4

Criminal Activities of Gangs

The stereotype of the gang member and the gang revolves around criminal activity, as if they do nothing else. This is in part perpetuated by both the media and the police. In the case of the media, this is no doubt because the daily activities of the typical gang member are rather boring, with little or no crime occurring (much less the stereotype of the "drive-by") and thus not newsworthy. As for the police, their historic role in this society is to catch people who have committed crime, and they usually have little interest in what the person does the rest of the time. Moreover, largely because of this role, information from the police about gangs (printed up and handed out at literally hundreds of "gang workshops" throughout any given year) tends to focus almost exclusively on the criminal activities of gangs and methods of identifying gang members (e.g., graffiti, dress styles, hand signals, gang slang) to help officers make arrests or engage in proactive policing (i.e., keeping tabs on gang members). It is important to keep this in mind as we discuss the various crimes committed by gang members. Most of their time is spent doing other things—sleeping, eating, going to school, hanging out, and so on—that occupy the time of adolescents everywhere.[1]

As with information on the number of gangs and gang members, there are serious problems with the data collected by law enforcement, which is by far the most commonly used. Klein and Maxson (2006) received data from several police departments around the country and quickly discovered a serious problem. While some agencies sent information on a variety of crimes (both violent and property, serious and minor crimes), some departments included mostly the most serious crimes, and a few even reported no larcenies, petty thefts, and status offenses. The agency that had the most offenses listed (a total of 1,022) reported that 40 percent were classified as "other offenses" and another 21 percent were status offenses. They reported only two homicides and one drug sale.

Greene and Pranis also discount the widespread belief that gangs do little more than sit around and plan their crimes. They note that "gang-directed, instrumental activities are the exception, not the rule." Further, while many gang members commit violent acts, it is mostly of the expressive variety and often against the wishes of gang leaders. Further, while drug sales are common, such activity "generally ranges from a completely disorganized pursuit of individuals to loosely organized cooperative endeavors" (2007: 52).

HOW MUCH CRIME DO GANG MEMBERS COMMIT?

Recent reports by the National Gang Intelligence Center seem to indicate that gangs do nothing but commit crimes and that they commit most of the crimes in a given area. For example, consider the latest information from their Web site, which states the following:

> Gangs are responsible for an average of 48 percent of violent crime in most jurisdictions and up to 90 percent in several others, according to NGIC analysis. Major cities and suburban areas experience the most gang-related violence. Local neighborhood-based gangs and drug crews continue to pose the most significant criminal threat in most communities. Aggressive recruitment of juveniles and immigrants, alliances and conflict between gangs, the release of incarcerated gang members from prison, advancements in technology and communication, and Mexican Drug Trafficking Organization (MDTO) involvement in drug distribution have resulted in gang expansion and violence in a number of jurisdictions. Gangs are increasingly engaging in non-traditional gang-related crime, such as alien smuggling, human trafficking, and prostitution. Gangs are also engaging in white collar crime such as counterfeiting, identity theft, and mortgage fraud, primarily due to the high profitability and much lower visibility and risk of detection and punishment than drug and weapons trafficking. U.S.-based gangs have established strong working relationships with Central American and MDTOs to perpetrate illicit cross-border activity, as well as with some organized crime groups in some regions of the United States. U.S.-based gangs and MDTOs are establishing wide-reaching drug networks; assisting in the smuggling of drugs, weapons, and illegal immigrants along the Southwest Border; and serving as enforcers for MDTO interests on the U.S. side of the border (National Gang Intelligence Center [NGIC], 2011).

What sources do they have to back up this statement? They give the following reference to this: "The assessment is based on federal, state, local, and tribal law enforcement and corrections agency intelligence, including information and data provided by the National Drug Intelligence Center (NDIC) and the National Gang Center." In other words, local law-enforcement agencies say

this is so; therefore, it must be true! Yet, law-enforcement estimates are contradicted by other reports. For example, a report from the Justice Policy Institute noted that "A large majority of rural counties and small cities reported no gang problems at the turn of the century, and among those reporting gang problems, 80 percent reported no gang-related homicides." They also reported that "Gang-related homicides are a serious problem in a number of cities, but nationally just one gang homicide occurs annually for every 18 gangs and 570 gang members" (Greene and Pranis, 2007: 56, citing Egley and Ritz 2006; see also Klein and Maxson, 2006). Moreover, most law-enforcement agencies reported no gang-related homicides between 2002 and 2004 (Egley and Ritz, 2006). As research has shown for decades, most homicides involve family members or acquaintances.[2]

Green and Pranis (2007: 51) conclude that both ethnographic and survey research has shown the following:

- The seriousness and extent of criminal involvement varies greatly among gang members.
- Gang members who engage in crime nonetheless spend most of their time in noncriminal pursuits.
- Gang members account for a small share of all crime (including violent crime), even within communities and neighborhoods where there are gang problems.
- Much of the crime committed by gang members is self-initiated and is meant to serve personal rather than gang interests.

The typical crimes committed by gangs have consistently been a garden variety or cafeteria style of offenses (e.g., burglaries, petty theft, vandalism, fighting, and truancy). The major victims of gang violence are other gang members. Innocent bystanders are rarely the victims despite claims from law-enforcement and other officials to the contrary (Klein, 1995: 22).

Two theories have been offered to explain why the crime rate is higher among gang members (Kaufman, 2010). One theory is called the "selection model." According to this view, those most likely to join gangs are "already predisposed toward delinquency and violence." The other perspective is known as the "facilitation model." This view argues that "gang members are no more disposed toward delinquency and violence than others are and would not contribute to higher crime rates if they did not join a gang. However, when they do join a gang, peer pressures promote their increased involvement in delinquency" (Kaufman, 2010). The overwhelming evidence gives support to the latter view.

Gang violence differs in significant ways from nongang violence. An analysis by Klein and Maxson of more than 700 homicides in the Los Angeles area found that gang violence is much more likely to occur in the streets (in contrast, most other homicides occur inside people's homes) and tends to be associated with the use of guns and less often associated with a robbery. Gang-related homicides are more likely to involve a larger number of participants and involve strangers, and the suspects are more often youths (Klein and Maxson, 1989: 223–224). However, when considering the overall rate of involvement in criminal behavior,

there is little question that gang members commit a disproportionate amount of crime, as several studies have shown (Shelden, Snodgrass, and Snodgrass, 1992; Klein and Maxson, 2006; Green and Pranis, 2007).

A study of a sample of youths from neighborhoods (both high school students and dropouts, mostly black and Hispanic youths) in three parts of the country (Chicago, Los Angeles, and San Diego) is instructive. The offending (or participation) rates (of involvement in such offenses at least once during the past year) were higher among gang members for all behaviors (felony, minor assault, robbery, and extortion) except violence. However, for all offenses (including drug possession and drug sales), gang members committed these crimes more frequently than nongang members. Specifically, gang members were about five times more likely than nongang members to commit a crime during a given year, and more than half of the gang members had committed more than one offense during the year (Fagan, 1990).

Among the Chicago gangs, most of the crimes committed during the period under study by Bobrowski (January 1, 1987, to July 31, 1988) were intraracial and involved Part II offenses[3] (it must be stressed that these data are based on those known to the police and are therefore subject to underreporting). Crimes were about equally divided between personal and property crimes (49.7% were personal). The largest category was vice offenses (mostly drugs), which accounted for almost 30 percent. The next most common offense was aggravated battery (22%), with simple battery ranking third (15.6%).

What is most interesting is that Part I gang offenses[4] constituted less than 1 percent of all Part I crimes in the city of Chicago. However, when considering homicides and serious assaults, gang offenses accounted for as much as 18 percent of the homicides during certain months. Furthermore, in certain neighborhoods, this percentage was even higher, with gang homicides accounting for 28 percent in one particular area (Bobrowski, 1988: 42–44).

A study by McCorkle and Miethe (1998, 2001) challenged the notion that gangs are responsible for most of the crimes in a given jurisdiction. Examining court records in Las Vegas, Nevada, for the years 1989–1995, they discovered that the proportion of defendants charged with index crimes who were identified as gang members was quite low. For violent index crimes, for example, the proportion who were gang members ranged from 2 to 6 percent. Gang members were most often involved in murder cases, but even here, their percentage of the total murder cases ranged from 10 to 23 percent during this period of time. As for property offenses, gang members constituted from 2 to 7 percent of the total; they were most likely to be involved in motor-vehicle theft (ranging from 4% to 12%). The myth that gangs dominate the drug scene was shattered by this study, as the researchers found that gang members constituted from 2 to 8 percent of all felony drug defendants. These figures were in stark contrast to local media and law-enforcement reports that gangs had taken over the drug market.

Similar findings have been reported for studies covering Dallas (where only 8% of the crimes were committed by gang members; Fritsch, Tory, Caeti, and Taylor 2003) and in Westminster, California (7% were committed by gang members; Kent et al., 2000).

In the most recent National Youth Gang Survey (NYGS) covering the period 2002–2007, more than half of the jurisdictions did not report a single gang-related homicide—this includes 77 percent of the rural counties and 80 percent of the smaller cities reporting gang problems.[5] Most gang-related homicides occur in larger cities.

> Excluding Chicago and Los Angeles (which, on average, have accounted for roughly one-quarter of all gang homicides recorded in the NYGS over the past seven years), gang homicides increased 8.5 percent in very large cities (with populations of 100,000 or more) from 2002 to 2008. To illustrate the difficulties associated with making generalizations about gang homicide trends, the annual number in Chicago increased 22.5 percent, while the annual number in Los Angeles decreased by 52.3 percent in the 7-year time frame.[6]

A recent study in Toronto sheds new light on the subject (Wortley and Tanner, 2006). This study compared youths in what was described as "social gangs" (not involved very much in criminal activities) and "criminal gangs" (heavy involvement in crime). They found that about half of the "criminal" gang members sold drugs, compared to none of the social gang members and 2 percent of the nongang members. Also, just over one-third (35%) of criminal gang members said they broke into a home or business, compared to 2 percent of social gang members and 2 percent of nongang members. With respect to violence, 90 percent of the criminal gang members reportedly got into a physical fight, compared to just 27 percent of social gang members and 26 percent of nongang members.

The use of weapons is common in many gangs. In Chicago, for example, handguns were used in about 16 percent of all crimes and in about one-fourth of all crimes against the person (murder, rape, robbery, and assault); but they were used in 93 percent of all homicides and 42 percent of all serious assaults. Other kinds of weapons were used in the majority (55%) of all other crimes reported. It should be noted that included in the term *weapon* was "hands/feet." The use of hands or feet accounted for 29 percent of all crimes in which a weapon was used; hands or feet were used in 86 percent of the simple batteries involving a weapon, and hands or feet were involved in 93 percent of the strong-arm robberies involving a weapon. In fact, hands and feet were the most commonly used weapon (constituting 15.9% of all cases, compared to 15.7% for handguns), according to the Chicago data (Bobrowski, 1988: 42–44; Appendix D, Table 21).

It should be emphasized that for most gangs, the bulk of their time is not spent committing crimes. Hagedorn's gangs spent most of their time partying and hanging out (Hagedorn, 1998: 94; a similar finding was reported by Huff, 1989: 530). As noted in Chapter 2, Malcolm Klein has commented on how boring gang life is. When they hang out, it is usually by a park or a taco stand, and they are "smoking, drinking, roughhousing, playing a pickup ball game, messing with a few girls, or sauntering up a street in a possessive, get-outta-our-way fashion" (Klein, 1995: 22). More recently, Klein and Maxson (2006) have reiterated these observations.

When they do get involved in crime, it is either fighting (mostly with other gangs) or hustling, which included petty theft and drug sales. Drugs will be discussed in a later section, but it should be noted here that, as Hagedorn found for Milwaukee gangs, selling drugs "for most gang members is just another low-paying job—one that might guarantee 'survival,' but not much else" (Hagedorn, 1998: 103; see also Padilla, 1992; Klein, 1995). The minimal amount of violence actually engaged in by gangs has been corroborated by other studies (Horowitz, 1983a, 1987; Keiser, 1969; Miller, 1975). Property crimes remain the major type of offense committed by gangs.

Having said this, as already noted, gang members do in fact commit more crime than nongang members. This has been demonstrated in numerous studies, such as a study by Huff (1996, 1998) as part of a project funded by the National Institute of Justice that included gang and nongang but "at-risk" youth in three parts of the country (Colorado, Ohio, and Florida). Not surprisingly, the gang members were found to be more involved in criminal activity. Gang members were significantly more likely to engage in drug selling, assault, theft, weapons-related offenses, shoplifting, and a host of other crimes. One of the most interesting findings was that the first arrest for gang members typically came *after* becoming a gang member. In fact, in each of the areas where the research was conducted, the pattern was as follows: The youths began hanging out with the gangs at around age 12 or 13, joined the gang around 6 to 12 months later (between ages 13 and 14), and incurred their first arrest at around age 14. Typically they experience their first arrest about six months after they join the gang (Huff, 1998).

The findings from a widely reported survey in Rochester, Seattle, and Denver further reinforce these findings but add one more important fact, namely that being in the gang results in more criminal activity. In this study, it was found that gang members committed the bulk of serious violent offenses, serious property offenses, and drug sale offenses and did so *while they were gang members* (Thornberry, Huizinga, and Loeber, 2004). Also, when comparing levels of offending between those who were in a gang and those who were not, the gang members had a much higher rate of offending (Thornberry et al., 2007).

All of these findings are corroborated by other researchers on U.S. gangs (Battin et al., 1998; Esbensen and Huizinga, 1993; Thornberry et al., 1993; Esbensen and Lynskey, 2001; Decker and Curry, 2002) and European gangs (Bradshaw, 2005; Esbensen and Weerman, 2005) in addition to Canadian gangs (Gatti et al., 2005; LaCourse et al., 2003).

Why do gang members commit more crimes than nongang members? According to research by Reiner, part of the reason is that gangs tend to attract individuals who are in the highest at-risk group in society—adolescent males who live in urban areas. However, Reiner also notes that there are "three realities of life in the gang subculture which drive the crime rate: fighting, partying and unemployment" (Reiner, 1992: 55).

In the first instance, most gang homicides are the result of "gang fights over turf, status and revenge." They "are the results of traditional gang codes which require members to fight to prove their honor, manhood and loyalty" (Reiner, 1992: 55). Reiner further notes that

> Boys who are toying with the gang lifestyle—hanging around with friends, perhaps, and timid or slow about speaking out—may suddenly, and unintentionally, become targets or accessories to drive-by shootings. There is a finality to such episodes, even when they do not end in death. For they can drag young men over the line and leave them there—exposed to arrest and imprisonment; fearful of retaliation from other gangs; wary of any action which would trigger rejection by friends they need now more than ever. Each attack thus creates a chain reaction of complicity, vengeance and commitment (1992: 55).

Partying tends to increase the likelihood of crime because, first, it corresponds with heavy drinking and drug use, both related to crime. Also, there is a need to obtain drugs for parties, costing money, which in turn brings gang members into contact with the illegal drug world. Because most gang members are without work (either because it is unavailable or because they have never been socialized into good work habits), crime becomes a part-time job. The most common crimes tend to be robberies (because they can produce money fairly quickly) and drug dealing.

It is important to note that the commission of these crimes is rarely a gang activity as such but rather the product of a small group of gang members. The gang, it should be noted, does not condone such activity, and in fact most discourage it. Moreover, "the crimes themselves are not committed on behalf of the gang, nor are proceeds shared. The individuals (or groups, which may include nongang members as well as homeboys) who commit such crimes do so for their own reasons and by their own rules—and that includes drug dealing" (Reiner, 1992: 58–59). This fact is important to underscore because it contradicts the theory underlying most gang-enhancement statutes (that increase the punishment if the crime is gang related), which suggests that gang crimes are committed on behalf of the gang.

One of the most recent studies (Decker, Katz, and V. J. Webb, 2008) was based on interviews with gang members in three different booking locations in Arizona. The aim of this study was to determine the relationship between the degree of gang organization and criminal activity (in this case, violent crimes and drug offenses). What is interesting about this study is that they considered the relationship between victimization and the degree of gang organization. Their findings are summarized as follows: "Individuals who were members of more organized gangs report higher victimization counts, more gang sales of different kinds of drugs, and more violent offending by the gang than do members of less organized gangs" (2008: 15). They also note that the strongest correlation was "between the degree of gang organization and violent offending" (2008: 16). Further, even though these gangs were not highly organized, they concluded that "what organization does exist is related to increased involvement in drug sales, violent offending, and violent victimization" (2008). Another recent study arrived at almost identical results that gang members are more likely than nongang members to be victims of crime.

Prior to moving on to the next section of this chapter, it is important to keep in mind something we have already said, namely that the vast majority of

gang activities do *not* revolve around criminal activities. Nor is it the case that most gangs are involved in any systematic, highly organized criminal activities.

GANG VIOLENCE

There was a surge in gang-related violence in the 1980s and early 1990s. Moore's follow-up study of her first study of East Los Angeles gangs (Moore, 1978) is instructive and warrants discussion in some detail. She began by noting that gang violence was on the rise in the Los Angeles area. Whereas between 1970 and 1979 gang homicides accounted for 16 percent of all Hispanic homicides, gang homicides accounted for only 7 percent of the homicides among other ethnic groups (Moore, 1991: 57–58).

Moore cites the following reasons for gang fights: invasion of gang territory by a rival gang, rivalry over dating, fights related to sporting events, and personal matters in which the gang is brought in to support someone. During the 1970s, there were more deaths among gang cliques than in the 1950s. Moore offers two explanations for this. The first has to do with weapons. Not only were there more guns available in the 1970s, but those who used them were more likely intending to hurt someone rather than just to intimidate. Second, a greater degree of impersonality entered the picture, especially with the emergence of the drive-by shooting. This is related to the demise of the fair fight, whereby when the fight ends, the fighters shake hands and go their separate ways.

Moore comments that "younger members often want to match or outdo the reputation of their predecessors. Respondents from the more violent cliques were significantly more likely to believe that their clique was more violent than its immediate predecessor" (1991: 60).

It may be tempting to explain the increase in gang violence by pointing to exaggerated masculine behavior, or machismo. However, this term, says Moore, refers just as much to control as it does to aggressiveness. Increased violence by the younger cliques has been described as a reflection of members being loco (crazy) or *muy loco*. Moore states that "locura is the 'craziness' or wildness that is stereotypically associated with Chicano gangs and their *vatos locos* (crazy guys)" (1991: 62). It is especially related to unrestrained conduct on the part of a member. But even the definitions of *locura* have changed over time, often becoming linked to violence among the younger members.

Also, more of the recent clique members described themselves as either *loco* or *muy loco* (81% versus 65% of the older members); they also were more likely than the older members to emphasize violence in describing themselves. And it is the more extreme *locos* in a gang who are most likely to start fights.

Moore concludes by saying, "In general the elevated level of violence over time had some relationship to each clique's sense that it must outdo its predecessor and also with some elements of the changing definitions of *locura*. Violence also puts the gang under considerable strain. This is a consequence of the 'code of the barrio.' In part, this translates into a norm that homeboys back one

another up in all situations, especially fights.... This 'code of the barrio' is one of the prime sources of lethal violence, especially in more recent times when guns replaced one-on-one fighting to establish a pecking order" (1991:65).

There is little question that the level of violence was related to the increasing availability of guns, especially the high-powered, semiautomatic weapons that, in the words of Reiner, "have profoundly altered the balance of power on the streets" (1992: 87). Much of this is a direct result of more money being made selling drugs, so that there is a decreasing need to steal guns. As one gang member put it, because of involvement in drug selling, "now you can just go buy a Mac 10 [an assault weapon] if that's what you want, instead of burglarizing somebody's house to get a weapon" (Bing, 1991: 223, quoted in Reiner, 1992: 87–88). The more weapons that are available, and the more powerful the weapons are, the more violence there will be. An increasing number of gang members carry guns with them all the time. One result of this is an increase in spur-of-the-moment shootings. Finally, with many of the new weapons, poor marksmanship is no longer a problem. Reiner concludes that "fewer constraints on violence, more shootings, fewer misses, and a greater chance of killing bystanders—that's a sure-fire recipe for accelerating the classic action/reaction cycle of gang attack and revenge" (Reiner, 1992: 89).

The violence committed by gang members was often shocking in its ferocity and is incomprehensible to ordinary citizens. Reiner notes that many rival gang members grew up in the same general area (perhaps a block or two is all that separated them) and went to elementary school together. But upon entering early adolescence, when the gang becomes more salient in their lives, they begin to drift apart. "Perhaps it is this very familiarity which yields such intensity of feelings. It also explains, incidentally, why gang members are usually very accurate (bystander casualties notwithstanding) about who they attack. These battles take place within small, fairly intimate local communities. In that sense, they are reminiscent of blood feuds from other cultures" (Reiner, 1992: 57–65). As with violence among acquaintances in general, violence can erupt over minor insults. One ongoing conflict, so far involving the deaths of at least two dozen people, is between two Crip gangs: the Rollin' 60s and the Eight Tray Gangsters. It allegedly started over a junior high school romance (Reiner, 1992).

Gang violence is also enhanced because gangs often attract young men who, frankly, enjoy violence. Reiner makes the following assessment: "The stark reality is that Los Angeles is producing an extraordinary number of dangerous, alienated young men—and, one way or another, there is a price to be paid for that in terms of crime. It may even be that gangs should be seen as symptoms rather than causes. After all, if gangs disappeared tomorrow, there is no reason to believe their members would join the Boy Scouts" (1992: 59).

Speaking of drugs, the assumption that gang leaders order members to commit violence to secure control of drug markets and other criminal enterprises is not true. Several studies have found that homicides are not very closely related to drug dealing but rather "are associated with external challenges to group solidarity and internal challenges to group norms" (Greene and Pranis, 2007: 59). Among Chinese gang members, one source noted that the police often assume

that they commit violence because of drugs. However, interviews of Chinese gang members by Chin found that only around 15 percent were involved in drug sales and that violence with rival gangs stemmed from "staring" during encounters in public locations (this was mentioned by 45% of the members Chin interviewed) and fights over "turf" (mentioned by 32%). Fights with their own gang members were mostly over girls and money. Among these gang members, the use of violence was discouraged (Chin, 1996).

One exception to this research is found in a study by Bellair and McNulty (2009). They found that gang members who sell drugs are significantly more violent than those who don't. Moreover, it was found that "the gap between those groups is larger in disadvantaged neighborhoods."

Violence results from the connection between the emotions of fear, ambition, frustration, and testing of skills and the encounters during which such emotions are apparent. Fear is one emotion that instigates this specific kind of violence. It is manifested through the concepts of respect and honor, concepts that are particularly relevant within the Chicano culture (as noted in Chapter 3). Violence occurs most often against those who show a lack of respect or challenge the gang's honor, at least as perceived by the gang. This is very important because gang members firmly believe that if there is not respect, honor, and reputation, there is nothing (and the gang member comes to believe that he is a nobody). Also, attacking a member of one's own gang may be a way of advancing in the organization.

Violence is often associated with frustration and anger, which emerge from three main sources. First, violence may be a result of verbal combat, also referred to in street language as the **dozens.** A common occurrence is that the dozens routine simply gets out of control, and someone's honor or respect is challenged or offended. A second source is over women. From the perspective of the gang members Jankowski studied, the women are often viewed as property, and sexual advances to someone else's woman will result in violence. The women he studied had apparently resigned themselves to a level of subordination. A third source is the result of physiological reactions to food deprivation, inadequate rest, and taking drugs. A poor diet, consisting of too much fat and carbohydrates and low protein, plus the ingestion of drugs and lack of good sleep and rest (gang members usually stay up most of the night and therefore have to sleep in the day, which is difficult because others are up and about making noise), often caused them to be tired and irritable. Moreover, the buildings in which they live are poorly insulated or have poor climate control (either too hot or too cold).

The fights between members of the same gang are often more intense and serious than fights with others. Jankowski suggests that fellow gang members are not really viewed as brothers. They are "loners who have chosen to participate not because the gang represents a family (with brothers) but because they perceive it to be, at least in the short run, in their best interests" (Jankowski, 1991: 148).

Horowitz (1983b: 81) succinctly summarizes the important relationships among insults, honor, and violence. She suggests that public humiliation causes a person to question his own competence or weakness. This is especially important for young men without many personal accomplishments or valued social

roles to protect their own self-worth when they are insulted. In a culture (such as the Chicano one about which both Horowitz and Jankowski have written) that emphasizes machismo and "defines violations of interpersonal etiquette in an adversarial manner, any action that challenges a person's right to deferential treatment in public ... can be interpreted as an insult and a potential threat to manhood." This situation demands that the offended male be able to respond. Horowitz states that this situation is particularly acute for youths because of their lack of educational and occupational success (1983: 247). Further, dishonor is something that is perceived as a loss of manhood, and the response to this, according to this subculture, must be physical. In short, "violence is triggered by the norms of the code of personal honor" (1983: 82; see also Anderson, 1994).

Violence by gang members is, as already noted, more prevalent than violence among nongang members of the same general age group and similar socioeconomic backgrounds. There are no known jurisdictions where gang homicides outnumber nongang homicides, however, because most homicides are committed by adults in totally different contexts. Klein's research documents the many differences between gang and nongang homicides. For example, homicides committed by gang members are more likely to be committed on the streets, with the use of guns and with a greater number of participants, and to involve victims with no prior contact with their assailants and where both the suspects and the victims are considerably younger (Klein, 1995: 114–115). Speaking of the streets, one study found that street corners dominated by gangs have a much greater level of crime than corners not dominated by gangs, and this includes violence (Ratcliffe and Taniguchi, 2008).

Gang-related homicides in Los Angeles are interesting because of the fluctuations during the 1980s and 1990s. Klein and Maxson collected data covering the years 1980 through 1997 (figures through 1992 found in Klein, 1995: 120; figures from 1993 to 1997 from Maxson, 1999).

Gang-related homicides really took off in the mid-1980s, exactly during the time when crack was introduced into the streets of Los Angeles. There was also a noteworthy increase in the availability and lethality of weapons during this time (Klein, 1995: 116). The number of gang-related homicides went from 212 in 1983 to more than 800 by 1992; the percentage of all homicides that were gang related went from 10 to around 45 during that period of time. A more detailed analysis revealed that part of this increase was directly related to the increase in drive-by shootings. Between 1989 and 1991, the number of these incidents went from 1,112 to 1,543, with the number of victims increasing from 1,675 to 2,222, and the number of deaths going from 78 to 141. The average number per day went from 3.0 in 1989 to 4.2 in 1991 (Klein, 1995: 118).

The good news is that there was a drop from 1992 to 1993, followed by a slight increase to 1995, which in turn was followed by a very significant decrease after 1995. Several possible explanations have been offered to account for this sudden drop, with the most plausible centering around the decrease in crack dealing, the improvement in the overall economy, and an increase in gang truces in the wake of the rioting following the Rodney King decision (Maxson, 1999). A report from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention noted

that between 1996 and 1998, half of the cities surveyed reported a decrease in homicides, while 36 percent reported an increase, and 15 percent reported no change. There was an overall decrease in homicides nationally, which was strongly influenced by trends in Chicago, Los Angeles, and a few other cities with large numbers of gang homicides (Curry, Maxson, and Howell, 2001).

However, as already noted, gang-related homicides were on the rise in Los Angeles in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Part of the reason for this is the fact that so many gang members who were sentenced to prison in the late 1980s and early 1990s have been released. Following many years of what amounted to "warehousing" in California's gang-dominated and violent prisons, these men return with virtually no skills and no hope. And they are returned to the same communities, with the same problems (most of these problems have worsened over the years) and hence the same motives to commit acts of violence (*USA Today*, 2002).

However, the most recent data show that homicides by gang members are a very small proportion of all homicides nationwide. The latest report from the National Gang Center notes that in 2009, out of 167 cities (population over 100,000) that reported homicide data, one-third reported no gang-related homicides while the other cities reported a total of 1,017 gang-related homicides. This was only a 2 percent increase over 2002 (Egley and Howell, 2011: 1–2).

GANGS AND DRUGS

There is little question that drug usage and violent crimes are closely related. What is still in doubt, however, is the relationship between drugs (both usage and sales) and gangs. As far as drug use is concerned, studies spanning three decades have noted that gang members are more likely than nongang members to use drugs and to use them more often (Fagan, 1989; Vigil, 1988; Bobrowski, 1988; Mieczkowski, 1986; Moore, 1978, 1991; Maxson et al., 2011; Harper et al., 2008, Voisin et al., 2008; Swahn et al., 2010; Bjerregaard, 2010).

What is most controversial is the relationship between gangs and drug selling. Most law-enforcement sources contend that gangs control the trafficking of drugs. However, the sources that are cited to support such a view come from surveys of law-enforcement agencies. For example, the latest survey from the National Gang Threat Assessment concludes, "Gang members are the primary retail-level distributors of most illicit drugs. They also are increasingly distributing wholesale-level quantities of marijuana and cocaine in most urban and suburban communities." On the other hand, according to the latest National Gang Center report (Egley and Howell, 2011: 2), about 60 percent of "agencies in jurisdictions with gang activity do not record local drug crimes as gang related—in fact, with the exception of graffiti offenses, nearly half of these agencies as a matter of practice do not record any local crime as gang related." Also, "organizational control of the local drug distribution by gangs is uncommon." Egley and Howell note that several recent studies (e.g., Decker, 2007; Howell, Egley, and Gleason, 2002; McGloin, 2005) "find that most youth gangs lack the

necessary organizational structure and capacity to effectively manage drug distribution operations." They also note that "drug use and drug sales have been shown to increase after joining a gang, and then decrease after leaving the gang" (Egley and Howell, 2011: 2–3).

After a careful review of the findings from scholarly research, Greene and Pranis conclude that

> Studies of several jurisdictions where gangs are active have concluded that gang members account for a relatively small share of drug sales and that gangs do not generally seek to control drug markets. Investigations conducted in Los Angeles and nearby cities found that gang members accounted for one in four drug sale arrests. The Los Angeles district attorney concluded that just one in seven gang members sold drugs on a monthly basis. St. Louis researchers describe gang involvement in drug sales as "poorly organized, episodic, nonmonopolistic [and] not a rationale for the gang's existence." A member of one of San Diego's best-organized gangs explains: "The gang don't organize nothing. It's like everybody is on they own. You are not trying to do nothing with nobody unless it's with your friend. You don't put your money with gangs." (2007: 6)

There is little doubt, however, that some gangs are heavily involved in the sales of drugs, even though they are in the minority. The next section covers this issue in more detail.

Drug Dealing among Gang Members

A study by Fagan (1989) reported that although gang members are far more likely to engage in drug selling than are nongang members, most of them sell drugs on a relatively infrequent basis. Generally, most gang members who sell drugs can be described as small-time dealers (Reiner, 1992: 61). This is not to say that some members of some gangs do not get heavily involved in the drug trade. Gang involvement in the drug-dealing business increased tremendously after the introduction of crack cocaine in Los Angeles in the mid-1980s. As Reiner notes, the change was most dramatic in the black community. From a "trendy but expensive specialty," it shifted "to a low-cost, high-volume product for the mass market. Suddenly, a greatly expanded market had room for countless local 'franchises.' Almost overnight, a major industry was born—with new outlets in every neighborhood, tens of thousands of potential new customers and thousands of available jobs in sales" (Reiner, 1992: 62).

Some reports give a rather exaggerated account of the gang–drug involvement. One report, for example, argued that the Crips and Bloods "have gained control of 30 percent of the crack cocaine market in the United States" (Spergel, 1990: 46). However, the spread of the crack problem as a gang-related problem "is generally attributed to market forces and normal migration patterns of individuals and families seeking economic opportunities [rather] than to a centralized, bureaucratic franchising campaign" (1990: 48).

Klein and Maxson (1990: 6) also take exception to the gang–drug linkage. They offer several reasons why the gang–drug sales connection is not as strong as media reports would have us believe. First, the greater degree of cohesiveness and organization that would be required for a sophisticated drug trafficking network does not normally exist in the typical gang. Also, such a business venture would require a gang "to overcome its own age-group compartmentalization, inter-member suspicions, inter-clique rivalries, age-specific leadership, and a focus on inter-gang rivalries." Second, if a gang were to specialize in profiting from drug sales, it would have to compensate its members. However, because membership fluctuates so much, such compensation would "require far more altruism, fellowship, and organization than is typical for street gangs." Third, strong and effective leadership would be required. The leadership within the typical gang "tends to be age-related and specialized for different functions." Fourth, because drug use and sales are generally combined and because users cannot be trusted (and trust is essential for any efficient business), it seems unlikely that most gangs could be successfully involved in the drug trade. Fifth, and finally, is the issue of violence. A successful drug trade requires instrumental violence, the kind that involves the "enforcer role, or takeover of rival territories," which is quite different from normal gang violence, which tends to be sporadic, retaliatory, unplanned, and expressive. As Klein and Maxson note, "It is no mean trick to convert 'normal' gang violence to that said to be demanded by drug distribution" (Klein and Maxson, 1990: 6).

A study by Skolnick (1990) questioned the conclusions reached by Klein and Maxson. His study, based on detailed interviews with more than 100 inmates (in both adult and juvenile correctional facilities in California), concluded that only a certain type of gang—the entrepreneurial gang—is likely to become heavily involved in drug dealing.

Skolnick wanted to focus on, among other things, the conflicting perspectives of Southern California convicts and the findings of Klein and Maxson on the extent of gang involvement in drug dealing. Law-enforcement sources claimed that it was increasing, while Klein and Maxson said such claims were exaggerated.

Skolnick argues that neither theory is totally accurate. He offers a **cultural resource theory** instead. To Skolnick, there is a gang culture that "generates values, understanding and trust relationships which facilitate, but do not direct, drug selling or the migration of members. Cultural gangs are initially organized horizontally, stressing values of neighborhood, loyalty, and the equality that obtains among members of a family" (Skolnick, 1990: 7). This applies particularly to Southern California gangs.

The northern California gangs are organized vertically, "with status in the gang dependent upon role performance" (1990: 7). As with any other capitalist organization, the organization of these gangs "is motivated by profits and the control of a particular market or markets. But unlike many capitalist enterprises, not all drug organizations strive for growth or expansion. They often perceive themselves as local businesses. Some may merely seek to control drug sales and distribution within delimited territorial boundaries, such as part of the city or housing project" (Skolnick, 1990: 5). (Padilla's [1992] study of a Puerto Rican gang in Chicago arrived at similar findings.) This may help explain why the

gangs in the San Francisco Bay Area rarely travel (not even to Sacramento), while the Bloods and Crips of Los Angeles travel extensively. Skolnick claims that his research has discovered the paradox that those gangs originally organized for social purposes have more resources at their disposal to support their travels, more than entrepreneurial groups organized to sell drugs.

Skolnick concludes that it is the "cultural and structural organization of gangs, rather than law enforcement or market pressures" (1990: 47), that best explains why some gangs migrate and some do not. The horizontal gangs tend to migrate the most because of the greater loyalty and trust developed within this structure and because these gangs furnish their leaders with more resources to conduct their drug business.

LIMITATIONS OF SKOLNICK'S STUDY AND SOME COUNTER-EVIDENCE

It should be noted that the Skolnick study has some limitations. The most important of these limitations is the fact that the data come from interviews with a small and unrepresentative sample of prison inmates. The gang–drug connection discussed in this study has so far not been supported by most other research (with the exception of Padilla's [1992] work). However, as Reiner (1992: 70) notes, the Skolnick study "may document the rise of independent drug gangs rather than the transformation of traditional turf gangs." Even so, as Reiner suggests, some police officials believe that the gang–drug connection is more valid for black gangs than for Chicano gangs. It may be too early to tell the extent to which black gangs will make a transition to drug-dealing gangs. Reiner arrived at several conclusions regarding the gang–drug connection (1992: 70–75): 1) Gangs are highly likely to exercise at least indirect control over the selling of drugs in their own neighborhoods, but it is incorrect to say that gangs control the supply of drugs; 2) many original gang members (O.G.s) may take on major roles in drug selling, although most gradually drift away from the gang; 3) large-scale operations are generally conducted by "individuals and small groups acting on their own rather than for the gang" (1992:72); 4) gangs often recruit younger members as street-level dealers, and these members continue to engage in other gang-related activities simultaneously; 5) most gang members do engage in some amount of drug dealing, mostly of a limited nature and on their own rather than on behalf of the gang; 6) as with other kinds of businesses, a few gang members make a lot of money dealing drugs, while the majority either make a small amount or fail altogether; 7) gang members who sell drugs usually do not use them and even look down on those who do; and 8) some members of Los Angeles gangs have formed national drug-distributing networks. One report suggests that some ex-members of Crip sets have been identified as selling drugs in a total of 46 states (Reiner, 1992: 76).

Maxson's research provides a counter to the perspective offered by Skolnick and even suggests that those who are *not* in gangs are more involved in drug dealing. Her study compared two cities in the Los Angeles area, Pasadena and

Pomona (Maxson, 1995). Maxson examined a sample of arrest reports by the police and conducted interviews with gang members to assess the connection between gangs and drug sales in the two selected cities. Both of these are rather large suburban areas in Southern California, about 130,000 people each, and both have had a long history of gang and drug problems. In comparing these two cities with 37 other midsized cities around the country, Maxson found that they were close in terms of the number of gangs (e.g., an average of 24 in other cities and 32 in Pasadena and 14 in Pomona), number of gang members (2,200 and 2,000 in Pasadena and Pomona, respectively, and an average of 1,243 nationally), and the number of both Hispanic and black gang members.

Maxson compared drug sale arrests for three years: 1989–1991. What she found was that the majority of those arrested for drug sales were *not* gang members (definitions of gang member and drug sales were based upon law-enforcement sources). Specifically, during the three-year period, there were a total of 916 cocaine sale arrests in Pasadena, of which only 30 percent were gang members; in Pomona, there were 645 cocaine sale arrests, and only 21 percent were gang members.

In her report, Maxson noted that the percentage of gangs involved in cocaine arrests were similar to the percentage for Los Angeles cocaine cases as a whole in 1985 (25%). She also discovered significant racial differences between gang members who were arrested for cocaine sales and their nongang counterparts. Specifically, while 91 percent of the gang members were black, only 76 percent of the nongang members were; in contrast, 20 percent of the nongang members arrested were Hispanic, compared to only 7 percent of the gang members. Over 90 percent of those arrested in both cities were males. Further, in both cities, the majority of drug transactions (about 80%) involved only two participants, few involved any form of violence (5% in Pasadena and 6% in Pomona), and most drug transactions were done in open areas on the streets. Another interesting finding from this research is that while about half of those arrested in each city had cash on them, the average amount was $393 in Pasadena and $235 in Pomona. As for the sale of other drugs, the gang connection was similar, except in Pomona the proportion of arrestees who were not in gangs was considerably higher (92%).

Maxson cautions that many drug sales go undetected and that the data on gang members in police department files are often incomplete. Nevertheless, the data she reports contradict the common belief that gangs are heavily involved in the illegal drug trade. Her findings were even supported by the police chief of Pomona who said that "drug usage, as opposed to drug sales, is a more dominate aspect of gang involvement" (Maxson, 1995: 11).

Some gangs have been rather heavily involved in the drug distribution business. The next section summarizes some of the research on this question.

Gangs as Entrepreneurs: Organized Drug Dealing

Many observers have noted that those who live in impoverished areas are deprived of what Bourdieu (1986) has called "capital," consisting of three types: economic, cultural, and social (see also Field, 2003). Economic capital refers to material

resources available to people; cultural capital refers to skills and knowledge that an individual possesses (education, vocational training, etc.); social capital includes a wide variety of social relationships with family, friends, and other people that together may be referred to as "connections." Normally these three types are associated with legitimate forms of capital, but they can also refer to illegitimate forms. Access to drug markets, gangs, and so on can be included. The lack of access to legitimate economic, cultural, and social capital leaves many poor people, such as gang members, with little chance in advancing in legitimate pursuits. As strain theory (see Chapter 7) suggests, those caught in this position have little recourse but to pursue illegitimate forms of capital. This was found to be the case in a study of Latino and Asian gang members (Pih et al., 2008).

In Jankowski's (1990) study of gang members in three large cities, we see evidence of the result of the deprivation of capital. Here he found that they had a strong "entrepreneurial spirit." This spirit encompassed a set of favorable attitudes toward accumulating money. One source of these attitudes is tensions between the consumer culture and the scarcity of resources in low-income neighborhoods. One message these youths receive is that activities not requiring cash are unsatisfying.

Many gang members do not want to take risks, so not all volunteer to participate in implementing plans. Often they have to be coaxed to do so. Many feel that there may be a strong possibility of being arrested and going to jail if they participate in a certain activity. However, fear of incarceration varies. Chicano gangs are far less likely to have such a fear because going to jail enhances their status. "So many Chicano gang members have gone to jail that imprisonment has ceased to be something feared and has become something expected" (Jankowski, 1990: 116).

Moore's study of Chicano gangs in East Los Angeles corroborates this. In fact, her data strongly suggest that for most gang members, the prison is experienced as a climax institution. In other words, going to prison is not a dramatic departure from their prior existence in the real world. Moore notes that "prison is no very big change for a man who walks a lifelong slack-wire between the highly personalized and emotionally consuming worlds of the barrio and of the institutional agencies" (Moore, 1978: 105–106).

As the preceding description makes clear, some of the characteristics of these gang members are not unlike the "spirit of capitalism" so common among those in the legitimate business world. In a similar vein, Taylor (1990a, 1990b) argues that drugs have become a unifying economic force for today's gangs, just as alcohol was during Prohibition. The intense demand for drugs has created an economic opportunity for gangs to act as suppliers. The gangs of the 1990s are no longer the same as those of the 1950s or 1970s, says Taylor. Today's gangs are entrepreneurs engaged in a corporate, albeit illegal, enterprise. They are, continues Taylor, the illegal counterparts of IBM and other legitimate corporations. As a result, a great number of today's gangs are highly organized and extremely deadly.

One of the best illustrations of the "spirit of capitalism" as it applies to gangs is described by the authors of the best-selling book *Freakonomics* (Levitt and Dubner, 2005). This is the subject of the next section.

Crack Dealing as a Business: The Black Gangster Disciples

The title of the chapter in *Freakonomics* (Levitt and Dubner, 2005) is "Why Do Drug Dealers Still Live with Their Moms?" The short answer is because they earn poverty wages dealing drugs on the street corners.[7]

As Levitt and Dubner explain it, the story begins with a young India-born man by the name of Sudhir Venkatesh who in 1989 began to pursue his PhD in sociology at the University of Chicago. His advisor, the prominent sociologist William Julius Wilson, sent him into the field to conduct a survey in one of the poorest neighborhoods in Chicago. What Venkatesh discovered was a gold mine of data provided by the leader of a drug gang that was a branch of the Black Gangster Disciple Nation. Venkatesh was trying to distribute a questionnaire when he was befriended by the leader of the gang, who happened to have a college degree in business. Venkatesh proceeded to practically live with this gang for about six years. He eventually was given a complete set of notebooks that consisted of a record of the gang's financial transactions covering four years. The records included drug sales, wages paid to workers, dues paid by some of the members, and even death benefits paid to the families of murdered members!

Venkatesh eventually earned his PhD and ended up at Harvard as a fellow. It was here he met Steven Levitt and together they took advantage of the financial books of the gang. The books provide a fascinating glimpse of the world of illegal drug dealing, and it turns out that this business was run like a lot of other American businesses. In fact, as the authors note, "if you were to hold a McDonald's organizational chart and a Black Disciples org chart side by side, you could hardly tell the difference" (Levitt and Dubner, 2005: 96).

It was discovered that the leader ("J.T.") reported to a board of directors (about 20 men), to which he paid about 20 percent of his earnings. Below J.T. were three "officers" who reported directly to him. One was called an "enforcer" (in charge of providing security for the gang), a "treasurer" (obviously one who looked after the "liquid assets" of the gang), and a "runner" (in charge of transporting the drugs to and from the supplier). Under these officers were "street-level salesmen" called "foot soldiers." The ultimate goal of a foot soldier was to someday become an officer (not unlike millions of workers of American businesses); there were around 25 foot soldiers, depending on the season of the year (the fall was the best time for sales). At the bottom of the organization were people known as the "rank and file" (numbering up to around 200). They were not so much "employees" but rather young males who paid dues (some for protection and some hoping someday to become foot soldiers).

Perhaps the most interesting part of this study was the "notebooks" and the information they provided. The total monthly revenues during the first year came to $32,000 ($24,800 in drug sales, plus $5,100 in dues, and $2,100 in "extortionary taxes"). The "extortionary taxes" were paid by other businesses that operated in the gang's territory (e.g., grocery stores, pimps, people selling stolen goods, etc.).

As with any business, there were expenses, which came to $14,000 per month, broken down as follows: 1) wholesale costs of drugs = $5,000; 2) board of director's fee = $5,000; 3) mercenary fighters = $1,300; 4) weapons = $300;

5) miscellaneous = $2,400. Mercenary fighters were those that were not members of the gang but were hired on a temporary basis to help fight during gang wars. The cost of weapons was low because the gang had a side deal with the local gun runners in the area whereby the gang provided protection. Among the miscellaneous expenses included legal fees, bribes, gang-sponsored "community events," and, perhaps most interesting, money paid to families of gang members who were murdered (this included funeral expenses plus a "stipend" of up to three years' wages paid to the families). A gang member told Venkatesh that "we grieve when they grieve. You got to respect the family."

After all the expenses were paid, J.T. took in $8,500 per month—$100,000 per year tax free. Not bad, providing you don't get killed or sent to prison. (J.T. eventually went to prison after a federal indictment broke up his gang.) In fact, about one-third of the board of directors (who could earn up to $500,000 per year) did time in prison. Then came J.T.'s three officers who collectively earned $2,100 per month or an average of $700 per month; then came the 50 foot soldiers who collectively earned $7,400 per month ($148 each). Now comes the reason why they lived with their moms: these foot soldiers earned about $3.30 per hour!

Finally, the ultimate "bottom line" of this "capitalist enterprise" that makes it different from mainstream businesses was the high probability that a member (including the board of directors) would be arrested and sent to prison, be seriously injured, or be killed. Over the four-year period covered by the financial notebooks, the typical fate of each member was to be arrested around six times, receive just over two nonfatal injuries, and have a one in four chance of being killed. You read that right: a 1 in 4 chance of being killed on the job! Compare this to the most dangerous occupation in the country, that of timber cutters, who have only a 1 in 200 chance of being killed on the job (Levitt and Dubner, 2005: 101).

Knowing this, one might reasonably wonder why anyone in this area would want to be a member of this gang. Looking at the demographics of the community surrounding this gang (typical of most gangs) provides an answer: more than half (56%) of the children live in poverty, less than 5 percent of the adults went to college, and only around one-third worked; the median income was $15,000 a year (2005: 102).

Levitt and Dubner summarize the situation as follows:

> The problem with crack dealing is the same as in every other glamour profession: a lot of people are competing for a very few prizes. Earning big money in the crack gang wasn't much more likely than the Wisconsin farm girl becoming a movie star or the high-school quarterback playing in the NFL. But criminals, like everyone else, responded to incentives. So if the prize is big enough, they will form a line down the block just hoping for a chance. On the south side of Chicago, people wanting to sell crack vastly outnumbered the available street corners (2005: 103).

Another example of the entrepreneurial activities of gangs is illustrated by a gang studied by Padilla (1992), called the Diamonds.

Another Chicago Drug Gang: The Diamonds

The Diamonds were originally a musical group, but the killing of one of their members by a rival gang was the catalyst for changing them into a violent gang. This act occurred in 1971, and for the ensuing six years, this gang engaged in violent confrontations with rival gangs. The gang gradually became more of a business in the mid-1970s. The Illinois Controlled Substance Act of 1971 increased the penalties for adults who sold heroin and cocaine, making the sanction for such selling a mandatory 20-year prison term. The adults in the area, aware that juveniles received light sentences, began to use them in their drug-dealing ventures. In effect, these youngsters became an instant source of cheap labor for adult drug dealers. Several members of the Diamonds were hired by adult drug dealers because they were juveniles. It was not too long before several members of the gang began to think about starting their own drug-dealing business. So, like a new company issuing stock, they asked other members to donate money to start the business (Padilla, 1992: 95–97).

During the 1970s, there was an increasing demand for drugs, especially cocaine. In fact, the demand was greater than the supply. "There was simply too much money to be made to forgo this economic opportunity, as more and more people began to use drugs; it was almost a natural act for the youth gang, which already controlled the streets of different neighborhoods, to become involved in this type of business. Youngsters realized that, by taking control over street-level drug dealing, they would have a long-lasting clientele desiring to purchase their goods" (1992: 15). What helped the Diamonds, first, as suggested previously, was that they already had control of their own neighborhood. Second, gang alliances that brought about the People Nation and the Folk Nation were aimed at reducing inter-gang violence. The alliance resulted in a better environment in which to conduct business. "Each gang was permitted to operate its business from a relatively safe turf or marketplace, selling only to those customers who voluntarily frequented there" (1992: 101).[8] After all, with so much demand for drugs, it made good business sense. (This is similar to what occurred as a result of the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment, prohibiting the sale of alcoholic beverages—namely, the rise of organized crime.)

Part of the motivation for these youths was their belief that traditional jobs did not pay enough to enable them to purchase the goods they wanted. These youths were also very pessimistic about the future of the economy. They rejected the traditional middle-class norm of success and, because of the strain from the lack of legitimate opportunities, became, in effect, innovators, as Merton (1968) predicted they would (Padilla, 1992: 101–103). "The youth gang as an ethnic enterprise came to represent an economic strategy with which they would create a niche for themselves outside a system that denied them equal participation. In brief, the youth gang became these youngsters' reply to a system of opportunity they believed to be closed" (1992: 14).

The gang became a sort of counter-organization or counterculture. The most important part of this culture was a collective ideology that bound them together as a whole, much like a family, and somewhat like a partnership in a

business venture. Their business was analogous to a local mom-and-pop grocery store, as they catered to a "base of local consumers or people who are referred by friends." As one gang member told Padilla, "People from the neighborhood know that they can get smoke, cane, and other things from us" (1992: 107–108). They also believed that they could not succeed individually but could succeed if they acted together as a group.

The gang business of the Diamonds is run like any other business with a bureaucratic structure. At the top of this structure are the cocaine and marijuana suppliers or distributors. These are the leaders of the gang, often called the "older guys" or "mainheads." The distributor, says Padilla, "embodies the dream which the larger society had denied Puerto Rican youngsters." The distributors resemble an exclusive club and are not unlike the superstars of the NBA. But, like these superstars, only a few make it that far (1992: 112).[9]

This business enterprise is also typically capitalistic in another sense. Most of the workers within the gang hierarchy are street-level dealers. The goal of these individuals is to become independent businessmen, but success is rare. The average profit is only about $100 to $150 per week. However, the profit for the distributor is from $1,000 to $2,000 per week (Padilla, 1992: 135).

At the bottom of the hierarchy are youths who make money stealing. They are called Peewees or Littles. Most often, this stealing is a way to prove loyalty to the gang (1992: 113). These individuals are the youngest members of the gang, generally between 13 and 15 years of age. Older gang members take advantage of these youngsters because they realize that, if they are caught, the juvenile justice system will be lenient toward them. Also, the Peewees are perceived by older members as a little crazy—that is, with little regard for their actions and a desire to demonstrate their commitment to the gang. Some of these individuals already have a reputation for stealing and want to display their talent. Most of the stealing is done in groups or crews (Padilla, 1992: 118–119). It is important to note that it is the policy of the gang to never steal in its own neighborhood, so they burglarize homes and businesses in other areas (1992: 124).

Stealing cars is a common crime the gang commits. Quite often, they steal specific types of cars as requested by those who operate "chop shops." Gang members become familiar with several of these operations in the Chicago area. Many times, chop shop operators tell members of the gang where a specific car is located. Contrary to popular stereotypes, however, the amount of money the car thieves earn is rather small, usually between $20 and $50 per car. Most of the time the money is spent on each other or on girlfriends (1992: 126–127).

Eventually those who have proven themselves good at stealing will be given an opportunity to take on jobs as street-level drug dealers working for the drug distributors. This job is in many ways like any job in the legitimate world of work. Padilla writes that "street-level dealers are not independent workers; rather, they are employed by the gang's distributors, or "mainheads," and perform their jobs in accordance with job rules established by their superiors" (1992: 129). They become street-level dealers with the ultimate goal of becoming distributors, but this turns out to be a dream few realize.

Most of them begin working as ***runners*** or ***mules.*** "The job description for these individuals entails making deliveries, or drops, of merchandise for various customers of the distributors, not unlike someone who drives a beer truck for a distributor and delivers to bars and restaurants (Padilla, 1992: 130). As with any other job, the employers are looking for people who can be trusted and who are hard workers. Unlike legitimate work, however, this work is often irregular, with many downtimes when the "heat is on." Many of the gang members interviewed by Padilla continued stealing to supplement their income while working as runners.

Working as a runner provides a person with some valuable training in good business skills. For example, they learn how to manage customers, not letting them take advantage of their youthfulness and inexperience, and learn how to show who is in control. They also learn that most of the profits go to the distributors and that as long as they remain runners, their wages will be low. Yet, like wage earners in the legitimate business world, most of these runners do not realize they are being manipulated and kept as part of an "army of reserve workers" that Marx once wrote about (Marx, 1964). Padilla notes that these youngsters believe what the distributors tell them—that their low wages are due chiefly to the fact that not enough people are buying or are not buying in large enough quantities. The runners believe that "this form of labor exploitation could be best resolved once they had achieved the occupation of street-level dealer" (Padilla, 1992: 132).

The job of ***street-level dealer*** is the next stage in the occupational hierarchy, in which runners become hired dealers for the distributors and work on a consignment basis—that is, they are given the drugs on credit, not unlike salesmen in legitimate businesses. Those who have worked their way up to this position have proven themselves to be competent and trustworthy workers. Still, the money they make is small compared to the money made by independent dealers or distributors. One gang member interviewed by Padilla stated that his biggest profit in a week's time was between \$100 and \$200, while the distributor he was working for made as much as \$1,000 to \$2,000 off his sales (1992: 135).

The method of operations is quite sophisticated, again not unlike in legitimate businesses. Usually street-level dealers claim a specific block or corner (called their turf or marketplace) and ply their trade at this location. This is, of course, risky, because they always face the possibility of being invaded and taken over by rival gang members. It is little wonder that violence is often common as competitors try to take over a marketplace (1992: 137). One of the main differences between this scenario and legitimate businesses (aside from the obvious legal difference) is that competitors in the legitimate world have lawyers who do battle in a courtroom rather than in the streets.

When the police attempt to break up their marketplace, the gang members, knowing that they have customers to satisfy, will learn of this beforehand and establish their turf at a different location.

After they have established a turf, the next order of business is establishing a clientele. As customers continue to consume the drugs, they become, in effect, salespeople for the product because they tell others where to purchase good

drugs (not unlike in the legitimate business world when one customer tells another where to buy a certain product). But actually it is more accurate to use the phrase "controlling the customer," because the dealers never know if the individual is a legitimate customer or working for the police. Also, dealers usually work in groups on the various street corners and blocks to provide protection not only from the police but also from customers who may want to rip them off.

Another common practice is to "control the law." What this means is that the gang members "must contend with the ever-present possibility of police detection," for there is the danger of becoming a victim of a buy-bust, when the police working undercover will buy drugs from street-level dealers and then proceed to arrest them. Many of the street-level dealers learn that certain police officers can be bought for the right amount of money (Padilla, 1992: 146). One method of avoiding getting busted is to simply ask a suspicious-looking customer to step out of the car and test the merchandise, for example, by smoking a joint. They also find several good hiding places for their drugs within their neighborhood.

The labor within the gang is highly exploitative, with few moving into their own businesses as independents. Not unlike in the mainstream labor market, the pay is low. They earn mostly survival income. One gang member told Padilla that, after working from about 4:00 in the afternoon until around 10 p.m., he earned between $250 and $300 for his employer but only $70 to $80 for himself and sometimes less than this (1992: 171). Another said he often earned around $25 out of $200 worth of sales. Despite hard work, dealers rarely venture beyond their own little corner in the neighborhood. Most believe they will become distributors, just like most playground basketball players believe they will be in the NBA. The street-level dealers are a cheap and permanent supply of labor. The distributors help keep it this way. In short, it is pure capitalism. The money is sporadic, with peaks and valleys. The majority of the youths Padilla studied spent most of the day and well into the night "working the block" or standing on the corner because a sale could occur at 6 a.m. or at midnight. Such a scenario is similar to that of a car salesman who stands around all day long waiting to make a sale.

After a period of time, disillusionment set in for many members of the Diamonds. As Padilla concludes, "For these youngsters the gang did not serve as the leverage necessary for improving their life chances in society, as they had earlier envisioned. Instead of functioning as a progressive and liberating agent capable of transforming and correcting the youngsters' economic plight, the gang assisted in reinforcing it" (1992: 163). They soon learned that the business of the gang was established to benefit mostly the chiefs and mainheads. As one gang member put it, "I used to see guys with the big cars and the ladies, and I thought everyone was like that. But those guys are the mainheads. You know, they are the suppliers, and there are only a few of them around" (1992: 165).

The gang members interviewed by Padilla dreamed of one day establishing their own business and could never anticipate (perhaps because as they were growing up, they got only bits and pieces of the whole story) "being relegated to the status of a dependent class of workers" (1992: 166).

The gang–drug connection will continue to be a topic of disagreement among both researchers and law-enforcement officials. One thing is certain—as long as there is such a high demand for drugs in our society, someone will supply the product. And some of these individuals will be affiliated with gangs because so many gang members are from the most disadvantaged segments of society and are therefore seeking methods of making money outside of the traditional labor market, which has been closed to them for so long.

SUMMARY

Gang members commit a variety of crimes, although the extent to which they contribute to the overall crime problem is not known with any degree of certainty. The crimes they tend to commit are similar to the kinds of crimes committed by other delinquent individuals—that is, mostly property and drug offenses. The extent of the violence committed by gang members is not nearly the level portrayed by the media, and, in fact, gang members' contribution to the overall rate of violence is relatively small. There is little question that the presence of drugs also accounts for increased criminal activity of youth gang members.

Drug dealing on the part of gang members is significant, but not to the extent that is portrayed by the media. As has been noted in this chapter, the extent of their involvement is in dispute, as is the claim that gangs are involved as an organized business. The studies reviewed here confirm this view. For the most part, drug dealing is a small-time activity in which the majority of dealers work long hours and receive little money, including the major examples seen in this chapter, both dealing with Chicago gangs. Most of the profits go to the suppliers and distributors.

NOTES

1. The stereotypes have often become so ludicrous that adolescents are mistaken for gang members simply because they "look like one." Much gang attire, plus slang, tattoos, and so on, have been borrowed by millions of teenagers all over the country, perhaps trying to mimic the rebellious image of gangs. Each of the authors has had students in his or her classes who "looked like" gang members—for that matter, many really once were gang members. Shelden gets many from Southern California who have moved to Las Vegas with their families and will tell him that they were once in this or that gang. Likewise, Tracy gets former gang members from Atlanta, while Brown, when he was at the University of Michigan-Flint, had many Detroit gangs and currently sees ex-gang members from Portland, Oregon. In all likelihood, the reader is sitting in a class with a few ex-gang members. These observations reinforce one of the key findings from gang research: Many gang members leave the gang eventually and lead normal lives, including going to college and majoring in criminal justice.