

1958

Heroin Use and Street Gangs

Daniel M. Wilner

Eva Rosenfeld

Robert S. Lee

Donald L. Gerard

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarlycommons.law.northwestern.edu/jclc>

 Part of the [Criminal Law Commons](#), [Criminology Commons](#), and the [Criminology and Criminal Justice Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Daniel M. Wilner, Eva Rosenfeld, Robert S. Lee, Donald L. Gerard, Heroin Use and Street Gangs, 48 J. Crim. L. Criminology & Police Sci. 399 (1957-1958)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Northwestern University School of Law Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology by an authorized editor of Northwestern University School of Law Scholarly Commons.

HEROIN USE AND STREET GANGS

DANIEL M. WILNER, EVA ROSENFELD, ROBERT S. LEE, DONALD L. GERARD
AND ISIDOR CHEIN

Daniel M. Wilner, psychologist, was Research Assistant Professor at the Research Center for Human Relations, New York University, and is, since July 1954, Associate Professor in the School of Hygiene and Public Health at the Johns Hopkins University. Eva Rosenfeld, sociologist, is Research Assistant Professor at the Research Center for Human Relations. Robert S. Lee, psychologist, is Research Associate at the Research Center for Human Relations. Donald L. Gerard, M.D., is a psychiatrist who joined the Research Center for Human Relations team in September 1954. Isidor Chein is Professor of Psychology at the Research Center for Human Relations, New York University.

This paper is a revision of one which was presented by the authors at the 1956 meeting of the Eastern Sociological Society, in March, 1956.

The series of studies of which the following is a unit, say the authors, "have been supported by the National Institute of Mental Health of the United States Public Health Service through a series of special grants, and conducted at the Research Center for Human Relations, New York University, under the general direction of Isidor Chein. Much of the spadework in the preparation of the schedules for this study and a major share of the field work was carried out by Dr. William Spinrad."—EDITOR.

The study reported on here is one of a series concerned with the role of environmental factors in the onset and continued illegal use of narcotic drugs among teenagers in New York City. A study of drug use in the street gang seemed desirable for several reasons. First, there is a widespread belief that street gangs are the centers of drug activity in the neighborhoods in which they operate. It has been alleged that street gangs are centers of organized selling of narcotic drugs, that gang members themselves use drugs heavily, and that they recruit users. The present study was undertaken in part as an attempt to evaluate these allegations. In addition, assuming intense narcotics activity in street gangs, we were interested in learning something about the life style of boys involved with drugs, in a natural setting: this information would supplement our knowledge about drug use, its antecedents and accompaniments, which we obtained from interviews with users in several institutions.

The data regarding drug activity and related variables for gangs were obtained from detached group workers of the New York City Youth Board. For some years now, the Youth Board has been conducting a program of social-therapeutic and preventive group work with anti-social gangs in Manhattan and Brooklyn (and recently also in the Bronx). In this program a group worker makes informal contact with a gang and attempts to develop a close relationship with its members.¹ He stands up for the boys in court, he finds jobs for some, and obtains case work assistance for the families of others. For all, he becomes available as a source of guidance in difficult periods. Most important, and perhaps most difficult, he demonstrates that he can be trusted with information about their delinquencies. Once this fact

¹ "REACHING THE UNREACHED", New York City Youth Board, 1954.

becomes known and accepted, the relations between the worker and the gang usually become stabilized at a high level of rapport and intimacy.

The group worker attached to a gang thus gets to know gang members quite well. He keeps voluminous process records and other data about the boys and their activities. These records and data, supplemented by the worker's general knowledge of the boys, constitute the source of all the findings reported here.

Each of the workers filled out a detailed questionnaire about his gang and each of its members. Some of the questions applied to the entire gang: its history, activities, group structure; specifically, we asked for the size and nature of groups of boys who used drugs together, where they gathered and, most important, whether there was any identifiable personal influence or group pressure to use or not to use drugs.

Other questions consisted of a series of items that were filled out for each individual boy, to determine who did or did not use drugs, what drug was used, the amount used, trend of use, arrests for drug use, history of treatment, efforts to stop use, attitudes towards drugs, etc. It also included material on personal background and the boy's position in the gang. The complete set of questionnaires took from about 15 to 30 hours of each group worker's time to fill out.

In all, we obtained reports on 18 gangs, ranging in size from five to 26 members—altogether, 305 boys. Most of these gangs are subdivisions—based on age or special interests—of larger gangs. The median age of the 305 boys was 18, most of them over 16 and under 20. The Youth Board selected these gangs for special servicing because they had an exceptionally high rate of participation in intergang warfare; one measure of the chronic character of their anti-social behavior is the fact that at the time of our study they had been serviced by the Youth Board for several years. An average of more than two-thirds of the boys have habitually participated in delinquent behavior, more than half have been arrested at least once (almost all of these having received at least probationary treatment following arrest) and about one-quarter have served sentences in institutions for delinquents. It is precisely such high delinquency gangs that one might expect would be involved in drug use and selling activity.

The gangs are located in three areas of the city which have the highest incidence of delinquency and drug use. Eight of them are in Manhattan's East Harlem, four in or near the Red Hook section of Brooklyn, and six are in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood in Brooklyn. If classified by modal ethnic composition, seven are Puerto Rican, six Negro, two Italian, one Irish, and two are Irish-Italian.

Concerning the extent of drug use in these gangs, several basic facts should be noted at the outset. First: practically the only drugs in use are heroin and marijuana. Of the 305 boys, 94 have used heroin more or less regularly—80 still doing so at the time of the study. About half of the heroin users smoke marijuana also. About 80 use only marijuana; these are exclusively Negro and Puerto Rican boys. This analysis is concerned only with users of heroin.

Second: heroin use is not common in all of the 18 gangs. In four gangs there was no heroin use at all (let us call them *Zero* gangs); in eight, less than half of the boys used heroin (we shall call these *Low-use* gangs); and in six *High-use* gangs, more than

half of the boys were users. Our findings cover three areas:

- I. The nature of heroin use (extent of addiction—efforts to discontinue—police intervention, etc.)
- II. Behavioral correlates of drug use, in the gang setting (comparisons of users and non-users).
- III. The role of the gang in the spread of drug use or resistance to it.

I. THE NATURE OF HEROIN USE

An important distinction must be made between heroin use and addiction to heroin. Addiction is typified by regular use, increased tolerance, and physical dependence. An addict uses at least one dose of heroin (or similar drug) every day and his intake increases with time. Yet, we find that not all of the 94 heroin users are seriously dependent on the drug, even though most of them have been using it for two and three years. For one thing, only 43 percent take one or more doses of heroin daily (T. Ib)²: only these can be presumed to be addicted. The rest take the drug about two or three times a week or even less often and many of them remain on this non-addictive level, even though some of them inject directly into a vein. Furthermore, only about half of them (54 percent) use the drug intravenously; most of the remainder sniff (28 percent); a few (7 percent) inject it subcutaneously (T. Ia). Such casual or weekend use represents a type that is not usually encountered in the medical literature because such users do not show the typical characteristics of addiction we mentioned, increased tolerance and physical dependence. For this group heroin use may be largely a social activity, the drug being taken as part of the leisure time patterns the boys have adopted.

It is significant that close to a half of the users are ambivalent in their feelings about heroin use or are outrightly opposed (T. IIIa) to it as well as to regular users (T. IIIb); however, their attitude toward occasional users is more tolerant (T. IIIc).

Many of the boys are concerned about their dependence on the drug: about half expressed concern about it to the group worker (T. Ig) and a somewhat greater proportion made some efforts to cut down or stop using (T. Ih), such as avoiding contacts with other users, seeking medical help, etc.

Contrary to the popular belief that heroin use is invariably a one way street, actually one-third of the users have been decreasing their intake of heroin: true, most of them were still using, but 13 had stopped altogether (T. Ic). Some of those boys who proved to be capable of decreasing their intake had been "addictive-type" users (using once a day or more); specifically, seven of such regular daily users succeeded in stopping drug intake altogether.

It is most interesting to compare these instances of self-initiated decrease of drug intake with the effect of medical attention which some of the users received, usually following an arrest or court appearance. Nineteen of the users received such medical attention (T. Ii): of these, only four have recently decreased intake, while two have increased it. The most notable aspect of this situation is that so few of the boys have received medical attention for the habit, although a majority have appeared in the courts on one charge or another (T. Iie), and, secondly, that among those who have

² Here and below, "T." designates Table.

TABLE I
HEROIN USERS IN HIGH AND LOW GANGS

	High Use Gangs	Low Use Gangs	Total
a. % who use heroin			
Intravenously	56	52	54
Subcutaneously	7	7	7
Sniff	27	30	28
DK, NA	10	11	11
b. % who currently use heroin			
Once a day or more often	44	41	43
Three to six times a week	16	5	13
Twice a week and less often	28	36	30
Dk current frequency	12	18	14
Total No. of <i>current</i> users)	(58)	(22)	(80)
c. % who recently decreased intake of heroin	24	11	20
% who stopped use	15	11	14
d. % who have been using heroin			
less than 1 year	2	29	10
1 year	18	7	15
2 years or more	76	45	67
DK	4	19	8
e. % who have been picked up by police in connection with narcotics	27	22	26
f. % who have been institutionalized for drug offense	12	19	14
g. % who have expressed concern to group worker about using drugs	48	48	48
h. % who made efforts to cut down or stop using	56	56	56
i. % who received medical attention for drug use	19	22	20
j. % who increased delinquency with onset or increase of drug use; or decreased delinquency with de- crease or cessation of heroin use	41	30	37
k. % who decreased time spent with club with onset of heroin use (or increased with decrease or cessa- tion of heroin use)	39	33	37
Total no. of cases	(67)	(27)	(94)

had specific medical attention, so few have decreased their use. This presumably reflects on the limited nature of medical treatment available to boys with markedly delinquent backgrounds.

About half of the users have at one time or another sold drugs (T. IIf) but only a quarter have been picked up by the police in connection with narcotics (T. Ie) and only 14 percent have been institutionalized for a drug offense (T. If).

Heroin users tend to increase other delinquent activity with the onset of use and decrease it with the decrease or cessation of heroin use (T. Ij). They are most likely to be involved in such forms of delinquency as mugging, auto-stripping, swindling and petty theft—i.e., the type of delinquency aimed at obtaining income rather than that against persons or property *per se*.

TABLE II
 USERS AND NON-USERS IN HIGH, LOW AND ZERO USE GANGS
 BACKGROUND AND BEHAVIOR

	High Use Gangs			Low Use Gangs			Zero Use Gangs	Total
	Users	Non-Users	Total	Users	Non-Users	Total		
a. Age: % 18 years and older	64	61	63	74	52	57	25	51
b. Education: % completed less than 4 yrs. H.S.	85	62	78	96	85	87	95	86
c. Work: % not working	34	27	32	63	24	31	46	35
d. Delinquency: % who are habitual delinquents	75	65	72	78	68	70	55	67
e. % who were arrested for non-drug delinquency	66	46	61	85	58	63	42	57
f. % who sold drugs	51	24	42	40	3	11	4	19
g. % who recently increased amount of delinquency	27	0	19	22	9	11	8	13
h. % who don't drink wine	53	58	54	15	31	28	14	33
i. % who don't drink whiskey	37	50	41	15	30	27	15	29
j. % who have sexual aberration (homosexuality)	28	8	23	22	21	21	3	17
k. % who spend little time with their clubs	16	23	18	41	16	21	4	16
l. % leaders (top and secondary)	25	54	34	41	23	27	25	28
m. % who lost leadership status	24	8	19	26	16	18	17	18
n. % who lost leadership with onset of heroin use or gained it with decrease of heroin use	30	—	—	33	—	—	—	31
Total no. of cases	(67)	(26)	(93)	(27)	(114)	(141)	(71)	(305)

II. BEHAVIORAL CORRELATES OF HEROIN USE IN THE GANG SETTING

In terms of the usual background characteristics, the minority who do not use in the High-use gang are similar to the majority who use drugs in age, schooling, and work habits (T. IIa, b, c). In the Low-use gangs, however, the minority who do use drugs are somewhat older; yet most of them are not regularly employed. Also, more of them are beginners who have been using during less than one year (T. Id).

There is considerable difference in the type of gang activities in which the users and non-users tend to participate. Users, especially in the Low-use gangs, tend to participate less in rumbles (T. IVa).³ They also participate less often in group dances, house parties, joint trips to movies or sporting events, and in active sports (T. IVe, f, g). But users participate much more in gang-organized robbery and burglary (T. IVb), especially in the High-use gangs. Those in High-use gangs also tend to participate more in group-organized sexual delinquencies—mainly lineups (T. IVd)—

³ The group workers reported that, in general, gangs involved with narcotics give up the kind of violent acting out which would be likely to "bring the cops on their necks".

TABLE III
 USERS AND NON-USERS IN HIGH, LOW AND ZERO USE GANGS
 ATTITUDES TO DRUG USE

	High Use Gangs			Low Use Gangs			Zero Use Gangs	Total
	Users	Non-Users	Total	Users	Non-Users	Total		
a. % who think heroin use:								
worthwhile	22	4	17	26	2	6	1	9
OK, if occasional	25	31	27	36	7	13	10	16
Opposed	19	46	27	19	62	54	34	41
Ambivalent	30	19	26	15	25	23	24	24
DK, and NA	4	0	3	4	4	4	31	10
	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
b. % whose attitude to regular heroin users is:								
hostile or derogatory	19	31	23	11	52	44	18	32
tolerant	48	54	49	59	25	31	23	35
ambivalent	28	15	25	26	18	19	28	23
DK and NA	4	0	3	4	6	6	31	11
	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
c. % whose attitude to occasional heroin users is:								
hostile or derogatory	12	27	16	4	44	36	17	26
tolerant	57	65	59	67	29	36	24	40
ambivalent	28	8	23	22	21	21	28	23
DK and NA	3	0	2	7	6	6	31	11
	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
d. % who think that smoking of marijuana is:								
worthwhile	16	8	14	41	9	15	6	13
OK if occasional	22	35	26	30	19	21	7	19
Opposed	9	31	15	7	42	35	13	24
Ambivalent or neutral	9	19	12	7	19	17	15	15
DK and NA	43	8	33	15	11	11	59	29
	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
e. % whose attitude to regular smokers of marijuana is:								
hostile or derogatory	7	23	12	7	45	38	8	23
tolerant	43	46	44	74	25	35	14	33
ambivalent	7	23	12	4	19	16	20	16
DK and NA	42	8	32	15	11	11	58	29
	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
f. % whose attitude to occasional smoking of marijuana is:								
hostile or derogatory	7	19	11	7	35	30	7	19
tolerant	43	58	47	74	32	40	15	36
ambivalent or neutral	6	8	6	4	21	18	20	15
DK and NA	43	15	35	15	12	13	58	30
	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Total no. of cases	(67)	(26)	(93)	(27)	(114)	(141)	(71)	(305)

TABLE IV

PARTICIPATION IN CLUB ACTIVITIES BY USERS AND NON-USERS IN HIGH, LOW AND ZERO USE GANGS
(WHICH ENGAGE IN THE GIVEN TYPE OF ACTIVITY)*

	High Use Gangs			Low Use Gangs			Zero Use Gangs	Total
	Users %	Non-Users %	Total %	Users %	Non-Users %	Total %	%	%
a. % who participate in rumbles	56 (45)	62 (24)	58 (69)	40 (15)	61 (62)	57 (77)	58 (71)	58 (217)
b. % who participate in robbery and burglary	57 (42)	7 (14)	45 (56)	48 (27)	32 (110)	35 (137)	13 (39)	34 (232)
c. % who participate in vandalism and "hell-raising"	38 (42)	21 (14)	34 (56)	24 (21)	36 (87)	33 (108)	49 (71)	38 (235)
d. % who participate in club organized sexual delinquency	45 (42)	21 (14)	39 (56)	17 (23)	13 (105)	13 (128)	10 (48)	19 (232)
e. % who participate in active sports	26 (61)	57 (21)	34 (82)	30 (22)	54 (114)	50 (136)	65 (71)	50 (289)
f. % who participate in club dances	69 (67)	92 (26)	75 (93)	56 (18)	72 (89)	69 (107)	87 (71)	76 (271)
g. % who participate in club house parties	73 (47)	82 (17)	75 (64)	36 (22)	62 (98)	58 (120)	83 (71)	69 (255)

* Since the N's are variable depending on how many clubs engage in the given type of activity the N on which each % is computed is included in parenthesis on the line following the percentage figure.

and more of them give evidence of sexual deviation—homosexuality mainly—in individual behavior (T. IIj).

When we remember that these gangs are within the sphere of influence of a Youth Board group worker, it is significant that users tend to increase their delinquent behavior (T. IIg) while non-users tend to decrease it.

III. THE ROLE OF THE GANG IN THE SPREAD OF DRUG USE OR RESISTANCE TO IT

This is a most complex and difficult question and we shall try to answer it partly by interpretation of specific data and partly by speculation based on the total picture.

The leadership status of users gives a good clue to this question. In the High-use gangs it is the non-using minority that provides most of the leadership; the users are predominantly rank and file. In the Low-use gangs the users appear to be a special subgroup. Most of them spend little time with the gang (T. IIk) and yet they contribute proportionately more leaders than the non-using majority (T. III); but those who are leaders are mostly recent users—the boys who have been using drugs for two years or more are mostly rank and file.

In both types of gangs, however, members who start using heroin tend to lose their leadership status; and, conversely, as they decrease the intake or stop using altogether, they gain in leadership (T. IIIn). Drug use apparently does not go well with leadership in a delinquent gang. This is an important fact. It can be understood only in the light of our findings concerning the behavior, interests and life-style of the user.

TABLE V
YOUTH WORKER'S GENERAL APPRAISAL OF HIGH, LOW AND ZERO USE CLUBS AS UNITS

	High Use Gangs	Low Use Gangs	Zero Use Gangs	Total
a. Are frequently in gang fights (once in 3 months or more often)	1	2	4	7
b. Frequently engage in vandalism and hell-raising (once a month or more often)	2	4	2	8
c. Frequently conduct robberies and burglaries (twice a month or more often)	3	5	2	10
d. Frequently engage in sexual delinquency (twice a year or more often)	1	4	3	8
e. Gamble frequently (once a week or more often)	1	5	3	9
f. Organize dances frequently (once a month or more often)	4	4	1	9
g. Organize house parties frequently (twice a month or more often)	2	4	2	8
h. Frequently engage in active sports (once a week or more often)	2	4	3	9
i. Frequently watch sports events	3	5	2	10
j. Are generally apathetic	2	3	0	5
k. Are "cohesive": none or only one of the major club activities are done in cliques	1	3	3	7
Total No. of gangs	(6)	(8)	(4)	(18)

For one thing, drug using activity either tends to split the gang into cliques or to take drug-using members away from the gang into solitary activity. In the High-use gangs, the users tend to snort or inject heroin together, in cliques; if there is no apartment available, they gather in hallways, toilets, movie balconies. Users in Low-use gangs go off by themselves or with drug-using non-members.

For another thing, although only slightly more of the users in both High and Low-use gangs show a persistent pattern of delinquency apart from the use or sale of drugs (T. IIId), significantly more users have been arrested for such non-drug related delinquent acts (T. IIe) and, when arrested, they are apparently more likely to be sent to an institution than non-users. This finding gives an objective basis to the group workers' general statement, that actively delinquent gangs dislike drug users because they are unreliable "on the job" and can get the gang into trouble if there are drug users in the arrested group.

Finally, let us remember the differences we already noted in the users' participation in gang activities—by the selective pattern of their interests and preoccupations, the users set themselves apart from the rest of the gang. All this helps explain the loss of leadership among users.

The demotion of users from leadership has its counterpart in the attitudes of non-users to heroin use. Large proportions of non-users in both High and Low-use gangs are opposed to the use of heroin (T. IIIa) and, more surprisingly, even to smoking marijuana (T. IIIId). In the High-use gangs, however, large proportions of

the non-users believe that occasional heroin use or occasional smoking of marijuana is O.K. (T. IIIe and f), or they are ambivalent or neutral on this issue. In the Low-use gangs, few non-users approve of even occasional use of heroin and about one-fourth are ambivalent or neutral; as for marijuana, equal numbers of the non-users in these gangs approve of occasional use or are ambivalent or neutral.

The non-users' attitude to heroin users whom they know in their gang is more tolerant than one would expect from their general attitude. Only a third of non-users in the High-use gangs have hostile or derogatory attitudes toward members who are users; only half of those in Low-use gangs (T. IIIb); the rest are tolerant or ambivalent. Even more are tolerant concerning occasional users (T. IIIe).

Thus it would appear that in many respects drug use is not compatible with the activities and attitudes of the gang and that non-users in both High and Low-use gangs tend to have negative feelings about drug use and users.

There is not a single report of a group, as a unit, pressing individual boys to use drugs: whatever influence to use is reported, involves, at most, only a few individuals as influencers. However, pressures not to use are, in several cases, mentioned as permeating the whole group. This is true in High as well as Low-use gangs, in drug using gangs with a generally permissive atmosphere, as well as in those with much hostility towards drug use.

In fact, we have very few reports of individual users influencing non-users in their own gangs to start using heroin. More often, users try to influence other users to continue use, or they reintroduce a former user after he had stopped for a while, particularly after he has been imprisoned or hospitalized.

But there are far more reports of influences and pressures to prevent use or, more often, to cut down or stop use. Even users are more likely to behave in this manner. This finding holds for every gang with more than one or two users. In one High-use gang, for instance, with little drug-permissiveness and much recent decrease in drug use, members try to get others to cut down use of heroin, especially when one member uses it a great deal. This takes the form of individuals or cliques warning the fellow to get off the stuff, to cut down, or to take more "pot" instead. The fear is that the boy will take an overdose or get "real sick". Sometimes the procedure of getting someone to take less takes the form of treating him to food, marijuana, or alcohol: "Stay with us"—say the non-users—"we'll watch over you; drink with us; it's better than junk." (In interpreting the above, it is necessary to repeat that because of their servicing by the New York City Youth Board, these gangs may not be representative of other teen-age street gangs in the city.)

Now, if habitual heroin use does not appear endemic to or especially compatible with gang life—what is it about some gangs that allows for the spread of this habit and, conversely, what, in the general climate of a gang, offers effective resistance to it?

A comparison of the Zero, Low and High-use gangs may help throw some light on this question.

We find, first of all, that members of the Zero gangs are several years younger than those in both Low and High use gangs (T. IIa). They differ from the Low and High use gangs in many respects which may be related primarily to their being younger. Many of them are still attending school while most boys in the older gangs

are out of school. Also, only about half of the boys are habitual delinquents, as compared to about 70 percent in the other gangs (T. IId). More of the Zero gangs are very active in sports (T. Vh) and, unlike the others, all of them engage in frequent gang fights (T. Va). Most of them carry on activities in the whole group, rather than in cliques (T. Vk). A larger proportion of their members participate in gang-organized activities such as sports (T. IVe), expeditions of vandalism and general "hell raising" (T. IVc). While they seldom organize dances (T. Vf), more of their members participate whenever the gang does organize a dance (T. IVf). None of the Zero gangs was described as "apathetic" as were five of the Low and High-use gangs (T. Vj).

The pattern of activities in the Low-use gangs is more similar to the younger Zero gangs than to the same age High-use gangs. The Low-use gangs, as compared to the High-use gangs, also tend to engage more in sports (active and spectator), vandalism and hell raising, and they are more cohesive; in addition, they engage more than High-use gangs in robberies and burglaries, gambling and club-organized sex delinquency (lineups). The general picture one gets is of a comparatively more lively, active, cohesive pattern.

On the face of it, we cannot say whether the comparatively smaller number of heroin users in these Low-use gangs and the greater antipathy to drug use is a function of their greater liveliness and cohesiveness and will continue to remain small, or whether the relation is reverse. It may be that the reason these gangs are more lively and cohesive is that the pattern of drug use is only beginning to spread there and that, as the number of users increases, the pattern of activities will change in the direction of High-use gangs.

The only way to discover the dynamics of the relations between age, pattern of activities and spread of drug use or resistance to it, would be to follow the gangs more closely from the time of onset of drug use. The most interesting cases are, of course, the Low-use gangs where the pattern of using drugs is either in its early stages or has remained arrested, limited to a minority of club members.

Our study was not designed to obtain a dynamic picture of the gang's role in the spread of drug use. But we do have descriptive, historical information for individual gangs which is sufficiently suggestive to warrant mention. Let us consider a few brief case histories.

LOW USE GANG #12: This group began as a football team, developed hostility for rival teams and engaged in gang fights. In the past few years the boys, all of whom are now over 18, became interested in marriage, army service, jobs, adjustment after institutionalization. Some members once tried smoking marijuana, got sick and never tried again. A pedlar trying to sell drugs was beaten up by command of the leader and told never to come back. One boy used drugs but the attitude of the others was so hostile to it that he used to go to other gangs for drug activity. He is now off drugs. The group participates in team sports, trips away from home and other constructive program activities (initiated by the youth worker).

LOW USE GANG #13: This group also began as a ball team and was active in street fights. In time, the group fragmented. Some members got jobs and became more self-supporting and independent. A small group got to use drugs, especially following periods of anxiety. They have their own leader. The group's main leader is an intelligent, dominating youngster who resents the influence of the drug clique's leader but cannot counteract a pervasive climate of boredom—"nothing to do and nowhere to go".

LOW USE GANG #19: This fighting group began, in the past few years, to lose interest in bopping. The group appears to be generally disorganized. Since gang fighting declined, drug use seems to have

risen. Those members who use drugs do it individually, not as a clique. Others speak out openly against the use of heroin.

Finally, let us mention one unusually clearcut case history of Low-use gang #8 in which a group of users emerged recently: This group organized five years ago for self-protection against other fighting groups in the area. Recently, as the majority grew cool to hopping, a group of three boys broke off in open conflict with the president; soon after, these three started using heroin and acting "down with the cats". They continue making efforts to get the gang back to fights but the majority of the members remain loyal to their president; the gang is doing well without fights. The three users are still out and it is unlikely that they will be readmitted.

Piecing together all of our data and some of the descriptive, historical information for individual gangs, we offer the following speculation about how gang activities and changes in the gang may play a role in the spread of drug use or resistance to it.

There appear to be two developmental stages in which the gang seems to assume different roles with regard to drug use. In the adolescent stage (roughly under 18) the street culture favors "acting out" on a gang basis. Rumbles, fights, hell-raising, competitive sports, are an appropriate expression for this age. Even if the gang includes a large proportion of anxious, inadequately functioning boys (of the type we would consider prone to drug use), the activities of the gang offer a measure of shared status, a measure of security and a sense of belonging. The boys do not have to face life alone—the group protects them. Escape into drugs is not necessary as yet.

But as the group grows older, two things happen. Sports, hell-raising, and gang fights become "kid stuff" and are given up. In the normal course of events, the youthful preoccupations are replaced by more individual concerns about work, future, a "steady" girl, and the like. If most of the gang members are sufficiently healthy to face these new personal needs and societal demands and engage in the new activities appropriate for their age, the availability of drugs will not attract their interest.

But for those gang members who are too disturbed emotionally to face the future as adults, the passing of adolescent hell-raising leaves emptiness, boredom, apathy and restless anxiety. In a gang where there are many such disturbed members, experimentation with drugs for "kicks" will soon lead to frequent and, later, habitual use; cliques of users will grow quickly. Enmeshed in the pattern of activities revolving around the purchase, sale and use of drugs and the delinquent efforts to get money to meet the exorbitant cost of heroin, the young users can comfortably forget about girls, careers, status and recognition in the society at large. Their sexual drive is diminished, they maintain a sense of belonging in the limited world of the addict, they remain children forever. They may give up all sense of personal responsibility for their lives and conveniently project the blame for their shiftless existence on the "habit".

SUMMARY

In summing up, we may say that delinquent gangs do not appear to play an important role in the spread of heroin use. To the contrary, in some ways typical patterns of gang activities discourage drug use. Finally, it is important to note that, according to the experience of the staff at Riverside Hospital,⁴ only a minority of juvenile addicts belong to organized gangs altogether. The typical addict is more often a lone soul as well as a lost one.

⁴ A municipal institution for juvenile drug users located on North Brothers Island in New York City.