qualities. Consequently, it would be difficult to trust them with confidential thoughts and information. Most of those who leave the group involuntarily

(incarceration) or semi-involuntarily (armed forces) do not present these problems to the group. They have left the group because they are men of the moral qualities admired by the group (the member who goes to jail over an altercation involving honor or a money-making illegitimate activity).

These members, having continued to affirm their status as men of honor, can reenter the gang with a minimum of problems.

Those who have voluntarily left the group not only can not return and be reaccepted to the group but feel a real loss of the close ties of the group. This loss is not expressed explicitly but can be inferred from their tone of voice, the interest they show in the Lions and their continual recital of past experiences with the gang while receiving little reciprocation of that interest. Admitting feelings of loss even slightly is placing oneself in a tenuous position demonstrating dependence on others. For example, both Len and Lou were not considered by the group to be members and did not consider themselves members though they attended several softball games. They were no longer part of the network of mutual obligations. Few of the members paid much attention to either when they showed up at a game. This lack of solidarity was experienced by each, both claimed they did not have any time to "hang around with the dudes" any more, yet spoke longingly about the past, the good times, and the common experiences they used to have. Len claimed that it was hard, when he had time to drink, to find someone to go drinking with, a problem rarely experienced by a member. But he had chosen to leave the group as he was unconcerned with the group's honor, and though his interests sometimes overlapped with theirs, it was not enough to allow him to just wander in and be accepted again when he pleased.

Lou had become involved with a Chicano political movement. He eschewed the qualities of the Lions which permitted and encouraged them to fight against their own people. He was concerned with the economic and political advancement of Chicanos and would not fight other Chicanos.

Juan, now a drug addict, cannot reenter the group, though he too is still concerned with the Lions' activities. Though many of the Lions experimented with drugs, he was the only one who became addicted to heroin. According to gang members, an addict lacks any moral qualities, his only thought being to satisfy his habit. An addict, claim many of the Lions, will not respond as a man of honor. One could never be trusted to demonstrate courage in a potentially demeaning situation.

Changes in expressive values lead to discontinuities of membership in much on the part of the members as the ex-member. It is not the disruption of mutual obligations which is the reason not accepting them back or their desires to return to the group. The obligations are only sporadic in the group and there are many networks which the ex-members can and do enter into the wider community as these networks are one of the basic forms of social relationships among community members. These exchanges only symbolize and veil the meaning of solidarity among the gang members which can only exist between men of the same moral qualities which have been demonstrated over a long period of time. A man with new and different moral qualities cannot be trusted particularly in questions of personal intimacies. As he has claimed a different set of moral qualities he may use this knowledge to place the member in a demeaning light.

Though material exchanges do serve to some degree an instrumental function, they can not alone serve as the basis for the continuity of the

Lion's gang into the members' twenties and after gaining prima facie evidence of their manhood. Material exchanges do serve in this cultural context to veil the potentially problematic nature of the solidarity of the group. The reason for the continuity of the group is in the meaning of the members' relationships -- intimate ties, which for the young men in this cultural context can most easily be experienced in a gang without laying open to question the moral characteristics which make up the identity of who they think they are and how they wish others to view them. Largely for this reason they continue to remain together; however, we must examine the public identity of the gang in order to understand why they must remain together as a gang.

Remaining a Gang

Up to this point we have not answered the question of why the Lions have remained a gang instead of becoming a social club. We have discussed how they avoid inconsistencies in their identities as "men with whom they do not trifle" in order to cover the meaning of group solidarity yet we have not discussed how that identity is constructed and affirmed as members of an all male group. As men of honor, they are like warriors who demonstrate their valor in the face of a common enemy. Honor is seen by these young men as tied not only to their individual activities, but, in addition, to those of the gang. The importance of the honor of the collectivity in part develops and is maintained through the members' commitments⁷ to the identity of the gang through the years they have remained together. But it is in the desire to maintain the moral qualities of men of honor on which the continuation of the Lions as a gang pivots. If the maintenance of the reputation of the gang becomes unimportant than there would be no reason

to stay together except the close ties of the members and they are inconsistent with the image of honorable men. In a community such as 32nd Street, a young man's claim to precedence is an essential aspect of his identity (who he is seen as) on the streets. Joining a gang is one means of claiming precedence without having to do it on one's own. In this way it not only means that one is continually called upon to support the group, but, in addition, the gang's "rep" may be his most salient attribute. If his claim is almost entirely dependent on that of the gang, it is very difficult to give up. Though his "side bet" may not have been a conscious decision, it serves to wed him to the gang having made an investment in the group. Although several members have identities which are partially independent of the gangs, most are firmly rooted in the gangs.

Leaving the group requires an almost total reconstruction of identity both from the perspective to the person leaving and the others who identify him as he was previously. There is always the possibility of being challenged as a member of one's "former" group and having no one to help. Members of other gangs do not necessarily accept one's new status. Lou claimed that even four years after he left the group, people were still identifying him as a Lion. He moved to a new, nearby community but found that he was identified as Lion. In one instance he said that he was returning late from the University when someone yelled "you're a Lion" and shot at him. "I even started to carry my 'heat' [gun] again after that. I wasn't safe without it," he claimed. Whether or not one is likely to be consistently challenged, most still perceive this situation as real. The Senior Greeks, while in their late twenties, were afraid to play baseball in an area

ten miles away from home because, they claimed, the gangs there had ~~been~~^{their} pictures and would probably challenge them if they /the Greeks/ were to attend the game. Leaving the gang would mean losing the support of the group when one's reputation as a member of that group is challenged, even if no longer a member. The reliance of the members on the gang's reputation as part of their own identity and others' awareness of and reaction to this identity, help to maintain the commitment of members to the gang's identity. It is that identity which is expressive of the kind of persons they wish to be and hope that others see them in that way.

The moral qualities of toughness and aggression had, in the past, lead them to be "self-image promoters" (Toch, 1969) i.e. not only did they respond to assumed slights on their claim to precedence, but would actively seek out situations in which they would intentionally challenge other's claims to precedence in order to enhance their own. This was no longer true in 1977. They had become "self-image defenders," seeking only to maintain their reputation. This change is only indicated through behavioral changes and is never discussed among the members. It is understood implicitly; however, Sal failed to note this change as he had been in jail for almost three years. He had wanted to provoke a fight with a gang which he had thought was "getting out of line," but the Lions disregarded what he was saying. On the other hand, there was no evidence that they would stop fighting altogether though they have not fought in the name of the group within the past year. There is evidence that they will in the future. They continually talk about unresolved conflicts with other groups and others express their commitment to fight the Lions for past aspersions cast by the Lions on their honor. Secondly, other gangs'

senior groups have been involved in gang conflicts recently. During the spring of 1977 the Senior Greeks (now in their thirties) were involved in a "set-up" in a tavern in which a number of men were wounded and ~~few~~ ^{several} were killed. Many of the Lions still own guns and several now have licenses in order to practice at firing ranges. However, there is little indication that they actively seek to claim precedence by provoking a fight.

However, they have developed no symbols to acknowledge this change. The account accepted by the members when asked if the gang had changed failed to indicate a shift in orientation. The usual answer was "we fight less," "we are slower to fight," or "we only fight if we have to." The latter are the exact words used when they were younger. The meaning of their experiences has changed in their transformation from self-image promoters to defenders. This transition has many more implications for their identity than just a change in the number of violent incidents and gang fights. As self-image promoters they were involved in purposeful action -- goal oriented behavior -- enhancement of their claim to precedence, while as self-image defenders they are only attempting to maintain what they have. This shift reflects upon their image of themselves as "men with whom others do not trifle" -- it expresses a lack of aggressiveness and courage.

By acknowledging this change it would reveal to themselves and to others that there must be a reevaluation of their moral qualities and a shift in why they remain a gang, i.e. from they are together because they are tough to fighting only in order to remain together. Purposeful action is no longer a part of group activities. Consequently, by failing to symbolically mark this change in their behavior, they can maintain their image of themselves as tough and aggressive warriors with strong continuity claims to precedence.

Elimination of all claims to precedence among neighborhood gangs would be tantamount to refuting every moral quality that they valued. There would be no culturally acceptable reason for them to remain together which, if they did stay together, would reveal the close personal ties among members. Not only would acknowledgment of these ties lead to failure to confirm the image of themselves as "warriors" but would contradict that image by indicating weakness and emotional dependency on others. Only by remaining a gang is it possible to maintain an identity based on their moral qualities which they see as important and continue being the kind of people they value while remaining together. A group of men whose solidarity is based explicitly on intimate ties cannot exist in this cultural context.

Conclusion: Tensions of a Youth Identity and Adult Status

Contrary to some common sense notions and sociological studies of gangs, the primary pay-off in gang membership is not utilitarian but expressive. In examining the expressive values of the gang members, it becomes clear that the continuity of membership is based in the nature of the solidarity of the group, not in similar reactions to failure to achieve, lack of opportunities or lack of necessary symbols of maturity. Remaining a gang when it is not necessarily "utilitarian" to do so, can only be understood in the context of what type of people they think they are and how they would like others to see them. The reason they stay and spend so much time together is in the intimate relationships they have developed.

By remaining together the gang does serve a minimal utilitarian function. The gang members' economic positions are not particularly good in either the legitimate or illegitimate sphere, so that the gang

members' expectations that their members "hedging^e their bets" by participating in both spheres can be seen as a rational means to maximizing their options for the future. By limiting their illegitimate activities they succeed in lessening the risk of incarceration but by keeping involved they can move into that sphere should good options arise. The same is true for the legitimate sphere -- by working should a good option occur, they have some work history yet they are risking little by the discontinuity of employment as most of the jobs which are available to them have a minimum of prerequisites.

In addition, the mutual exchange network is utilitarian in that it does provide members with economic and social benefits when they need it.

However, as we have argued neither "hedging one's bets" nor the availability of the mutual obligation network are sufficient explanations of the continuing solidarity of the group or its having remained a gang rather than becoming a social-athletic club. It is only by examining the expressive values in an honor based subculture, that we can understand the gang's continuity. As men of honor who cannot depend on or be subordinate to others and must be tough and aggressive in order to maintain that honor, they can only experience closeness in a gang -- the meaning of gang solidarity. The nature of gang solidarity must be veiled to be consistent with the image of themselves as "men with whom others do not trifle." This is done by publicly expressing their solidarity as a mutual obligations network. Intimacy can only be expressed among trusted members and those are members with social histories who continually demonstrate their equality of moral characteristics with the others. In addition, they must, in order to assert their moral qualities, remain together as "warriors" i.e. in order to remain together they must

continue to be a gang — defending their reputation against others' claims to precedence. However, in the shift from "promoters" to "defenders" the meaning of the relation between toughness and togetherness had charged. They remain tough in order to be together instead of being together because they are tough. With no symbolic changes they can remain together with a historically consistent image of themselves.

Though this maintenance of a gang identity (a youth oriented delinquent identity) and adult status (jobs, wives and children) did not present many explicit problems for the members, there were some indications of tension. Members asked me several times if I thought that they had changed. I returned the question to them and the response was generally "well, we're older now" and "we don't fight as much." On the other hand, there was an undercurrent of thought among the members that there should be some significant change in their lives now that they were adults. "We're slower to fight and more peaceable now. We should get together for good things like housing and jobs...shouldn't kill our own people...but we still have things to take care of..." claimed Jaime. The gang members view themselves as irrevocably tied to their pasts which create for them a continuity of past and present, yet this tension which Jaime expressed seemed to a question which several felt but could not express. To express it would mean the end of the gang.

We can see that the framework within which the gang members view their world, it makes sense to continue as they are. They see little in their lives as incongruent, though a few have begun to experience but not to explicitly verbalize the tensions. Whether they will remain on the park bench for many years to come and begin to resemble the men living on the margins of society on Tally's corner (Liebow, 1968) within the next few

years or develop a new evaluation of their moral qualities and can move out of the gang. In 1978 they were still on the same bench in the park and when I asked a community resident, ex-street hustler and worker in his thirties why the Lions were still on their bench his reply was "they're still young." He sees them sitting there for another ten years.

TABLE 1

THE LIONS AND THEIR ACTIVITIES 1971-77

	<u>1971-2</u>	<u>1973-4</u>	<u>1975-6</u>	<u>1977</u>
Number of Central gang members ¹	28	24	21	21
Married ²	1	2	5	1
New fathers	2	3	6	2
Working ³	5	6	9	11
School	11	7	1	3
Army	0	1	2	1
Jail ⁴	4	6	4	3
Dropout-illegal orientation	0	1	2	0
Dropout-legal orientation	0	1	1	0
Dropout-whereabouts unknown	0	2	0	0
Median Age	17	19.7 (1973)	21.5 (1975)	23.5

¹These are the members who can be counted on to defend the reputation of the group. Sometimes peripheral members would "hang out" with the group for short periods of time.

²The number in each year indicates the number of newly married members.

³Included in the number of members working in school are those who worked or attended school for a fairly significant proportion of the two years. Those not included in either category were spending most of their time just hanging around.

⁴All are juveniles or were in juvenile facilities with the exception of the same three who have been incarcerated since 1974 on charges of murder and robbery.

FOOTNOTES

¹It is necessary to distinguish between what is meant by a gang and a club or group of which there are many among adults in lower and working-class areas. A club or a group is not involved in illegal activities as a collectivity, particularly in defense of their name; however, individual members may be involved in criminal activities. A gang engages in some illegal activities as a collectivity and usually its members are sensitive to aspersions cast on the honor of the group to which they must respond in the name of the gang.

²Bounded by train tracks and factories, the 32nd Street community is only a short distance from the downtown area, yet there is no direct public transportation to the center city. The population, according to the 1970 census was 44,500 though local residents estimate that it is closer to 70,000 of which 55 percent were Spanish speaking. A local survey estimated that the Spanish speaking population was closer to 70 percent. Most are Chicanos, i.e. of Mexican heritage. Ranked on socio-economic criteria, its status is one of the lowest in the city; however, a different image emerges when traditional SES indicators are examined separately. The median family income in 1970 was \$8,560, better than 18 percent of the other communities in the city, and 18 percent of the communities have a higher percentage of families receiving welfare benefits. However, the percentage of high school graduates over the age of twenty-five -- 21.1 percent, is the lowest in the city. A survey conducted by a youth-serving agency estimated that 70 percent of the male youth join a gang for at least a short period in their lives.

³Similar types of male peer groups are found in many working class communities. Gans (1962) found that most peer groups were sex segregated and that husbands and wives spent little time together or provided much support for each other. Similar situations were found in other working class or lower-class settings (Whyte, 1955; Liebow, 1967; and Komarovsky, 1967). However, even Gans' (1962) "action-seekers" whose lifestyle, in part, resembles the Lions-impulsive and seeking thrills, challenge and vengeance -- rarely participated in illegal activities as a group. Gans' "action-seekers" like the Lions, spend little time at home, hang on street corners or in bars and do not work regularly. Here the similarities end.

⁴An account is "a linguistic device employed whenever an action is subjected to evaluative inquiry" (Lyman and Scott, 1963:46) which is standardized within the local culture and used to bridge the gap between action and expectation.

⁵I would like to thank Gary Schwartz for many of the above ideas on expressive values.

⁶We will not go into detail in this paper on this aspect of honor, except to say that a man cannot, under this code of honor, be dependent on his family for support. However, in recent years, like in modern Greece (Safilias-Rothchild, 1968) there have been few occasions when violence has been the reaction to the loss of sexual purity of women, though there have been a few. One young man went to jail for his father for the murder of his sister's seducer. Though there are increasing numbers of married women going to work, it is still because the men let them and only in order to earn supplemental income for luxuries.

⁷Commitment has been used in the sociological and psychological literature as both an independent and dependent variable and its usage is frequently tautological -- if one "makes a commitment" then one will follow a consistent course of action, which indicates that one is committed; however, these explanations fail to specify the "act of commitment," Becker (1970) employs the notion of "side bets." The "side bet" must be independent of the consistent pattern of activity, though it may not be deliberate on the actor's part. It may only be discovered when he tries to get out of it. "By his own actions prior to the final bargaining session he has staked something of value to him, something originally unrelated to his present line of action, on being consistent in his present behavior" (Becker, 1970:266).

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