

# WHY JOIN A "GANG"?

An Adolescent Perspective and  
Implications for Recreation Services

---

prepared by

Gary W. Manson

September, 1990

---

## SPECIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The original version of this paper, entitled, *Why Join A "Gang" - An Adolescent Perspective*, examined the psychological processes that help to explain why young people might join gangs. After the paper was completed and with the encouragement of others, I decided to expand the scope of it and include possible implications for the field in which I work - recreation. I would like to especially thank the following individuals for their encouragement, time, and feedback in assisting me with this project:

**Gordon Cole, M.A. of Simon Fraser University**

**Robert Chong, Probation Officer with the Ministry of Solicitor General (British Columbia)**

**Doug Soo, M.Ed., Executive Director of Britannia Community Services, Vancouver**

**Kenn Whiteman, M.A., Leisure Programs Division Coordinator, City of Port Alberni**

## CONTENTS

1. Introduction 1
2. History 3
3. Gang Defined 6
4. Why Do Teenagers Join Gangs? 9
5. Selected Studies and Articles 11
6. Implications For Recreation Services 18
7. Conclusion and Recommendations 25
8. References 30
9. Recent Newspaper Articles

## INTRODUCTION

As a person who works with youth and who has done so for many years in a variety of settings, the author has become, like so many others in similar positions, increasingly concerned with the issue of "youth gangs" and the effects that this phenomenon of youth activity is having on the communities in which we live and work. The author works in the District of North Vancouver which is located in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia, and is responsible for the delivery of recreation programs for teenagers in the Lynn Valley area of this municipality. The main impetus for forming this position was to address the concern of local residents and merchants that a great number of teenagers in their particular community were responsible for creating problems and anxiety. The objective of this position was to try to re-focus these teenagers towards better community involvement; "better community involvement" defined as non-delinquent behavior and where possible, a positive contribution to the well-being of the community.

That was several years ago, and at that time the writer would not have considered the activities of those teens to be "gang-type" activities. Today, in this same community, there are teens who are known to be affiliated with quasi-type or *wannabe* gangs. These teenagers "hang around" in groups that often get involved with criminal activity; some of these groups have reputations as being aggressive and violent. This increase in unconstructive leisure activity ultimately leads community service providers and leaders into more and more reactive-type programming instead of guiding with preventative measures. Reactive-type programming, commonly known as

*putting out fires*, is a necessary response for some agencies such as police forces, but what response, if any, should a recreation agency have?

This report is directed towards those who have an interest and concern about adolescent youth gangs and their effects on the community. There are two primary focuses in this report - (1) why might a young person join a gang?, and (2) what are the implications for recreation services?

The beginning of this paper will attempt to better define "gangs" so that the reader has a clearer frame of reference for the purposes of this report. In this report some perspectives will be given to the question, *Why Join A "Gang"?* from a teenage male's point of view. Specific information will not be given with regard to teenage female involvement in gangs because of limited space and the little research available pertaining to girls and gangs.

Several areas will be looked at in the following report including:

- a) a brief history of youth gangs and the situation at present;
- b) defining gangs;
- c) why do teenagers join "gangs"?
- d) by-products of youth gang activity; and
- e) implications for recreation services.

It will be argued in this report, that adolescents are often attracted to such groups for core reasons considered to be natural in terms of their maturation and development. It will also be argued that recreation agencies have a responsibility to provide services to children and youth that are proactive and preventative in nature in reference to delinquent and anti-social behaviors.

## I. HISTORY

Whether or not the word "gang" conjures up the pleasant thought of an entertaining story like *Oliver Twist* or the less pleasant thought of a modern day youth gang perpetrating a crime, the concept of gang has been around for a long time and has existed within a negative context. In recent decades, the electronic media has alerted us to the dangers of gangs and the "Dr. Jekyl/Mr. Hyde" effect these groups can have on our young people. The movie *The Wild One*, filmed in 1951 starring Marlon Brando, was the first film portraying adolescent youth gangs and when shown, sent shivers down the spines of many members of the audience. This film in fact contained a warning in the beginning of its presentation: "This is a shocking story. It could never take place in most American towns - but it did in this one. It is a public challenge not to let it happen again." In addition to the warning, the movie was banned from being shown in many cities. According to Dr. Martin Labba, an expert in communications and the media, the movies - *The Wild One*, *Rebel Without A Cause* (1955 staring James Dean), and *Black Board Jungle* (1955 - first movie with rock and roll featuring the music of Bill Haley and The Comets) - had great economic and cultural impact on American society in terms of a newly emerging adolescent culture.<sup>1</sup>

Youth gangs go back as far as the Middle Ages in Europe.<sup>2</sup> In North America, youth gangs are known to have formed in some American urban centres where gang existence became common for some teenagers.<sup>3</sup> Frederic M. Thrasher began studying youth gangs in Chicago in 1919 and published his findings in what is now recognized as a classic study - *The Gang*. Although adolescence as an identifiable stage of human development was not really an entrenched concept until the twentieth century, it seems that adolescent gangs were around for some time before their study in the

1920s. An excerpt taken from the diary of a man by the name of Philip Hone who was Mayor of New York City in the early nineteenth century read:

*One of the evidences of the degeneracy of our morals and of the inefficiency of our police is to be seen in the frequent instances of murder by stabbing. The city is infested by gangs of hardened wretches, born in the haunts of infamy, brought up in taverns, educated at the polls of elections, and following the fire engines as a profession. These fellows (generally youths between the ages of twelve and twenty-four) patrol the streets making night hideous and insulting all who are not strong enough to defend themselves; their haunts all the night long are the grog-shops in the Bowery, Corlear's Hook, Canal Street and some even in Broadway, where drunken frolics are succeeded by brawls, and on the slightest provocation knives are brought out, dreadful wounds inflicted, and sometimes horrid murder committed. The watchmen and police officers are intimidated by the frequency of these riots, the strength of the offenders and the disposition which exists on the part of those who ought to know better to screen the culprits from punishment.*

Diary of Philip Hone, 1828-51 (N.Y.: 1936)<sup>4</sup>

In Thrasher's study, which encompassed 1,313 gangs in Chicago, he came to the conclusion that gang activity commonly occurred due to the unorganized state of the community and the lack of constructive activity therein.<sup>5</sup> Thrasher also concluded that the young people in those environments took the initiative to create order where there was none before and that the resulting gang behavior was not a result of any psychological abnormality.<sup>6</sup>

Since the 1920s, there have been many studies done on youth gangs which utilize several theories on delinquency, including: Social Disorganization, Strain Theory, So-

cial Control, and Cultural or Value Conflict. Thrasher's study cited above is an example of Social Disorganization Theory which is based on the uncertainty that occurs in a developing and changing urban environment. Strain Theory refers to a type of incongruity between the idealism and recognition of achieving success and the realistic possibility that doing so is limited. An example of this would be a group of youth from a limited opportunity neighbourhood or community who elect to be involved with antisocial or criminal behavior. They do this because the expectations demanded of them are too high with regard to securing a good job and contributing to the community. Social Control Theory refers to the individual and his or her bonds to other people, institutions, or goals and values. In one study, for example, it was found that the weaker the bond between parent and child, the greater the chance that the child would be involved with delinquent behavior.<sup>7</sup> Finally, Cultural Conflict Theory states that delinquency and criminal behavior are approved, required or expected behaviors within certain social contexts. Some earlier research would speak about the conditions of the lower class and how such behavior might be viewed as acceptable within that class structure.<sup>8</sup>

The theories listed above are some of the ways in which researchers have tried to explain gang activity and behavior in the last several decades. To date however, questions remain about this topic such as: How and why do youth get involved with gangs? How do we combat gangs? What are the trends? Aside from the more obvious effects of gang-type activity such as increased costs in protective and maintenance services, there is perhaps an even worse toll taking place in the form of an eroding community psyche due to fear of personal harm or loss. Rarely if ever, does a month go by without people of the Lower Mainland (British Columbia) hearing about another youth gang related incident. Clearly, complete answers and solutions to this problem have not been found to the satisfaction of society.

## II. GANG DEFINED

The word "gang" can be interpreted in several different ways depending on the way it is described and the context it is presented. For example, to one person "gang" could be interpreted as a group of children playing baseball at the park while for another person, it may mean Bonnie and Clyde-type characters. For the purposes of this report, "gang" will be first described in terms of types of gangs<sup>9</sup> followed by a more formal definition of "gang". Examples of local gangs are taken from the Lower Mainland area of British Columbia where the author currently resides.

The first type of gang, which is profit and power-oriented, can best be described as *Organized Crime* which can be further broken down into two subgroups - *International* and *Local*. Examples of International Organized Criminal Groups are the Italian Mafia or the Japanese Yakuza who are involved in very sophisticated international criminal activity and who are led by adult criminals. Examples of Local Organized Criminal Groups include lower ranking members of the Red Eagles or Viet Ching who are also sophisticated in their ways but are limited to smaller geographic areas. Organized groups are also known to be led by adults.

The second type of gang can be described as *Street Gang*. These groups operate primarily at the street level and have a mix of youth and adults within its structure. As well, it is recognized as being aggressive in a more outward fashion in that more violence is visible to the public eye. The gangs at this level are also profit-oriented but will show greater force to retain dominance. Specific examples of these gangs in

the Lower Mainland include the Los Diablos, Mara Latinas, and the Gum Wah (a subgroup of the Red Eagles).

*Youth Gangs* are the third type of gang and are identified as such by professionals who work in the youth justice system, primarily for case management purposes. In Canada, the Young Offenders Act recognizes that children under the age of twelve do not know the difference between right and wrong, but that the person over the age of seventeen does. Primarily for the purposes of the Young Offenders Act then, youth who are involved with gangs and are ages twelve through seventeen fit into this category.

The fourth type are *Prison Gangs*. Although prison gangs are mostly associated with adult institutions they do exist in a much less formalized manner in some juvenile facilities. The main purpose of the prison gang is to seek control of the prison population or some portion thereof and where possible, to do the same with the prison administration.

The last type of gang defined for the purposes of this report are the *Wannabes* or "want-to-be" gang members. The Wannabes can be described as copycat-type groups where young people gather in small collectives in hopes of being identified with the same status as the more powerful and organized gangs. These gangs, comprised of mostly young offenders, can be equally dangerous and high-profiled because of their random actions and organized, attention-getting activities. Local examples of these types of gangs include the Black Chin, the N.V.L., and Mafia Lotus.

The MacMillan Contemporary Dictionary defines the word "gang" as "*n. 1. group of people organized or associated together for illegal or disreputable purposes.*" An

even more accurate definition in reference to youth gangs is "...any cohesive group of adolescents who have a controlling set of norms and a social system specific to that group. The delinquent gang is distinguished from other juvenile groups on the basis of the delinquent product of gang interaction."<sup>10</sup> There are some sources that also distinguish gangs by ethnic and racial differences,<sup>11</sup> however it seems that more and more, these types of definitions are inadequate to describe a phenomenon that encompasses greater mixed groups.

As described in the section on types of gangs, there are several different types and it is not possible to cover all of these in this report. Only the question of why adolescents join gangs will be covered in this paper and this will be done within the context of local gangs.

### III. WHY DO TEENAGERS JOIN GANGS?

In 1981 it was estimated that there were approximately 30,000 street gang members in the Los Angeles area; as a result of these gangs, almost one person per day was being killed.<sup>12</sup> Today, gang membership in Los Angeles is estimated at 70,000 involving 600 different gangs.<sup>13</sup> In the Vancouver area, it is estimated that there are approximately 200 hard core gang members and approximately 1000 associate members led by the hard cores.<sup>14</sup> Above the hard core group in the hierarchical structure are an undetermined number of key leaders referred to as "Dai Lo" or Big Brothers". It is also estimated that there are at least several hundred non-Asian gang members in the Vancouver area and that this number is increasing.<sup>15</sup> If gangs have been around for so long, then why has there been so much attention given to them in the past few years as compared to years gone by? There is plenty of attention given to youth gangs today because of the amount of violence and involvement in drugs that occurs today in comparison to previous decades.<sup>16</sup> This involvement continues to rise at an alarming rate and has become a major concern. Obviously these gangs have provided many adolescents with an alternative to other more desirable activities that would contribute to the well-being of the community. Why would a young person choose to join a gang?

There have been several factors bandied about as to why adolescents join youth gangs including: cultural, economic, media, and peer influences. However, what are the psychological factors that entice these individuals to groups such as the Los Diablos or N.V.L.? There are very few studies available on this subject, but for those adults who can recall their teenage years and some of the feelings experienced during that time, they may be able to list many factors that attracted them to hang around in groups: affiliation, power, security, recognition or status, rebellion, separation and in-

dependence from family, attraction to significant others for the purpose of mentoring or role modelling, etc. This list, if read in a different context, might sound very much like the reasons why a young person might join the Boys Scouts or Girl Guides.

Before the twentieth century, the family was the agent of change for the child entering adulthood and thus was responsible for teaching adult skills to the son or daughter. Today in our Western culture, that is no longer the case. The child is now trained and educated within state institutions and, as a result, the child is more or less separated from adult society and forced to develop within his or her own culture. This separation has created a situation where adolescents feel more comfortable outside the home and therefore seek social attachments with other youth in the same predicament. This can lead to adolescents in search of recognition, support, and reward from those they most identify with - those who may have goals that are not acceptable to society as a whole.<sup>17</sup>

Adolescents as a group are inexperienced in many matters pertaining to societal values because they are still developing and maturing. In a study done by Alan Waterman, it was discovered that approximately seventy percent of high school students are in the Identity Diffusion and Foreclosure phases of adolescent identity formation,<sup>18</sup> which means that the majority of adolescents are either in a "suspended" or a "conformist-type" state. This coupled with Lawrence Kohlberg's observations that the same group is either in stage two or three of Moral Growth, where one is more concerned with self-interest as well as generally depending on another's views and seeking approval from the peer group,<sup>19</sup> means that the adolescent is generally ill-equipped and ill-prepared to provide leadership to peers. But is this the alternative that society has given to adolescents since there is much less interaction with adults compared to past centuries?

## IV. SELECTED STUDIES AND ARTICLES

One study that observed youth gangs in a high-crime neighborhood of Chicago, concluded that youth in this particular area who were involved with gang activity were above all else, defending their "honor".<sup>20</sup> The researcher found that the concept of honor was a deeply ingrained value within the whole of the community and that parents basically ignored the activities of their sons unless violence occurred directly against other family members or was brought into the home. The parents, and in turn the community, were tolerant of gang activity because 1) there exists an extensive value system of personal honor within the Mediterranean and Latin societies (the community studied was made up of people from these cultures); 2) the gangs were skillful in carrying out their activities within the framework of honor; 3) generally, parents accepted and approved of the notion of violence to uphold honor; 4) there existed the belief that sons will eventually grow out of the gang and that in the meantime, "my son is a good boy"; and 5) parents were caught in a dilemma of allowing the son independence outside the home to develop into a man while at the same time condemning continuous fighting and run-ins with the law. The parent would not look to the police for help because to do so would question the honor of the son. The parent generally felt that there was little he or she could do because the pull of the streets was too strong.

In another study that looked at gangs in a Southern California beach community, it was found that the gang members studied were upper-middle-class residents, frequently brought up in a broken home environment.<sup>21</sup> The gang member most often felt a lack of love and concern on behalf of the parent or parents although his physical

needs were taken care of. He had low self-esteem, poor sex-identity and was introduced to illegal substances at a young age. He found companionship mostly with others in similar circumstances and thus received peer reinforcement towards the negative attitudes he held, particularly against parents and society. Securing and maintaining employment was difficult and attending to education was not stimulating. He lived primarily for the moment through the use of drugs and sex and had no foundations of religious beliefs. The main reason for the cohesiveness of the gang studied seemed to be the pursuit of pleasure - surfing, parties, drugs and sex. During the same study, the researcher found that non-gang members came from stable home environments and appeared to have "normal" relationships with parents and the opposite sex.

In a special edition of Maclean's Magazine (May 1989), much attention was focussed on the phenomenon of youth gangs.<sup>22</sup> Journalists collected information from several areas in North America and Russia and ended up writing four separate articles. In the first article entitled *Gang Terror*, the authors reiterated what some psychologists and other experts have speculated - that parental neglect and economic conditions are the primary factors contributing to gang behavior. The article states that youth gang-like behavior is worldwide and growing and that in the opinion of some, media attention and "Hollywood Hype" are only further influencing gang violence. According to Martin Labba, research is ongoing into this allegation but research to date is inconclusive. It is also pointed out that some psychologists believe that there are a range of other issues that have also contributed to the rise in gang activity - "from society's failure to cushion immigrant children from cultural shock to the collapse of traditional family values among middle-class Canadians."<sup>23</sup> For many new young Canadians from Asia who have trouble adapting into Canadian culture, their situation is often complicated by a disruptive history.

In the second article entitled "*Violence Is Nice. Honestly*", members of gangs state that they are motivated by violence and that younger members often follow in the older members' footsteps because they admire and want to be like the older members. Some youth lack ambition for a "typical-type" career because of the earnings made in drug trafficking on the streets, while for some others, they have enjoyed setting-up their own visible minority group.

The final two articles, *A Study in Fear* and *Gang Warfare, Soviet-Style*, talk about an incident where a youth fleeing the wars in Central America came to Canada and was shortly thereafter stabbed in a gang-related incident. In the latter article, Soviet authorities describe two incidents, one in which a gang in the city of Kazan follow their motto of "Let us turn Kazan into a city without virgins", and the other incident where an ultraconservative gang was caught near Moscow boiling several human heads. Allegedly, many Soviet teenagers have complaints similar to American teens growing up in inner U.S. cities - that it is becoming increasingly difficult to obtain consumer items and so opt for criminal behavior to obtain such goods.

In *When You're A Crip (or a Blood)*, an article published in Harper's Magazine in March 1989, an interesting dialogue is transcribed that includes a conversation with members of the Los Angeles Crips and Bloods youth gangs. In reference to joining a gang and staying in one, the members had the following to say:

*"What I think is formulating here is that human nature wants to be accepted. A human being gives less of a damn what he is accepted into. At that age - eleven to seventeen - all kids want to belong. They are un-people."*

"...some of us are not so highly motivated to be educated. So we have to get ours from the blood, the sweat, and the tears of the street. And if a homeboy rises up...I want to come with him, but when he reaches the top of the barrel, I grab him by the pant leg and I [pull him back down]."

"I got that manly pride that won't let me break down and say, Man, I'm scared! Take me with you - I want to go with you! ...That's how strong peer pressure is!"

"...we're the extended family."

"There was a male figure in the house. But I never accepted him as my father. My mother can only teach me so much 'bout being a man-child in the promised land. If, after that, there is nothing for me to take pride in, then I enter into manhood asshole backwards, and I stand there, a warrior strong and proud. But there is no outlet for that energy, for me or my brothers, so we turn on each other."

"...what goes up on the silver screen comes down into the streets..."

"It's the same everywhere. A sorority, a fraternity, the Girls Scouts, camping club, hiking club, L.A.P.D., the Los Angeles Raiders, are all the same. Everything that you find in those groups and institutions you find in a gang."

"you got the American dream over there, and you reaching for it. But you can't get it. And you got dope right here, real close. You can grab it easy. Dealing with the closer one, you might possibly make enough money to grab the other one. Then you throw away the dope."

The concept of honor was also referred to in this latter article just as it was as the main point in Horowitz's study:

*"The highest honor you can give for your set is death. When you die, when you go out in a blaze of glory, you are respected. When you kill for your set, you earn your stripes - you put work in."*

In another study conducted by James Vigil, joining a gang is looked at in terms of self-identification.<sup>24</sup> This study indicates that the gang is in competition with all other community institutions and that its recognition is further enhanced by the fact that early adolescence is especially sensitive to peer pressure.<sup>25</sup>

*"Through immersion in gang routines and affairs, they accomplish the personal task of age and sex role clarification, contribute to the role definitions of others in the group, and support such salient gang practices as defending their territory. Thus personal needs merge with group needs."<sup>26</sup>*

In terms of a psychological process, the group becomes entwined with the individual's ego ideal. Again, this study also identifies racial and cultural discrimination along with poverty and family and school guidance as key factors in whether or not someone gets involved with a gang and to what degree they may become involved.

The study goes on to define the terms of reference, including the components of identity for self: *ideal self* (what a person would like to be); *feared self* (what a person would not want to be); *claimed self* (what a person would like others to think they are); and *real self* (what a person believes he is).

The individuals studied came primarily from broken or dysfunctional homes where unhealthy situations existed early in the young person's life and continued on an ongoing basis. The gang member often seeks to gain self-identity through the camaraderie of peers and street role models because of the lack of direction provided in such realms as family, school, and recreation or sport. This lack of direction does not allow the developing adolescent to achieve a balance between the different aspects of identity and therefore is a prime target for recruitment into the gang environment. The gang thus becomes the vehicle for the adolescent to achieve his sense of identity as well as meet other psychological needs such as protection, aggression, affection, etc.

Once in the gang, the young person experiences fear but is able to combat this feeling by exhibiting "toughness". Toughness as a behavior becomes an important focal point for the gang member in his development of self. It is a characteristic behavior that not only allows the person a coping mechanism, but it also builds the ego which in turn enhances the perception of being successful. A dangerous extension to this ego-builder is the gang's use of weapons. All of this combined with the pressures of "proving" oneself, can lead to dire consequences as is often reported in the media.

From the perspective of a young person not yet in a gang (has a *real* self identity) but who is somehow attracted to it, the gang milieu may be viewed as a good vehicle to develop an *ideal* identity or to get as close to it as possible. For those young males who have been female-raised, they often best relate to the *feared* self identity and thus feel weak and somewhat inadequate especially when the model of ideal self is all around (the gang). A brief case study demonstrates this point well:<sup>27</sup>

*"I remember my mom used to comb my hair. It ain't really nothing special.  
I always wish I could go back to those days when my Mom would wake me*

*up in the morning. She would play some Spanish music on radio KALI and she would get dressed and cook breakfast, comb our hair. I remember she used to comb it to the sides. So one day I took the comb from her and started combing it back. That's when I started thinking I was all chingon (tough guy, in control)".*

Vigil's study concludes by reiterating that the community he studied, in its whole and in its parts, failed to provide the children with the directions and healthy environment required in such a critical phase of adolescent development (psychosocial moratorium). With the traditional support systems in disarray, the adolescent turns to a more organized system that will provide him with a meaningful self identity - the gang. The gang provides recognition, affiliation, protection, emotional bonding, alleviation of fears, and a group ego which to identify by. Vigil describes the behavior by individual gang members as "hyper-masculine". The gang has become an entrenched institution in many communities and this therefore makes it much easier for young adolescents to identify with it much like some children in other communities might identify with the school.

## V. IMPLICATIONS FOR RECREATION SERVICES

*A contributing factor to a dependence on street peers for social support is the lack of other community outlets for recreation and social events.<sup>28</sup>*

Recreation practitioners argue that recreation is an essential component in one's lifestyle and that worthwhile leisure experiences can contribute to both an individual's and community's well-being. This contribution of well-being extends to all sectors of the population regardless of age, sex, socioeconomic background, etc., and therefore encompasses adolescents. How then, do recreation and related services approach the concern of youth gangs? Several studies have shown that detached worker and recreation programs are not successful in dealing with the concerns of youth gangs, and that in fact, such services can contribute to the cause of the gang.

Some gangs either got their start or maintained themselves by way of organized social, educational, or recreation programs.<sup>29</sup> In Thrasher's time, recreation programs were viewed as an essential ingredient in the solution of dealing with gangs, however recent research has shown otherwise. It is not that gangs do not participate in organized leisure activities - they do. An incident occurred in New York in 1989 where a gang of teenage boys nearly beat a female jogger to death in Central Park. Upon arrest, the boys were "rapping" and joking. When asked why they beat the girl with a lead pipe, they replied, "it was fun."<sup>30</sup> Another practice common amongst some gangs that can be considered fun by those in the gang, is extortion.<sup>31</sup> A simple example to illustrate this activity is when a member approaches another stating that he wants that person to shoplift an item from a store for him, say a jacket. If the one approached

fails to carry through with the instructions given, he is warned that he or someone close to him may face dire consequences, for instance, get beat-up. In this situation, it is not the end (jacket) that matters as much as the means (the act of intimidation and extortion) that provides the sense of fun and excitement. Vigil has found that this sense of fun as described by gang members not only allows them to vent aggression and pursue a sense of adventure, but it also provides emotional support through group camaraderie.<sup>32</sup>

Detached youth worker programs are often the tactic or strategy taken by communities to deal with youth gang and even general youth concerns. One study identified the basic proposition that underlies detached work programs: "Because gang members do not ordinarily respond well to standard agency programs inside the agency walls, it is necessary to take the programs to the gangs."<sup>33</sup> The study goes on to say that these types of youths are normally targeted because:

1. These individuals do not normally use existing youth facilities, or they may be banned from entering these facilities in the first place;
2. These individuals create their own "mess" and therefore end up both socially and economically isolated and alienated due to their own behaviors (the worker attempts to break this cycle); and
3. By committing various offences in the community, the gang member costs the community money and anxiety (the worker attempts to lessen the impact).

The five primary goals of detached programs identified in the study are:

1. control (usually of fights)
2. treatment of individual problems
3. providing access to opportunities
4. value change, and
5. prevention of delinquency

The difficulty with such goals is trying to identify what the priority is. For instance, is it prevention of delinquency or is it treatment of individual problems? If all are priorities, it is unlikely that such a project would be successful due to the skill and resources required. In order for these types of programs to be more successful, goals must be clearly defined and clearly understood, especially by frontline workers.

One program that was studied and found to be somewhat successful was the Ladino Hills Project.<sup>34</sup> This project's main goal was to break down the gang's cohesiveness through cessation of group programming (eg. weekly "club" meetings, sport and recreation activities, and tutorial projects) with the hypothesis that this would directly affect delinquency rates. The hypothesis turned out to be half correct. Although individual member rates of delinquency did not change, the overall rates of delinquency for the group as a whole were lowered due to the fewer number of members active in the gang. In addition, entry of new members into this gang ceased completely.

It is agreed by most theorists familiar with gangs that an increase in gang cohesiveness will likely lead to an increase in gang delinquency.<sup>35</sup> This increase in cohesiveness, caused for example by organized recreation, is commonly referred to as

the *paradox of programming*. The situation becomes even more salient for gangs that are more entrenched in the community.

*There can be no escaping the conclusion that detached work programs, as constituted in the recent past, are not effective in the reduction of gangs or the "violent" activities associated with gangs. They may inadvertently contribute to gang violence.*<sup>36</sup>

Other factors that have been identified in various studies and articles that may hold implications for recreation and related services include:

- the lack of ties with institutions, not low self-esteem, will be of greater importance as to whether or not a young person seeks to be identified with delinquent peers<sup>37</sup>;
- community response to a gang concern can actually contribute to the gang's momentum by providing incentive for the members to mobilize and work together<sup>38</sup>;
- gangs are no longer restricted to inner city areas and lower class neighbourhoods. Today gangs are being reported in suburban and middle and upper class communities.<sup>39</sup> Some have referred to the gangs from more affluent communities as "Yuppie Gangs";
- major changes in the structure of the family and the changing role of women viz., work and career, have combined to place new and increasing demands on services for children and youth while at the same time, this latter population has been losing its political leverage<sup>40</sup>;

- based on their cultural background, some new immigrants, particularly young immigrants, may be reluctant or unable to totally assimilate into North American society.<sup>41</sup> In an Ontario study, it was found that most programs and facilities were not geared towards the unique leisure interests of ethnic groups.<sup>42</sup>

The writer has reviewed many studies relating to gangs and found little with regard to the role of recreation, perhaps because the majority of literature when it did look at programs, tended to do so from a reactive, or after the fact point of view. The intention here is to look at services from a preventative mode, or as the old maxim goes, "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure". It is not intended however, to look at any specific program or project in detail, only to suggest areas that may be important to look at when setting one up.

*...factors such as ineffective religion, inadequate schooling, and unguided recreation, is a purely negative factor so far as the gang is concerned, merely creating an opportunity for ganging or any other kind of substitute activity.<sup>43</sup>*

Recreation can play a key role especially in preventative youth services, and is most successful as one component in a multiplicity and integration of approaches including: education, vocational counselling, health, and family issues; a well thought out social plan whose parts are co-ordinated and integrated effectively is important. Some cities in California as an example have experienced success in introducing programs of prevention utilizing recreation as a key component.<sup>44</sup> Several projects discussed in this same article seemed to have had common areas that contributed to the success of each, including: community commitment, agency cooperation and communication, and programs offered to targeted youth at little or no cost.

*"For a reliable accounting of their needs, the [parks and recreation] planner must invite teenagers to speak for themselves."*<sup>45</sup>

Ideally, the youth themselves should be involved with the decision-making process on any matter that will affect them. This process could include legal binding public information and consultation duty for policy makers as suggested by Dr. W. Fache of the University of Gent in Belgium. Dr. Fache points out in his article, *Towards A Youth Policy*<sup>46</sup>, that local government should be legally obligated to involve any party in a decision for which a particular decision might or will affect that party. This type of political set-up will also help to compensate those with the least amount of political strength as well as fully recognize that "all" are equal in a democratic society. Similar forms of representation at the Provincial and Federal levels of government have also been recommended in British Columbia.<sup>47</sup> These recommendations imply that young people would have to develop skills in critical and constructive thinking.

As has already been pointed out, when a gang or a group of youth become more fully entrenched in the community by developing its own culture and expectations of conduct, it becomes very difficult, if not impossible, to reverse this situation. This again demonstrates the importance of providing meaningful experiences, including recreation, in a preventative manner and on an ongoing and consistent basis. Two recommendations that came out of an Ontario study<sup>48</sup> in reference to the leisure delivery system for youth, were:

- a) Increase the amount of *collaboration* and direct link-ups among agencies and groups that are providing recreational and other services for youth; and
- b) Youth serving agencies, especially those with a strong recreation mandate must become more *proactive*.

The same study goes on to say that too often, agencies wait for the youth themselves to come forward and indicate what their needs are or how they are not being provided for. Agencies and other groups cannot expect this to happen due to the relatively short period of adolescence and the fragmentation of this group.

It is not surprising to most to see teenagers "hanging around" when they have lots of discretionary time available. In other words, there are few alternative activities available that are constructive and worthwhile and at the same time, attractive enough to draw active participants. For some young people, their sense of exploration and adventure can lead them into less-desirable activities so that they will have something to do where there was nothing to do previously. Compounding this problem can be the parent's sense of confusion about how he or she (sometimes they) should raise children in today's rapidly changing society - a society much different from the time the parent was a teenager. More common today also is the working single parent or double-income family. After putting in a day at work, parents may not have the energy to put effort into effective parenting.

Parents along with other citizens, including young people, are calling out for help to deal with an apparent increase in youth crime, school drop-out rates, health-related issues, unemployment and under-employment, family breakdowns, and boredom, to name a few. Recreation agencies are certainly in a good position to be identified as preventative-type agencies, and with some creativity, flexibility, and adequate resources, would be in a better position to help provide young people, their families, and ultimately the community, with a happier and more positive existence.

## VI. CONCLUSION

*Each Canadian community must assume control of its own affairs and put its imagination to work so that we may improve the present and future lives of our young people.<sup>49</sup>*

Many aspects of gangs have been touched on in this report including: a historical perspective, definitions, gang member testimonials; a look at several studies and articles that discussed sociological and psychological etiology with regard to gangs and gang membership, and implications for recreation services. As mentioned in the beginning of this paper, there was very little to reference in terms of why adolescents join gangs. Most of the research available looks at the criminal aspects of gang delinquency and contributing factors such as socioeconomic conditions.

Throughout the studies and articles reviewed, there were reoccurring elements or themes as to why children or teens join gangs. The common reasons for joining a gang are: companionship, protection, excitement, status and recognition (ego builder), and lack of motivation to pursue other activities that might be deemed socially acceptable. Other reasons for joining a gang include cultural barriers or poor assimilation into a new community, looking up to an older friend or relative who is associated with a gang (heroism), and community gang precedent - where a gang has been in existence in a particular neighborhood for several or more decades. All of these elements must be put within a larger context in order that the psychological reasons for joining a gang are properly understood. The larger context includes common elements or themes such as: poor direction and support from traditional institutions such as the family, school and church; peer influences; adolescent psychological moratorium or

self identity formation; poor economic standing and an inability to attain many consumer goods in a consumer-oriented society; and the alleged effect of certain media campaigns and influences on the "young mind". "Gang features arise in a web of ecological, socioeconomic, cultural, and psychological factors".<sup>50</sup>

Most, if not all, would probably agree that non-violent gang activity such as partying and socializing are normal. Not everyone however, would see violent gang activity as normal, but Robert B. Edgerton might. "Edgerton reasoned that such personal and group activities must be perceived not as 'freaks in a side show' but as 'principle performers in the everyday dramas of life.'"<sup>51</sup> James Vigil sums up the situation of youth gangs nicely by explaining that the ego, group, and role psychologies combine into a sociopsychological network.<sup>52</sup> He goes on to say that "the gang has taken on the responsibility of doing what the family, school, and other social agencies have failed to do - provide mechanisms for age and sex development, establish norms of behavior, and define and structure outlets for friendship, human support, and the like."

Recreation, if planned and organized properly, can be an important aspect of a young person's life. Recreation - it can be the answer to Thrasher's questions and concerns of so many decades ago and which continue to haunt us today: *How to break the humdrum of routine existence while competing with less-desirable activities that fuel the young person's craving for challenge and excitement?* Recreation agencies should not supplant family responsibilities, but complement them by providing staff and volunteer role models who are trained and knowledgeable about youth and youth-related issues. Recognizing that recreation is only one aspect of a young person's life, it is important that different fields of responsibility for youth communicate, co-ordinate, cooperate, and have a sense of commitment. Provincial governments

should consider the worthiness of having a provincial body or ministry responsible to co-ordinate provincial resources for youth (eg. health, education, housing, employment, etc.) and that could in turn assist local governments and agencies that are struggling with what to do or what they should do for youth in their respective communities.

*"The challenge for parks and recreation planners is to continue to monitor the needs of teenagers and successfully integrate them with the needs of all other user groups in the development of the parks and recreation system."*<sup>53</sup>

In researching for this report, over twenty studies and articles were reviewed. As well, several interviews were also conducted. Combined with over ten years of work experience in youth services, the author has arrived at several conclusions. These conclusions, which follow in the form of recommendations, are meant to elicit creative thought and consideration. These recommendations are a challenge to those individuals and agencies who consider themselves youth advocates. The challenge is to proceed from enlightened thought to positive action, by way of providing more worthwhile opportunities for adolescents in all communities.

1. Recreation for adolescents needs to be redefined. Specific issues that should be considered include:

- i) the need to recognize that youth recreation practitioners provide more than recreation (eg. vocational guidance/counselling, family support, etc.) due to the relationships established between themselves and the adolescents they lead, as well as with parents/guardians;
- ii) the importance of a holistic approach - physical, emotional, social, vocational, spiritual, and cultural aspects should all be considered.

- iii) opportunities for both individual and group activities should be viewed as equally important;
  - iv) the price of programs should not create barriers to participation and should be viewed with respect to long term benefits;
  - v) more integrated recreation opportunities for the family need to be developed.
- 2. A Provincial Ministry of Youth should be formed and be responsible for the overall coordination of preventative and rehabilitative youth services.
- 3. There should be a coordinating body in each city and municipality to connect the various resources and agencies at the program delivery level.
- 4. There should be purposeful policies in place to actively involve youths in policy setting for those issues that will or may affect them.
- 5. Educational institutions should be encouraged to conduct ongoing research of youth-related problems and concerns to help to identify current and future issues as well as to assist in evaluating services.
- 6. There should be training and education specifically designed for individuals wanting to become leaders of youth. Such a program would need to address principles that are unique to working with youth.
- 7. Newly developed programs need to consider the integration of minority groups, immigrants, the disabled, adolescent females, and natives.

Adolescents have been forced into developing their own subculture because of the many complex changes that have occurred in the past 150 years or so - even these changes were preceded by many others which have got us to where we are today. As countries become more interdependent in terms of resources and at the same time increasingly competitive in order to ensure high standards of living, adolescence as a stage will likely continue to have to endure the pursuits of the adult world. Today in many areas across North America, the gang has become a common rite of passage to adulthood for many adolescents. To continue to endure on their own, adolescents may end up on "an island" like they did in the book, *Lord of The Flies*<sup>54</sup>, where they developed a rudimentary society complete with their own system of justice and hierarchy of social status.

## REFERENCES

1. Telephone Interview, February 8, 1990 with Dr. Martin Labba, Assistant Professor, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, B.C.
2. James Diego Vigil, *Barrio Gangs* (The Center for Mexican American Studies, The University of Texas at Austin, 1988), p. xi (Foreword)
3. Mary G. Harris, *Cholas - Latino Girls and Gangs* (New York, N.Y.: AMS Press, 1988), p. 73
4. Gus Tyler, *Organized Crime in America* (University of Michigan, 1962), p. 416
5. Frederic M. Thrasher, *The Gang* (The University of Chicago, 1927), - Abridged Edition, 1963, p. 33
6. *ibid.*, p. 34
7. Harris, *op. cit.*, p. 25
8. Ruth Horowitz, "Community Tolerance of Gang Violence", *Social Problems*, Vol. 34, No. 5 (December 1987), p. 443
9. Interview with Rob Chong, Probation Officer, Province of British Columbia, February 2, 1990
10. Harris, *op. cit.*, p. 9
11. Delbert Thomas Joe, *The Problem of Chinese Youth Gangs in The Schools and Community in Vancouver's Strathcona-Britannia Area* (Faculty of Education, Master Thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1976), p. 10
12. Harris, *op. cit.*, p. 1
13. Anne Gregor, "Death Among The Innocent", *Maclean's Magazine* (May 22, 1989), p. 38
14. Television News Program, CKVU Television, February 8, 1990
15. *ibid.*
16. Vigil, *Barrio Gangs*, Foreword
17. Harris, *op. cit.*, p. 14
18. Norman A. Sprinthall and W. Andrew Collins, *Adolescent Psychology - A Developmental View* (New York: Random House, 1988), p. 163
19. *ibid.*, p. 192

20. Horowitz, *op. cit.*, pp. 437-450
21. Jeremiah Lowney, "The Wall Gang: A Study of Interpersonal Process and Deviance Among Twenty-Three Middle-Class Youths", *Adolescence*, Vol. XIX No. 75 (Fall 1984), pp. 527-538
22. Maclean's Magazine (May 22, 1989), pp. 36-44
23. Barry Came, "Gang Terror", *Maclean's Magazine* (May 22, 1989), p. 37
24. James Diego Vigil, "Group Processes and Street Identity: Adolescent Chicano Gang Members", *Ethos*, Vol. 16(4) (1988), pp. 421-445
25. *ibid.*, pp. 421 & 423
26. *ibid.*, pp. 421-422
27. *ibid.*, p. 430
28. Vigil, *Barrio Gangs*, p. 43
29. Lowney, *op. cit.*, p. 529; Malcolm W. Klein, *Street Gangs and Street Workers* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1971), p.50
30. Charles Krauthammer, "Crime and Responsibility", *Time Magazine* (May 8, 1989), p. 104
31. Chong, *op. cit.*
32. Vigil, "Group Processes and Street Identity: Adolescent Chicano Gang Members", p. 427
33. Klein, *op. cit.*, p. 46
34. *ibid.*, pp. 50-51
35. *ibid.*, p. 151
36. *ibid.*, p. 51
37. Harris, *op. cit.*, pp. 65-66
38. Gene Muehlbauer & Laura Dodder, *The Losers* (New York, 1983), p. 121
39. Seth Mydans, "Not Just the Inner City: Well-to-Do Join Gangs", *The New York Times* (April 10, 1990), p. A7; Came, *op. cit.*, p. 39; Lowney, *op. cit.*, p. 527
40. Harold Howe II, "The Prospect for Children in the United States", *Phi Delta Kappan* (November 1986), p. 192
41. Vigil, *Barrio Gangs*, p. 7
42. Robert Lockhart, "A Time To Refocus On Youth", *Recreation Canada*, Special Issue (1985), p. 12
43. Thrasher, *op. cit.*, p. 340

44. Pat Willis-Kistler, "Fighting Gangs", *Parks and Recreation* (November 1988), pp. 44-49
45. Jim Morgenstern, "Planning Parks With Teenagers", *Recreation Canada*, No. 4 (October 1979), p. 15
46. Dr. Willy Fache, "Towards A Youth Policy", *World Leisure and Recreation*, Vol. XXVIII No. 1 (February 1986), pp. 22-25
47. Victoria Association For Street Kids and B.C. Public Interest Research Group, *Off The Street - The Conference Report* (Victoria, B.C., 1987), p. 64
48. Lockhart, *op. cit.*, p. 13
49. Special Senate Committee on Youth, *Youth: A Plan of Action* (Ottawa, Ontario, February 1986), Introduction
50. Vigil, *Barrio Gangs*, p. 9
51. *ibid.*, p. 152
52. *ibid.*, pp. 151-168
53. Morgenstern, *op. cit.*, p. 36
54. William Gerald Golding, *Lord of The Flies* (New York: Queenswood House, 1962)

By LINDSAY KINES

## WHITE ROCK

**T**HE WHITE STRETCH limousine pulled into the lot behind McDonald's and parked alongside the red Mustangs and jacked-up Ford Broncos.

It was Friday night and the place was crowded with teens and cars.

Natalie Moser, celebrating her 15th birthday, leaned out the window of the rented chauffeur-driven car and complained, "We have a limo for another hour and we have no place to go."

Except for the bit about the limo, it's a complaint you hear often outside the McDonald's restaurant in south Surrey.

"There's nothing to do in White Rock," said Shelley Todd, 17. "Everyone meets here because it's a central place to meet."

"Everyone" means as many as 150 young people congregating in a paved parking lot located between the McDonald's and a Canadian Tire store, across the street from a Wendy's restaurant and near a convenience store, doughnut shop and shopping mall, just off 152nd Street.

It's one of the few McDonald's where management employs bouncers to keep the kids in line, says Ron Marcoux, executive vice-president of McDonald's of Canada.

On the night Natalie rolled in with her limo, three of the largest McDonald's employees you've ever seen — these guys could easily bench press hundreds of quarter pounders — made regular patrols into the parking lot to ensure the teenagers did their loitering on Canadian Tire property.

Two RCMP officers surveyed

# Hanging out

the scene, checking for drugs, open bottles of liquor and motor vehicle infractions.

It's a serious concern both for police and McDonald's.

"Mostly, it's complaints of intimidation by the numbers that hang around, the volume of noise, the garbage," said Const. Dave West, of the RCMP's Surrey detachment.

"There is some drug dealing going on there, and there's a small quantity of stolen property going through there as well; not necessarily at McDonald's, but in that particular area."

The problems also occur in other suburbs. On the North Shore, for instance, municipal governments last year appointed a youth committee to examine similar concerns.

But it's particularly apparent in south Surrey, where some of the most rapid development in the Lower Mainland has occurred.

"I think, in some ways, south Surrey has grown faster than

All dressed up and no place to go: it's a common complaint of teens who hang out on a parking lot in south Surrey. One expert calls them the 'sidewalk kids... one step from being street kids.'

the services that are needed to support it," said White Rock Mayor Gordon Hogg.

**T**HE mayor met last fall with Surrey Mayor Bob Bose, Social Credit MLA Bill Reid and Progressive Conservative MP Benno Friesen to discuss the needs of area youth.

The politicians are hoping to find a location for a youth centre and raise money to hire street workers.

In the meantime, Brian Davison, a street worker with the provincial government's Reconnect program, handles the task alone.

Davison started in the area by trying to reach the hard-core street kids, but adjusted his goals when it became apparent a far greater number of young people were at risk.

"We have what I call sidewalk kids," he said. "They're about one step from becoming street kids."

Davison said the kids go home

at night to families that cut across social and economic lines, from the wealthy upper class to single-parent welfare homes.

"They come down to McDonald's because their home life isn't that great and they don't have anything to do," said Davison.

Ehor Boyanowsky, an associate professor of criminology at Simon Fraser University, says the teenagers are seeking autonomy and independence from their parents. They turn to each other in their search for an identity and an understanding of the complex emotions each experiences with the onset of adulthood, he says.

"It's a phenomenon that's been going on for a very long time."

But if hanging out is normal, the situation gets out of hand in areas where a community grows too fast and offers no place for kids to go, said Boyanowsky.

"It's so easy to deal with the situation. But it often requires

resources that are dedicated to other goals in fast-growing communities."

Without community centres places for teens to congregate teenagers hang out for extended periods of time and experiment with increasingly exciting, and often illegal, behavior.

"It's a time of ultimate exploration," said Boyanowsky.

Davison agrees, explaining that only a core group of 10 or 15 kids deals in drugs or crime. "But they get the other ones — what I call the fringe kids — sucked into their behavior."

He holds a video night in his small White Rock office one evening a week and it now attracts from 25 to 30 kids.

**T**HE SEMIAHMOO Peninsula Youth Support Society, a non-profit organization sponsored by community organizations, has worked since last September to develop a youth centre.

Marilyn Karsgaard, who chairs the society's board, says directors have been looking at sites and asking teens for input.

But it wasn't until February, when 16-year-old Jennifer Binette of White Rock was hit by a car on 152nd Street, that the community started paying attention to the problem.

Binette, who was in a coma for three weeks and is now recovering at Sunnyhill Hospital in Vancouver, had been drinking heavily before walking out in front of the car, said her mother Marilee Doucet.

"Jennifer's accident sort of opened a lot of people's eyes, so we're using the accident to somehow good if we can," said Doucet. "It makes me sad that kids haven't got a place to go."

# Hired to guard schools

## Surrey, New West. fight gang problem

By Greg Middleton  
Staff Reporter

Two Lower Mainland school districts are using uniformed security guards to protect students from youth gangs.

"Most of our problems come from outsiders," says Dave McLeod, principal of Queen Elizabeth secondary school in Surrey.

Eight schools in Surrey and one in New Westminster are part of a pilot project to have security guards on duty at key times.

Vancouver thugs belonging to an east-side gang known as the East Van Saints have been causing problems at several Surrey schools.

They have tried to recruit members, extort money and generally harass the kids.

Three guards have been working rotating 3½-hour shifts in Surrey and one is on duty in New West.

Surrey school board administrator Rubino Taddei says the school guard program — launched last month — is an extension of the noon-hour supervision program. The board adopted it after teachers said they would no longer patrol school grounds at lunch time.

Vancouver has police officers in the schools but the school boards in Surrey and New Westminster decided instead to try hiring guards.

"(The guard's) job is to keep an eye on things in the school, not to drag kids down to the office," says Bill Popowich, principal of New Westminster secondary school.

He admits having initial reservations about the young guard Western Pacific Security sent out.

But Popowich says Darren Jesperson, who is in his early 20s, has worked out well and has been accepted by the students.

"He's really cool," says David Gauvin, a 14-year-old Grade 9 student, who admits to being a bit of a rebel. "He's got a bit of power, but he doesn't push it."



Staff photo by Rick Loughran  
Security guard Darren Jesperson chats

## PARENTS ON PINS AND NEEDLES

# Trouble in the streets

Parents say youth gangs have taken over their North Burnaby neighborhood.

"These kids have taken over so bad, it's almost as if you can't walk down the street anymore," said one man, who represents a group of parents who live in the Brentwood Heights district.

"There's a lot of upset people around here," he says.

"This is a daily, daily routine. We're about the only ones who are standing up to these (people)."

They say most of the activities in their neighborhood involve small-

parts of Vancouver, the parents are nonetheless concerned.

The bottom line, parents add, is giving back the neighborhood its respectability—even if that means calling on municipal council to impose curfews.

One single mother frets constantly over her son. "Every night that he goes out I sit here on pins and needles with my heart pounding,

wondering if he's going to come home."

Another, older woman also worries about her son. "Every time these kids go out the door, you

## A SPECIAL REPORT

## FACING THE FACTS

By PETER SMITH



time robberies and vandalism and gang members intimidating and assaulting other teenagers—including their children.

According to a spokesman, the neighborhood's troubles started about three years ago when Vancouver's Asian and Hispanic gangs became more prominent and gained notoriety.

"I think that's basically where it started," said the group's spokesman. "It's sort of spread out into all the (suburban) communities."

Burnaby Now first met with the parents, their teenaged children and other family members last November, in a home in the Brentwood Heights area. They asked their identities remain confidential, fearing retaliation against their kids from the groups of youth who claim membership in four different gangs.

The neighborhood's problems intensified last fall with a number of specific incidents in their neighborhood, including a drive-by shooting last October in the 4600-block Union Street.

While there is no evidence that neighborhood gangs are engaging in drug trafficking, extortion or other high-level gang activities common

don't know what's going to happen. It doesn't matter where you go—there is nowhere to go."

The 58-year-old spokesman for the group agrees the neighborhood gangs—they estimate the total number of youths involved at about 150—are not as sophisticated or structured as the Vancouver-based organized gangs.

"I think what's happening, is that maybe two or three kids in this area think they are gang leaders, or tough guys or whatever you want to call it and they sort of recruit a couple more. And then there's a lot of kids that are basically good kids but they join these gangs because they don't want to get beat up all the time."

However, while they are largely unsophisticated, the gang members have apparently established a pecking order or hierarchy.

"They call themselves grandfathers, once you get to be of age," says the single mother. "You're 19, you're a grandfather, you're 17 (and) you're a father, and then you're just one of the boys when you're under age," she said. "That's how it goes."

And while the parents believe the neighborhood gangs are not



Police say they need cooperation if they are to follow through on complaints.

necessarily linked to the organized gangs in the urban core, they agree the gangs are starting to control the neighborhood.

The spokesman said he's contacted police about the problems. But the RCMP say people in the neighborhood have to bring forward complaints—a move they may be reluctant to do—so the police can pursue charges.

"These people (gang members) are not what I would call hard-core street gangs," said Const. Tim Bowles, the RCMP's school-liaison officer. "But we can't do our job if people refuse to testify. The

fear of intimidation is really the only danger."

Said Const. Don Campbell, the former youth-detail officer: "We need co-operation from the people, so we can follow through."

The neighborhood spokesman said parents will have to take a unified approach to solve the problem. Parents, he adds, will also have to take greater responsibility for the actions of their teenagers who may be involved in the gangs' activities.

"We've had cops here... in the past few weeks," the parent spokesman said. "They say it's a problem. If we can get some concentrated effort and more people get

their backs up, we may get something done."

Burnaby-Kingsway MP Svend Robinson, meanwhile, says he's unaware of any organized gang activity in the neighborhood. But his office has contacted the RCMP about the neighborhood's complaints.

"I certainly understand the concerns of people in that neighborhood."

**ON SUNDAY:**  
**Gang members doing time.**

# Not Just the Inner City: Well-to-Do Join Gangs

By SETH MYDANS

Special to The New York Times

**LOS ANGELES**, April 9 — In suburban Hawthorne, social workers tell of the police officers who responded to a report of gang violence, only to let the instigators drive away in expensive cars, thinking they were a group of teen-agers on their way to the beach.

In Tucson, Ariz., a white middle-class teen-ager dressed in gang colors died, a victim of a drive-by shooting, as he stood with black and Hispanic members of the Bloods gang.

At Antelope Valley High School in Lancaster, Calif., about 50 miles north of Los Angeles, 200 students threw stones at a policeman who had been called to help enforce a ban on the gang outfits that have become a fad on some campuses.

## Copycats, Mutants and Yuppies

Around the country, a growing number of well-to-do youths have begun flirting with gangs in a dalliance that can be as innocent as a fashion statement or as deadly as hard-core drug dealing and violence.

The phenomenon is emerging in a variety of forms. Some affluent white youths are joining established black or

**Tattoo on a  
bare shoulder:  
'Mama tried.'**

Hispanic gangs like the Crips and Bloods; others are forming what are sometimes called copycat or mutant or yuppie gangs.

The development seems to defy the usual socioeconomic explanations for the growth of gangs in inner cities, and it appears to have caught parents, teachers and law-enforcement officers off guard.

Police experts and social workers offer an array of reasons: a misguided sense of the romance of gangs; pursuit of the easy money of drugs; self-defense against the spread of established hard-core gangs. And they note that well-to-do families can be as empty and loveless as the broken families of the inner city, leaving young people searching for a sense of group identity.

## 'Mama Tried'

Furthermore, "kids have always tried to shock their parents," said Marianne Diaz-Parton, a social worker who works with young gang members in the Los Angeles suburb of Lawndale, "and these days becoming a gang member is one way to do it."

A member of the South Bay Family gang in Hermosa Beach, a 21-year-old surfer called Road Dog who said his family owned a chain of pharmacies,

put it this way: "This is the 90's, man. We're the type of people who don't take no for an answer. If your mom says no to a kid in the 90's, the kid's just going to laugh." He and his friends shouted in appreciation as another gang member lifted his long hair to reveal a tattoo on a bare shoulder: "Mama tried."

Separating their gang identities from their home lives, the South Bay Family members give themselves nicknames that they carry in elaborate tattoos around the backs of their necks. They consented to interviews on the condition that only these gang names be used.

The gang's leader, who said he was

the son of a bank vice president, flexed a bicep so the tattooed figure of a nearly naked woman moved suggestively. Voicing his own version of the basic street philosophy of gang solidarity, the leader, who is called Thumper, said, "If you want to be able to walk the mall, you have to know you've got your boys behind you."

## From Cool to Dead

For young people who have not been hardened by the inner city, an attitude like this, if taken into the streets, can be dangerous, said Sgt. Wes McBride of the Los Angeles sheriff's department, who has gathered reports on the phenomenon from around the country.

"They start out thinking it's real cool to be a gang member," he said. "They are 'wanna-be's' with nothing happening around them to show them it's real dangerous, until they run afoul of real gang members, and then they end up dead."

In California's palm-fringed San Fernando Valley, said Manuel Velasquez, a social worker with Community Youth Gang Services, a private agency, "there are a lot of kids who have no business being in gangs who all of a sudden are going around acting like gang members."

"They play the part," he went on. "They vandalize. They do graffiti. They do all kinds of stuff. But when it comes down to the big stuff, it's: 'Wait a minute. That's enough for me. I want to change the rules.' And then they realize it's a little bit too late."

There are few statistics on middle-class involvement in gangs, and officials are reluctant to make generalizations about its extent or the form it is taking. But reports of middle-class gang activity come from places as disparate as Denver, Seattle, Tucson, Portland, Dallas, Phoenix, Chicago, Minneapolis, Omaha and Honolulu.

Sgt. John Galea, who until recently was the commanding officer of the New York City Police Department, said that although there was no lack of youth violence in the city, organized street gangs as such were not a serious problem.

## 'Mama Tried'

After the drive-by shooting last summer in which a white teen-ager was killed, he said, he asked a black gang



Gangs that started in the inner cities are gaining members and imitators in the well-to-do suburbs. The South Bay Family in Hermosa Beach, Calif., has evolved over the last five years from a group of bouncers for a rock band to a full-fledged street-wise, well-armed gang.

The New York Times/Genevieve Birch

The South Bay Family, in Hermosa Beach, has evolved over the past five years from a group of bouncers for a rock band to a full-fledged, street-wise, well-armed gang. But for the most part, white gangs, or white members of minority gangs, have just begun to be noticed in the past few months.

## Parents Are Totally Unaware

"I think it's a new trend just since the latter part of 1989, and it's really interesting because it's getting out to suburban areas," said Dorothy Elmore, an intelligence officer for the gang enforcement team of the Portland Police Bureau in Oregon. "We've got teachers calling up and saying: 'We've got some Bloods and Crips here. What's going on?'"

"It's definitely coming from two-parent families, working class to middle-class to upper-middle class, predominantly white," she went on. "The parents are totally unaware of the kind of activity these kids are doing."

In Tucson, Sgt. Ron Zimmler, who heads the Police Department's gang unit, said, "We are seeing some of our kids from even our country-club areas who are suddenly getting involved in gangs."

After the drive-by shooting last summer in which a white teen-ager was killed, he said, he asked a black gang

**Innocent as a  
fashion  
statement, or  
deadly as drugs.**

member about another white youth who had attached himself to the gang. "I don't know," the black member replied. "He just likes to hang out. I told him to go back to Hollywood, but he just likes to hang out."

The phenomenon is better established but still relatively new in the Los Angeles area, the nation's gang capital. "We have covered parties where I'm totally shocked at the mixture of people who are there," said Mrs. Diaz-Parton, of Community Youth Gang Services in Lawndale. "Your traditional Hispanic gang member is next to this disco-looking person who is next to a preppie guy who looks like he's getting straight A's on his way to college."

## Bandanas and Baseball Caps

Irving G. Spergel, a University of Chicago sociology professor who studies gangs, emphasized that the phenomenon accounts for a very small portion of the nation's gang problem, which is centered in inner cities. He said the 4,000 to 5,000 neo-Nazi skin-head groups around the country, which have their own style and ideology, were a separate and worrisome problem.

More trivial, but still troublesome to

school officials, is a trend toward gang fashions in some high schools and junior high schools. In Los Angeles, Phoenix, Tucson and several California suburbs, students have staged demonstrations to protest bans on wearing certain colors, bandannas, jewelry or baseball caps that can be a mark of gang membership.

Bare chests, tattoos, Budweiser beer and a televised hockey game seemed to be the fashion one recent Saturday evening at an extremely noisy gathering of members of the South Bay Family in a small house in a middle-class neighborhood near the Pacific Coast Highway in Hermosa Beach. There were knives and a deer rifle in evidence, and some said they had pistols.

Asked about the gang's philosophy, Bam Bam, the son of a professor at the University of Southern California, shouted, "Right or wrong, your bros are your bros!"

"Another thing that goes good here is peace," said Road Dog loudly.

"Peace by force, man," shouted Porgy, who said his father was vice president of a plastics company.

"What we don't like is child molesting," announced Thumper.

"No drug dealing!" shouted Tomcat, the son of a stockbroker.

"Quit lying to him, man," said Little Smith. "There's drugs everywhere."

"On a more reflective note, away from the crowd in a small back room, Porgy said: "There is no justification. We do what we do because we want to. I don't blame my mother. She did the best she could."