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ABSTRACT

In considering whether subcultural values are associated with violence, it is critical to determine both the precise content of such values and the way in which the subculture interacts with structural forces to affect the level of violence. This paper is a qualitative inquiry into these questions for adolescent gangs in the Chicano barrios of East Los Angeles, the largest community of persons of Mexican heritage outside Mexico.

The role of machismo and the incidence of gang violence are examined under two structural circumstances: first, under the more common state of disenfranchisement, and second, under the conditions of the late 1960s and early 1970s in which a strong locally based political movement existed. The research materials indicate that existing literature has generally misunderstood the meaning and role of machismo in Chicano life, and that the frequency of gang violence is strongly dependent on the political conditions in the community.

ESTRANGEMENT, MACHISMO, AND GANG VIOLENCE

Introduction

In the study of Chicano life, a major theme has been that of manliness, or machismo. Chicano culture, and Latino culture in general, is said to place heavy emphasis on sex role differentiation, and an important part of the male role is said to be physical aggressiveness. This emphasis on machismo has an affinity to subcultural theories of violence, especially those of Wolfgang and Ferracuti [1967] and Curtis [1975]. These authors argue that the apparently high rates of violence among young males of minority race or ethnicity results from a positive valuation of physical aggression. In the most recent statement of this position, Curtis argues that young blacks and Hispanic males, in addition to subscribing to the ideals of dominant white middle-class culture, are part of a violent contraculture.

In considering whether sub (or contra) cultural values are associated with violence, it is critical to determine both the precise content of such values and the way in which the subculture interacts with structural forces to affect the level of violence. It is these questions to which the present paper is addressed, in a qualitative study of gang violence in the Chicano barrios of East Los Angeles.

With regard to the content of values, we consider whether, in the community studied, violence is a cultural value. Specifically, we examine the accuracy of the view that physical aggression is part of a machismo orientation. Based on interview and observational materials, our conclusion is that machismo is a cultural trait that may contribute to physical

aggression, but only indirectly and under certain structural conditions. More generally, we find no evidence that violence in itself is a cultural value in this community.

Turning to a consideration of the structural conditions that increase the likelihood of violence, we examine the emergence and handling of conflict prone situations under two different political conditions. First, we consider the more common state of affairs, in which Chicano youths in East Los Angeles experience a structurally induced feeling of estrangement. This estrangement fosters a strong identity with the peer group in the immediate neighborhood (barrio), because the peer group is the most readily available source of identity. The consequence is a strong sense of turf, which in turn greatly increases the potential for conflict and thus for violence. We then consider the change in group identity and in the incidence of violence concomitant to a change in structural conditions. This change occurred roughly in the period from late 1967 to early 1972, when a strong locally based political movement succeeded in greatly reducing the level of estrangement.

Method

Given the inconclusiveness of research on subcultures of violence [Erlanger, 1974] and given the methodological problems inherent in large scale quantitative studies in this area,[1] an appropriate research strategy at this time is one of generation of theory rather than of hypothesis testing. The methodology employed for this study was qualitative and inductive. Our analytic strategy followed the general approach of Glaser and Strauss [1967], especially their strategy of constantly

reevaluating and refining preliminary ideas in the light of new data, and of seeking data that would potentially challenge emergent understandings. However, we felt it impossible to generate a parsimonious explanation covering every case.

Our analysis is based on more than twenty-five open-ended interviews conducted by one or both of the authors. The respondents were Chicano males aged 15-30, who live in one of the barrios of East Los Angeles and who currently participate or have participated extensively in gang activity. This age range allows an assessment of both the contemporary situation and that of the middle and late 1960s. The paper centers on gang youths because they are believed to have the highest rate of violence in the barrios. Their fighting is also the most public and the most likely to occur in a group context. Thus it is possible to cross-check descriptions of altercations and also to solicit the reactions of different people who experienced the same event. This is preferable to eliciting responses to hypothetical situations.

Almost all present and former gang members interviewed have been arrested at least once, and all have been in many gang-related fights, some of which resulted in fatalities. Respondents came from many different gangs including those generally considered to be the toughest in East Los Angeles. Younger respondents were contacted through persons working for service agencies and community groups involved with gangs. The criterion for selection of these respondents was that in our contacts' judgment they were representative of gang members in the barrio. Older respondents were reached through a broader range of contacts. With the older

respondents. our objective was to interview men with a variety of experiences subsequent to their intense gang involvement. Several of the older respondents have served prison terms for offenses such as murder, rape, and armed robbery. Their current occupations range from hustlers and dealers in hard narcotics to a high level program administrator.

Many of the respondents also acted as informants, thus generating a large and broad-ranging pool of information. A number of persons with a comprehensive knowledge of the community and the events to be discussed in this paper were also interviewed as informants; these included police and probation officials, community program directors, and political figures.

Undertaking the type of research reported here requires well-developed ties to the community. In this project the collaborating author served this liaison function. He was born in East Los Angeles and has been involved with various community organizations in the area over the past eight years.

The Community

In East Los Angeles the number of persons of Mexican heritage, numbering one million or more, is comparable to the population of Guadalajara or Monterey and is substantially exceeded only by Mexico City. East Los Angeles is bordered by Watts on the south, the Civic Center on the west, Whittier on the east, and Highland Park on the north; the majority of the residents of this area are Chicano. Governmental authority is divided among several jurisdictions: part of East Los Angeles is a subsection of the city of Los Angeles, part is in the unincorporated area of Los Angeles County, and parts are in suburbs of Los

Angeles, such as San Gabriel, El Monte, and Pico Rivera. Many of the Chicano residents (especially in the barrios near the central city, where a very high percentage of the residents in the barrios are Chicano) view East Los Angeles as a single community.[2] The sections nearest the central city are the oldest and also the poorest, and in these areas the income per capita and the mean educational level are among the lowest in the Los Angeles area, as low or lower than in the black ghettos of South Central Los Angeles (Watts and surrounding area).[3]

East Los Angeles is divided into numerous subcommunities, or barrios, which are differentiated by natural boundaries such as streets, parks, housing projects, and the like. These barrios are known by the names of such landmarks, e.g., Hazard (park), Ramona Gardens (housing project), Dogtown (location of the main city animal shelter). Contrary to common Anglo usage, Chicanos use the term barrio to refer to these subcommunities or neighborhoods, rather than to the community as a whole. We will follow that usage here.

For many youths in East Los Angeles, the first venture beyond the immediate environs of their barrio is to go to high school (in which case they would still be in the East Los Angeles community) or to search for work. This is graphically illustrated in several of our interviews. For example, one respondent, now 30 years old and a graduate of UCLA, reports that, except for having to go to juvenile hall he had not been out of East Los Angeles until he was sixteen:

Q. When you were in Mateos, downtown LA was only about 10 blocks away, right?

A. Right.

Q. Did you get to downtown LA?

A. No.

Q. Not even ten blocks to where all the stores were and all the action?

A. No. Never. Then I was still young [in junior high school].

Q. How about your older brothers?

A. I guess they did. I never heard them talk about it.

Q. Maybe they didn't then?

A. Maybe. I used to go to the LA River and trip out over there.

Q. That was four or five blocks, maybe, huh?

A. Yeah. That was the biggest thrill I ever had at that point.

For many decades male Chicano youths have participated in gangs in their barrio. These groups usually take the name of the barrio, and the maintain a high degree of continuity over time. Many gangs have kept the same name and turf for 30 years or more.[4] In the barrios nearest the central city, most male youth belong to the gang in their barrio, which bonds together all those who wish to be part of the group.[5] In the more affluent barrios, gang membership is somewhat less common. There are subdivisons (some formal, some informal) of each gang, and a member spends virtually all his free time "hanging around" with his subgroup--going to a playground, rapping, going to a show, going to dances, etc.[6] Sometimes these activities lead to physical aggression both within the immediate group, and between gangs from different barrios. For this reason, the barrios are the target of official and police concern and are a relatively frequent subject of local--and at times national--attention in the news media.[7]

The Meaning of Machismo

Studies of Chicanos and Latin Americans have placed great emphasis on machismo, or manliness, which is reputed to be a cultural trait predisposing men to an exaggerated sense of honor, hypersensitivity, intransigience, sexual promiscuity, callousness and cruelty toward women, physical aggression, and lack of respect for human life [Aramoni, 1972; Burma, 1970; de Nemes, 1974; Stevens, 1973].[8] There is a substantial literature attacking many of the negative stereotypes of Chicanos [see especially, Hernandez, 1970; Romano, 1968; Trujillo, 1974; Vaca, 1970][9] and some which deals with the machismo stereotype [see, e.g., Montiel, 1971]. However, the relationship of machismo to physical aggressiveness has not been studied directly.

For all the Chicanos interviewed, machismo means "having courage", "not backing down", or "being ready to fight." Without further inquiry, these phrases would most likely be taken as connoting physical aggression. However, to our respondents, violence in itself is not directly a macho trait. For example, we asked each respondent whether Cesar Chavez--a Chicano who eschews all forms of physical aggression, goes on hunger fasts, allows himself to be arrested, etc.,--had machismo. Almost all respondents knew of Chavez, and all of these strongly felt that Chavez does have a good deal of machismo and that he is a very tough person. It is particularly noteworthy that most of the respondents stressed that Chavez does indeed fight, and rejected our presentation of Chavez as a man who wouldn't fight. Thus, for our respondents, fighting, being strong, and having machismo are much broader than simply physical aggression. The following response is representative:

A. He has it, or he wouldn't be doing what he is doing right now.

Q. But he's not fighting.

A. He's fighting, yeah, he's fighting...

Q. He's fighting?

A. Yes he is.

Q. Not physically.

A. Not physically you know...

Q. So he has machismo, and yet he doesn't fight and he wouldn't fight if someone hit him?

A. I don't know him personally, but from what I hear about him and what I've read about him, I don't think he's (pause) if somebody came up to him and slapped him, I think he'd try (pause) he wouldn't fight back you know, but he'd fight back in words, not with fists.

Several of the older respondents resented the use of the word machismo and complained that it was being misused by Anglos. One of the more articulate respondents stated:

A. Machismo means being a man and doing what you have to do. It doesn't mean being bad, just taking care of business--including getting a job, and having pride.

Q. Does it mean fighting necessarily?

A. Not to me, or to any of the people I know. We get that slapped on us all the time by the gabachos [whites]. They use it more than we do--'He's a macho dude'--We've been stereotyped to death on that.

There is a big difference between "doing what you have to do" and being physically violent. As the next section will elaborate, machismo only leads to physical fighting when alternative avenues to maintain dignity are blocked.

Estrangement and Interpersonal Violence in the Gang Context

The Emergence of Estrangement

From the time of the American conquest of the northern territories of Mexico in 1848, persons of Mexican heritage living within the United States have been subject to economic and cultural domination by Anglos. Moore [1970], for example, has suggested that Blauner's [1969] model of internal colonialism is especially appropriate for the analysis of the Chicano experience. The historical experience of the Chicano in the United States has been well documented [see, Bancroft, 1888; McWilliams, 1968; Pitt, 1966] and need not be reviewed here.

The record of discrimination against Chicanos in East Los Angeles is also well documented, and the educational situation faced by Chicanos has been particularly unsatisfactory.[10] All our respondents attended schools--both public and parochial--in which Chicanos were punished for speaking Spanish, even among themselves in the school yard.[11] Many report that their first major confrontation with Anglo authorities was over language:

> Q. Anyway, so you started going to school. Did you start when you were five?
>
> A. Yeah, I think I was five and a half or six and I know that right away I was put into the first grade. And I remember this; they asked 'What's his name?' and someone said 'His name is Juan,' so right then my name was changed to John. 'Well, now he'll be called John because that's his American name.'

These confrontations have had very significant consequences for self-identity. In some cases the consequences are especially serious, and fundamentally affect the relationship between the school and the student:

A. ...I'd go home, and speak Spanish at home. And so what happened was the next day I would go back to school--I'd forgotten all the English I had learned. And so, so, this all went on for about a year, year and a half, y'know, and then the principal, y'know, used to tell me to bend over and--

Q. Why were they punishing you?

A. Because, because I didn't understand. I'd get nervous inside, y'know, and I would like be a goof-off for the class, you know what I mean? But I couldn't really relate to what they were trying to explain--I got expelled from that school.

Q. And that was mostly from messing off because you didn't understand what was going on?

A. Yeah, 'cause I didn't understand, 'cause I would go home and speak Spanish and forget about it. I would forget all the English--all the a-b-c...whatever I learned from school.

Q. Did that make you feel kind of bad when you went to school?

A. Yeah, it sure did, especially when they kicked me out of school and they told my mother that I was mentally retarded, that I was never going to be able to learn English.

Q. Oh, they told you you were mentally retarded?

A. Yeah, I was only a little guy, y'know--that I was not going to be able to learn English because I was retarded. And so, that put like a big strain on me right there.

Many of our respondents report a general atmosphere in school in which Chicano students were not respected or seen as having much potential. They report being talked down to by teachers, being channeled into shop classes, and being swatted for minor offenses, such as not wanting to hold a girl's hand at a rehearsal. The general validity of these observations is corroborated by one of our informants, a Chicano teacher who grew up in an East Los Angeles <u>barrio</u>, went to college, and then taught elementary school in the same <u>barrio</u>. He reports that he was quite successful in school and college and that through that period of his life he questioned why other young Chicanos couldn't do for themselves what he felt he had done

for himself. However, once he became a teacher and got a view of the school system from the inside, he fundamentally changed his evaluation of the process. After a year of teaching, his reaction was "how in the hell did I make it?" Asked to elaborate on his first year experiences, he replied:

> A. Well, I remember the advice given to me by my supervisor when I was in college. He said you're going to be a first year teacher; you're going to be involved with people who have been teaching for 15-20 years and they aren't going to take kindly to you coming in and telling them how to do that and how to teach. You listen, and don't try to come in there and change the whole school system. So, that's really what I did. I'd go into the lounge and I'd listen and I would hear stupid remarks by teachers....Some of them wanted to treat kinds of different cultures the same way and they took no interest in finding out the idiosyncracies of these cultures, and how they could hurt kids by not knowing these things. I heard comments like, 'Oh what a cute little kid. They all look alike.' I heard teachers saying out in the field 'you goddamn Mexican' to another teacher who was umpiring...I heard teachers reprimand kids who were speaking Spanish in the hallways...and this was supposed to be a time when they were teaching Spanish in school already. I heard teachers saying 'what do you expect of these kids? We can only give them so much.'
>
> Q. What effect do you think this had on the kids?
>
> A. It was bad. First of all, the level of expectation of the teachers is very low, and I can't see these people making those comments in the lounge and not taking those feelings into the classroom.[12]

The school is just one place where the young Chicano is confronted with negative images of his people. From an early age the Chicano has been bombarded with the message that his language, culture, food, and habits are inferior and should be changed to conform to those of the Anglo. The mass media have been particularly derelict in their portrayal of the Chicano and instead have made heavy use of the "Frito Bandido" or Lazy Jose stereotypes [Martinez, 1969, and Morales, 1971]. Later he is

subject to discrimination in the administration of justice, employment, voting, and in other areas [Almanza, 1964; Glick, 1966; Interagency Committee, 1967; Morales, 1970, 1972; New York Times, 1975; Schmidt, 1970].[13]

This is not to say that every Chicano has had the same experience, but rather that this has been the most common experience over the years. The domination of Chicanos has resulted in their feeling that they are living in an environment controlled by an Anglo structure that they cannot affect. Political action to change these circumstances is difficult because of gerrymandering and because of widespread feelings that there is little prospect that meaningful change will come about. These feelings of powerlessness, exclusion, and absence of control over the conditions of one's existence can be summed up as "estrangement."[14] As one respondent expressed these feelings:

> A. We grew up to be scared of the Anglo...Mostly your police were Anglo, and the police in the barrio is always feared; not a friend of the people, but an enemy to beat, to get away from. So we all knew the cop. He poses a threat to us, he could take us to jail...
>
> Q. What about the teacher?
>
> A. The teacher? This is another trip. I read something about the teacher you know being very big--when a youngster is 5 or 6 years old and goes to school, what does he see, he sees a big Anglo teacher, and she looks big at that size you know. And she's the teacher, she's the example of what we're supposed to be.

The Result of Estrangement

A major consequence of the estrangement just described is the emergence of a strong identification with the immediate environment--the peer

group and the barrio. Adolescent youth particularly are faced with the need to expand identity beyond the family. In the estranged environment the peer group in the barrio, who share the same feelings and experiences, are the most readily available source of identity.

Our interviews indicate that this identification is equal to that with the family and is much more intense than that with religion, with political entities (Los Angeles, California, United States) or, except under certain circumstances to be discussed below, with the Chicano people as a whole. The following exchange with a 21-year-old probationer, talking about the period just before he was incarcerated, illustrates how deep the attachment to the barrio is:

> Q. What I'm trying to figure out is which was more important? What would you consider more serious--an insult to you or an insult to the barrio you were a part of at that time?
>
> A. Probably the barrio--the neighborhood.
>
> Q. The barrio was more important?
>
> A. Yeah, there's people I've seen who have given up their lives for the neighborhood. I've seen people die...
>
> Q. Literally die?
>
> A. Yeah, Yelling out like, 'Qué Rífas.!' [Long live the neighborhood!] And at that time I probably would have been the same way, y'know.
>
> Q. So it was that important? It was more important than even yourself?
>
> A. That was the thing, you know, the neighborhood comes first.

In the estranged setting, the gang member who shouts the name of his barrio with his last breath has, from the point of view of the gang, shown his courage and dignity in one of the few ways open to him. Youth in the barrio are rejected by Anglo society, and that society is rejected

in turn, for it demands that they surrender their cultural identity in order to gain positive recognition. Thus most young Chicanos come to rely on the peer group for this recognition. Our respondents reported that it is critical that status in the gang was based on attributes that could be reached by anyone--for example, the machismo qualities of courage, dignity, and readiness to fight. Since other outlets for demonstration of these attributes are blocked in the barrio, the pursuit of them is often in the context of physical confrontation. But many respondents report that even in such confrontations the important personal quality is the willingness to fight, more than physical prowess per se.

> A. I went to this other school when I moved. The first day I went in and right away I started pinpointing who's who, you know--the pecking order type thing. And the second day that I was there, there was a [gang] already there--little kids, you know, you run around together. So I was jammed: 'Where you from?' and all that kind of stuff, and he says 'Well you're going to have to fight one of us. No not one of us, you're going to have to fight this dude.' I was scared as hell, but I had to go along with the program. But luckily I didn't have to fight...I didn't have to fight with them but because I wanted to fight with them I was accepted by that clique.
>
> Q. You didn't have to, but your willingness to fight was sufficient? Is that what you just said--you didn't fight with them?
>
> A. No, I didn't fight with them.
>
> Q. But you said you would?
>
> A. Yeah, well [I was] ready to fight, you know, they said well you're going to have to fight this guy, and I said ok. [The incident was broken up by a teacher.]

There are many scenarios that push the willingness to fight over the brink into actual fighting. The most frequent and important instigators of gang fights are violations of barrio "turf," either physically or symbolically. The gang establishes control over the physical territory that constitutes the barrio, and defends it against all intrusions. A

teenage male may be challenged to identify his barrio at anytime. If he responds, and identifies his barrio as one that is on unfriendly terms with that of the challenger(s), physical conflict will usually ensue, and the fight can escalate to involve large numbers of young men from the two barrios. Gang members also do not tolerate outsiders--especially from a rival gang--dating a woman from their barrio, even if she is unattached and even if they meet on other turf. Horowitz and Schwartz [1974] present a useful microsociological account of the processes through which the concern with turf and with honor can lead to violent clashes.[15] The reports of our respondents are similar:

> A. You know when a kid is down and if you attack the only things that he has going for him, namely his manliness--his machismo--his home boys--his barrio, that's all he has. When you attack that you're attacking him to the quick--what else does he have?
>
> Q. When you come into that neighborhood, are you attacking that? His manliness, his barrio?
>
> A. That's right. You are challenging him.

Although the degree of concern with courage and honor seems to be constant, the conflicts that often result from the effort to maintain these attributes are dependent on the existence of estrangement. The following section shows that when the level of estrangement decreases, the character of interaction among individuals and groups in the barrios is fundamentally affected.

Political Action and the Decline of Estrangement

Much can be learned about normal patterns and the basis for them when these patterns are disrupted. Such a situation existed in East Los

Angeles in the late 1960s, and early 1970s, when there was a broadly based political movement in the community.

The Movement

Contrary to the impression of many writers, Chicanos have been involved in political activity directed at changing their life circumstances for over a century [see, e.g., Alvarez, 1971; Guzman, 1968]. However, the period from late 1967 to early 1972 marked a particularly intense period of political activity in East Los Angeles, a period that we shall refer to as the Movement period. The issues in East Los Angeles were similar to those in other minority communities across the country--for example, Chicano control of the schools and of the social and law enforcement agencies operating in the community, greater recognition of Chicano needs by the Catholic Church, and development of economic independence through governmental assistance and through the development of an independent local economic base. Basic to these issues was Chicano pride and a quest for unity and power.

Key events during the Movement in East Los Angeles included walkouts from the city schools, a moratorium protesting the disproportionate Chicano fatalities in the Viet Nam war, protest of allocation of Catholic Church funds to construction of churches in West Los Angeles rather than to social programs in the barrios, protests against police treatment of Chicanos, and a protest at a state educational conference. These events involved thousands of people. Some protest events culminated in violent clashes between police and Chicano demonstrators and bystanders.[16]

The Effect of the Movement on Estrangement

From its inception the Movement involved large numbers of Chicano youth. Walkouts were held at almost every high school and several of the junior high schools in the community, with large numbers of students participating. Our interviews indicate that gang members were not immediately involved in the Movement, but many of the gang youth felt that they were receiving repercussions from the police for Movement activities and as a consequence decided to become directly involved. One of the better known Movement leaders reports that prior to the Movement a gulf between gang members and serious high school and college students had existed because

> ...The teachers had done a good job of propagandizing--that if you're going to be a [gang member], that's the wrong way to go. And they isolated that group, and said that group was bad, bad, negative.

As the Movement progressed, not only were gang members involved, but the relationship between them and others, especially college youth, was fundamentally changed:

> It put a whole positive connotation into being [a gang member], the thing is that the Movement said everybody is a worker in the Movement, no matter who they are. And that gave them less social alientation, so they could go to meetings with college students, whereas before they couldn't, because they felt that definite alienation. They could go to meetings with anybody, 'cause the Movement says, 'We need you too.' 'Because you're a Chicano too, and you're not some weirdo.'

Thus, there was a perception that there were common interests that cut across individual pursuits and that the fate of one was bound up with all others in the same circumstances.

Besides generating unity among youth in the barrios, the Movement generated pride and a feeling of power. The heightened sense of pride and Chicano identity was perhaps expressed best by one of our respondents, who was released from prison on a pass for El Dieciseis de Septiembre, Mexican Independence Day:

> A. When I come out, the Chicano convict organization calls me, sticks a button on me, says, you're with us, brother blah, blah,...They have a parade every year and we'll bring up the ranks. As far as I could look back...as far as I could look back, all I could see was Chicanos...I'm on a pass from Soledad. I still had to go back to prison. I was just out on a pass.
>
> Q. That day?
>
> A. Ya. You know what, a pride went over me, I don't think I've had it since.
>
> Q. You didn't ever get it in a gang fight, or anything?
>
> A. No. Just the fact, I turned around and looked and as far as my eyes could see, I'd see nothing but Chicanos. Young and old and guys that I know from different barrios.

The sense of power is shown in an incident that occurred early in the Movement, as reported in one of our interviews:

> And I distinctly remember--we were picketing, we had our signs--and passing out leaflets, the students were walking out--and I distinctly remember this girl who came up to me and says 'Are you sure you know what we're doing?' And I looked at her and I says, 'Yeah, and she starts telling me, y'know, they are going to expel us and everything. And I kept saying, 'They can't expel you. There's too many of us out here. And the more people we get, the greater the fact that they can't expel us.' And I told her, 'Look, just watch.' And in fact when we met with the principal there were five student representatives that were already chosen, and I asked her to come, and it was really beautiful, because that was the first time I saw students dealing with the principal on an equal level. And they were telling him, 'Hey,...'cause they were coming from a sense of power, 'cause the students were out there, and these five were the ones that could tell the students to come back. And the principal knew that, and he sat there and we dealt with the issues on a negotiating basis. So that gave us a whole sense of power that we didn't have before.

The Effect of the Movement on Gang Violence

During the period of intense political activity there was a dramatic reduction in the amount of fighting between gangs and between individuals within the gangs. More important, there were many instances in which rival gangs worked together for what they saw as a betterment of the Chicano community. According to the Los Angeles Police Department, reliable quantitative data on gang-related violence are not available for years prior to 1973. However, the decline of violent gang activity in the Movement period was recalled by every person working in law enforcement that we contacted, including the Operations Officer of the Gang Squad, Criminal Conspiracy Section, Los Angeles Police Department.[17] Almost all the older gang members we interviewed also reported a sharp drop in violence during the period.

In delineating the effect of the Movement on gang violence, we must differentiate among three broad groups of gang members. The first group was comprised of those gang youths who were personally involved in the Movement (in varying degrees, from serving as leaders to just being loosely affiliated). For these youths, reduction of fighting came from the heightened sense of efficacy and from a commitment to the principle that all Chicanos are brothers and should not fight each other. In the second group were gang youths who, although not affiliated with the Movement, were affected by it because the Movement changed the environment in which they operated. For example, several of our respondents reported incidents in which a peer intervened to prevent a fight with a successful appeal to Chicano unity. The third group was comprised of

those who were essentially unaffected by the Movement, whose lives went on much as before or who ignored appeals to unity. The latter group was not large enough to affect the overall impression of our respondents and informants that the number of violent altercations decreased markedly for the community as a whole. There is no doubt then, that the Movement had profound effects both in terms of the number of people directly and indirectly affected and the extent to which they were affected.

For those directly involved in the Movement, the focus was on carnalismo, which literally translated means brotherhood, and which connoted the feeling of pride and unity to our respondents.

> A. Carnalismo to me would be having people unite, being brothers to each other, so they can relate to each other, know what's happening, and to more or less carry each other.
>
> Q. Is that affected by the Movimiento?
>
> A. To me it is, because once you're carnal to someone else in the Movimiento you've got someone to go with to push that Movement. The carnalismo is like sticking together. You're united, you're united! That's your carnalismo right there.

Our respondents reported that the feeling of carnalismo existed prior to the intense period of the Movement, but it was only expressed on the barrio level, and could not be effectively used to defuse a confrontation. Chicano gangs from different barrios did not cooperate except in confrontation with a non-Chicano group, for example, the police. During the Movement, carnalismo took on special significance. Because courage and dignity were achieved in other ways through the Movement, barrio youth were less likely to take affront at the actions of others. In the following exchange, the interviewer asked about the effects of the Movement:

> Q. Did that have an effect on the barrios?
>
> A. Oh ya, certainly it did.

Q. At that period?

A. Oh ya. It's never happened before. Everyone was saying that 'unity is one.' That was a very emotional period, you know....At that point people were hungrier, you know: 'Let's get it together, let's get it together.'....

Q. Did it affect you personally? Were you in the gang at that period?

A. Right. We'd go to parties during the Movement, like fund-raisers at a certain house. All the gangs would be there. If there was an argument between one guy and another from another barrio the first thing anyone could say would be 'Hey man, don't go hitting your brother,' and the fight would cease right there and then. And they'd go 'Forget the barrio and being from Hazard [a particularly rough barrio] and all that bullshit.'

Q. Was there a different kind of identification then? They didn't really forget the barrio did they?

A. No. But they tried not to use the barrio against one another. 'I'll respect your barrio and you respect mine.'

Q. So it was more of a Chicano consciousness?

A. Right.

In expanding their identity from the barrio to the broader Chicano community several hundred gang members joined groups that maintained some of the characteristics of the gang but which were community rather than barrio based. The members of these groups became "soldiers of the Movement" rather than "soldiers of the barrio." This was a way of maintaining courage and dignity while transcending interbarrio conflicts. Probably the best example of an organization of this type was the Brown Berets.

The gang member who wasn't part of the Movement often found that other barrio youth, both in his gang and others, were much less interested in fighting. Besides the appeals to carnalismo, which during the Movement was generally--although not always--successful in diffusing potential

violence, the general environment in which barrio youth functioned had changed. The experience of one of our respondents well illustrates this situation. Now in his twenties and still very much into the gang scene, he was never a part of the Movement, he does not have a clear idea of what the issues were or why the events took place, and he does not feel that the Movement affected his sense of being Chicano.

Q. When you went to junior high. Let's see, that's about seven years ago?

A. The last part of '68.

Q. Okay. Was that the time the Chicano Movement started going strong then? (Yeah) Did that have any effect on anything? Did you meet any guys from the Movement?

A. No. I never met nobody. The closest thing I ever got to it was when I was, ah, when Sal Castro and all the students were having walk-outs at Lincoln.

Q. That was at Lincoln, right?

A. Yeah.

Q. Sal Castro was a teacher there and he was getting transferred or something, right?

A. I...I really didn't know what happened. I was about in the seventh or eighth grade when that happened. And I joined in, too.

Q. You joined in?

A. Yeah.

Q. Did you know what you were joining in for?

A. Not really.

Q. Why did you join in?

A. I don't know.

Q. Did you think..., did it have any effects on what you thought of yourself in terms of being Chicano?

A. Yeah, well, ah, you know, everybody else you know, everybody out there was Chicano and they were yelling out, telling the rest of us to come out. So me and about 40 of my home boys just jumped over the fence and went over, and some of the other ones didn't get to go over.

However, this respondent remembers this period as one that was unique in that there was very free movement between the barrios, even to the point at which one could date an unattached girl from another barrio without being hassled. When the respondent was asked how he spent his free time during the Movement period, the following exchange ensued:

Q. What were you doing?

A. Going to the park and getting loaded and picking up broads and things like that.

Q. But no hassling, huh?

A. Nope.

Q. What did you think of that period?

A. It was all right...I used to go down there to the sewer to get loaded 'cause I used to be seeing the sister of a guy from Clover when she was in Hazard. [These two barrios are among the toughest in East Los Angeles, and have had an intense rivalry for over 30 years.]

Q. So in that period you'd go over to Clover and not worry about it, huh?

A. Yeah.

Q. And make it with their women and that didn't start a fight?

A. Yeah, just as long as they weren't with nobody else.

Plausible Alternative Explanations

The foregoing has shown that there was a decrease in interpersonal violence during the intense period of activism in the barrio, and that the key elements of the Movement that led to this effect were the increase

in political consciousness and the feeling that Chicanos were going to change their life conditions for the better:

> ...The concepts began to filter down throughout the community, and one of the things that we kept saying was that--to be proud of yourself--'Be proud of who you are,' was one thing we kept saying. But another thing we kept saying is that, 'We dan do it. We can do it. And we can change through organization, we can change the system.'...Instilling a whole feeling of power, that heretofore hadn't been there.

Is the effect on violence properly attributed to the new sense of power? Possible alternative explanations for the reported reduction in fighting can be divided into those stressing factors that were external to the Movement and those stressing nonpolitical consequences of the Movement.

The most likely factor outside of the Movement that could account for the observed relationship would be a major change in employment opportunities. If the Movement were to coincide with very favorable economic conditions for Chicanos, then it would well be that material benefits, rather than ideological change, led to reduced levels of interpersonal violence through reducing the amount of idle time, getting people a bigger stake in the system, or whatever. Although the late sixties was a period of relative prosperity, the economic situation of the Chicano in the barrio, especially that of the gang youth, was not significantly affected.

This is not to deny that the economic conditions of the sixties may have substantially contributed to the milieu in which the Movement developed. But these conditions themselves could not alone be responsible, because there have been similar periods of relative prosperity since World War II in which gang violence did not notably change. For example, one of our informants, who has extensive experience working with gang

youth and who himself belonged to a gang when he was younger, reported that the only fluctuations he was aware of were seasonal, with periods of intense violence followed by lulls. Having worked with gang youth for a long time, "one can almost gauge when it's going to happen." Except for the extended period at the height of the Movement, he knew of no other period of more than a few months in which there was a sharp decrease in gang fighting in East Los Angeles.

There are several plausible nonpolitical consequences of the Movement that could be considered as contributing to the decline in gang violence. Miller [1958] has argued that excitement is one of the focal concerns of lower-class culture. One might argue that the activities of the Movement provided sufficient excitement so that violent interpersonal action was not necessary. But if it were simply the excitement of the Movement that was having the effect, then nonparticipants would not be affected, and there would not have been any reason why appeals to carnalismo would stop a fight that was about to start as effectively as our evidence shows they did. Similarly, it might be argued that the political movement simply kept people busy, without regard to the content of what they were doing, and thus they simply had less time to fight. Again, the contrary evidence is that the Movement was not that time-consuming, except for the relatively few leaders and that this alternative explanation would not explain the effect on nonparticipants.

It may well be true that when people are busy, they are less likely to fight, and many barrio programs have been based on this premise. Gang workers have promoted car clubs, mural programs to paint over barrio placas (graffiti including the gang name and the name of the person who

drew it) and a wide variety of recreational projects. However, at best these programs work only during the actual period of activity, and they do not affect people who are not directly involved. They are different from the Movement in that they do not change the relationship of the individual to the outer world or fundamentally change the milieu of a community. In a discussion with community leaders, the critical difference between the Movement and apolitical activities was identified as the extent of power and control:

> It's different from clubs, murals; all that was just an occupation of time, and not a head change. And it was different in that [the others didn't] give any sense of more power; they just gave a sense of maybe being worthwhile in something that is acceptable...You didn't have any control yourself--no power--it was other people letting you do that, y'know, parks and recreation type activities... The Movement gave a sense of power, of organized power to achieve certain ends, there was a goal and a means.

At the other extreme of political involvement, a gang member with no involvement in the Movement reported that a current program involving members of rival gangs in the painting of murals to beautify the community [Time, 1975], is only effective during its actual hours of operation, and only for those directly involved:

Q. Did guys who were enemies work together on those murals?

A. What do you mean?

Q. Guys who didn't get along with each other, did they work together?

A. Yeah.

Q. In other words, when that was going on, then guys who would usually fight were...

A. When they fight, they fight at nighttime.

Q. But when they were working on the murals, they wouldn't fight?

A. That was in the day time. Usually when we fight against each other, it's at nighttime.

Conclusion

At the descriptive level, observation of gang fighting would lead to the conclusion that an excessive concern with values such as courage and dignity escalates trivial affronts into major physical confrontations. We have shown that in East Los Angeles the explanation is much more complicated than this, and that this type of impetus to gang fighting operates only in an estranged setting.

Chicano culture places a strong emphasis on values such as courage and dignity for males, but how those values are manifested in behavior depends heavily on the broader context in which people function. For example, a Chicano who has achieved high status can use the perquisites of that status in much the same way that his disenfranchised carnal might use physical prowess. One of our respondents, who now holds a high administrative position with a major employer in California, reports the following encounter:

> Last night...I was in a bar...sitting with this young attractive, red-haired, very fair-skinned, very lovely girl. And these guys are giving her big eyes and so forth. The first thing I think about is that these clowns are showing disrespect to me. I don't know who they think they are, or who they think I am, but I don't have to put up with that shit. So one of them comes over and starts talking to me and says, 'Oh hi, how are you doing? Haven't I seen you, aren't you from around here, all this shit. Until finally he finds out--he asks what I do and I tell him, and for some reason I hand him a business card, and then I got the impression at that point that suddenly he sees that the card is fairly impressive. He sees that I am somebody. And he backed off. I remember telling [my date] that I'm sure they thought 'What's the Chicano doing with that nice woman. What is he?' I was dressed fairly nice. Suddenly all that started coming back to me. The whole idea that, goddamn it, how long do I have to keep fighting this issue. ...I guess I just wanted to show [him] at that point that I was as articulate, if not more so than he was.

Virtually the only time within the memory of our respondents or informants in which there was a viable opportunity for the expression of courage and dignity outside of the gang setting for the masses of Chicano youths was during the Movement period of late 1967 through early 1972. During this period identity with the broader community became primary and a sense of power to influence the institutions affecting the community emerged. As a result, gang-related violence decreased markedly.

In the past four years the intensity of the Movement has lessened. The last Movement events attracting thousands of people occurred in late 1971, and ended in violent confrontations with the police [Morales, 1972]. Remnants of the Movement live on, but the sense of power has lessened considerably, and with it the community identity transcending that of the individual barrios. As one of the Movement leaders observed in an interview:

> We thought the limits of the struggle were just getting Chicanos together and then everything else would follow. Now we have greater information to work behind and we realize that that's not the case. We can still effect change, but it's going to come through different directions...Now we still have potential power but I think we're more realistic.

A sense of estrangement has returned, and even though appeals to carnalismo can sometimes be effective, gang violence has been on the upswing. Our respondents and informants estimate that in 1976 the degree of violence is worse than in the early sixties.[18]

Our emphasis on the importance of political activity in understanding the social context in which gangs function is consistent with a perspective recently urged on students of gang life by Short [1974; 1976], although we come to different conclusions. Short reminds us that:

> It is axiomatic that every group is shaped by its external environment, but the dependence of gangs in this respect seems especially great [1976: 150].

In addition he relates changes in gang activity in Chicago in the 1960s to political developments at the national and local levels. In East Los Angeles in the late sixties and early seventies (and today as well) political awareness among Chicano gang youth differed from that among black gang members in Chicago in the periods reported on by Short; Short reports that in the late fifties and early sixties, his research group

> ...had been impressed with the lack of political and social awareness and involvement displayed by the black gang boys, despite feverish political and civil rights activities...and the emergence... of activist organizations [1976: 133].

Short also surmises that a similar absence of concern existed in black ghettos in the late sixties, a period comparable to that which we studied in East Los Angeles and cites several other studies in support of this view. He concludes, therefore, that

> Status threats are played out on a day-to-day basis, on the street and in other contexts. The trappings of formal organization, even when combined with incentive to rally around business enterprise or improvement of the lot of one's fellows is unlikely to compensate for these problems [1976: 143].

In East Los Angeles we found not only a much higher level of political awareness, we also found that, when combined with a sense of unity and power, fundamental changes in the perception and handling of status threats could ensue. (As the Chicanos of East Los Angeles did not have the business opportunities open to the "supergangs" of Chicago, we cannot comment on the possibilities in this regard.)

How broadly can our findings be generalized? Other groups for which we have data are black gangs in South Central Los Angeles, and

inmates of the California prison system, and our findings there are similar.[19] Moreover, gang violence may be an example of what Marwell defines as the "classic delinquent act", an act that from society's point of view seems negativistic, malicious, and/or nonutilitarian. Marwell argues that these types of behavior are prevalent among adolescents because "the adolescent is comparatively powerless at a time when the importance of power is being impressed on him as never before" [1966: 40]. To the extent that our findings are generalized, they point to a need for linking theories of deviance to theories of power and its distribution.

NOTES

[1]This study originally was funded to undertake a large scale sample survey of attitudes toward and experience with interpersonal violence. Numerous problems with this design were encountered when we moved to the data collection stage. First, evidence began to mount that a standardized research instrument would not be the most valid or effective method of collecting data on violence. We found, for instance, that the "off-the-record" comments made during or after the interview seemed much more perceptive and were much more valuable in informing our thinking. This was true even with open-ended items, unless extensive probing and discussion took place.

In addition, it appeared that there would be a minimum household nonresponse rate of 35 percent and that it would be virtually impossible to interview street corner men. Finally, we determined that it would be extremely difficult to put together a staff of indigenous interviewers, but that without interviewers closely tied to the community the cooperation of respondents would be difficult to secure.

[2]This is evidenced in part by several widely supported attempts to incorporate the area as an independent city. For reasons largely unrelated to community identification, the area that would be incorporated included only the city and county jurisdictions.

[3]The work by Grebler et al. [1970] is the most comprehensive statistical review of the situation of Chicanos and their socioeconomic status vis à vis "nonwhites". For a series of reviews critical of the approach, but not the data of Grebler et al., see Social Science Quarterly [1971].

[4]Continuity of the gangs over time can be seen in the similarity of our observations to those of McWilliams [1968] in the 1940s.

[5]There are similar groups of female youth, a discussion of which is beyond the scope of this paper. Some of these groups are affiliated with male groups and some are autonomous.

[6]For a discussion of black ghetto street life, which is similar to street life in the barrios of East Los Angeles, see Hannerz [1969].

[7]One of the more recent nationally circulated features of the community and its gangs was a front page story in the Wall Street Journal [Gottschalk, 1975].

[8]The term machismo has carried over into general discussions of "male culture" and is also frequently involked in discussions of inter-Personal violence, even when Chicanos or other Latinos are not actually the subject of study. See, for example, Ball-Rokeach [1973] and Wolfgang and Ferracuti [1967].

[9]Also sometimes the authors to whom the stereotypes are attributed deny that this was their intention. See, e.g., Heller [1969].

[10]On Los Angeles in particular, see United States Commission on Civil Rights [1968, 1971], Heller [1966: 45-54], Heussenstamm [1972], and Kerby [1968]. For discussions of educational discrimination against Chicanos in general see Carter [1970], Cross and Maldonado [1971], Ericksen [1968], National Educational Association [1966], and Parsons [1966].

[11]Even today very few school districts offer bilingual programs and even fewer offer bicultural education. In recent years, there have been several attempts to change this situation by appealing to the courts under the equal protection doctrine; the results have been mixed. Recent legal developments are discussed in Grubb [1974], and Johnson [1974].

[12]For a similar report on ghetto education in another city, see Kozol [1967].

[13]The citations here are limited to works dealing with Chicanos in Los Angeles and other urban areas; migrant laborers are, of course, subject to even greater barriers. See, e.g., McWilliams [1969].

[14]Our concept of estrangement is close to Seeman's [1959] concept of powerlessness. We do not use Seeman's term because we feel that his does not capture the feeling of being excluded from dominant society and separated off as different. Note, however, that the type of estrangement our respondents experienced is different from those that Seeman terms self- and cultural-estrangement. Our concept is also different from that of anomie, which has so often been used in explanation of deviant behavior. Especially for Durkheim [1951], and to a lesser extent for Merton [1957, 1964], anomie refers to a breakdown in processes of social control.

[15]The similarity between the processes observed by Horowitz and those reported to us holds in spite of differences in the type of group studied and in the economic level of the community. Horowitz and Schwartz studied youths in a "club", while we studied gang youth. In East Los

Angeles there are also groups called clubs that have many of the same characteristics as the club studied by Horowitz and Schwartz. The clubs are joined by youth who are more affluent and more oriented to the Anglo culture. The same seems to be the case in Chicago, where Horowitz and Schwartz report that the club members come from a community meeting "the basic requirements for inclusion in...the socially respectable and politically significant segments of the working class" [1975: 245]. As Grebler et al. [1970] show, such a community is substantially better off than the overwhelming majority of Chicano communities in the United States. Because of their rejection by Anglo society our respondents do not experience the normative ambiguity emphasized by Horowitz and Schwartz.

[16]The Chicano movement in Los Angeles is discussed in Ericksen [1968], Gomez [1971a, 1971b], Guzman [1969], Heussenstamm [1972], Kerby [1968], Lopez [1970], Morales [1972], Newsweek [1971], Time [1970], and Torgerson [1968]. On the Chicano Movement more generally, see Aguirre [1971], Blauner [1971], Bongartz [1969], Madrid-Barela [1973], Muñoz [1972], Penalosa [1970], and Womack [1972].

[17]Ten other persons in law enforcement were contacted including several officers and supervisors in Youth Authority parole offices in East Los Angeles and the assistant director of Los Angeles County Probation.

[18]This is in part due to the greatly increased availability of weapons. As one of our respondents reported:

> We used to have chains and knives in our lockers and everything, we didn't used to carry them with us....At least you had a chance with a chain and a knife. With a gun, you don't have any kind of chance.

[19]A report of these findings is in preparation.

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