

<CT>Foreword

<TXT>The next time you read about gang violence, or proposals to do something about gangs and the neighborhoods they inhabit, you will bring an enriched frame of mind and understanding to the topic after reading ~~Prof.~~ Diego Vigil's book. The Projects brings gangs and families to life; it is a holistic study in the best sense. You will think of gang members not simply as individuals in isolation, but as struggling families and children embedded in their sociocultural setting, with a sense of how they think, feel, and experience their world. The Projects provides evidence across levels of analysis, from structural conditions in the ~~US~~United States and in Los Angeles, to neighborhood and housing project circumstances, to family and school contexts, and last but not least, to the everyday practices of families and gang members themselves.

~~The Projects chapters~~ The topics covered in Vigil's book move from the physical settings, to local history, to local gang and family subcultures, to a case study of one gang member and his family, to the stories of girls and young mothers in this world (the research team identifies three types of female gangs and gang members, and describes the very frequent sexual abuse and drug/alcohol abuse in their early experience), to important ~~chapters describing~~ descriptions of the lives of non-gang

families along with a comparison ~~chapter about of~~ families embedded in the gang world. The book offers a conceptual overview of the factors pushing and pulling youth, a history of prevention/intervention efforts, and a concluding set of policy recommendations.

Vigil offers many compelling examples of everyday activities and routines of life of gang members and their families. Whatever the structural and neighborhood circumstances that beset these youth and their families, the everyday activities they ~~are embedded~~ engage in matter a great deal because ~~these they~~ are the proximal, immediate conditions ~~that~~ with which youth and parents live ~~within~~. The book describes goals and values; the resources available; the tasks ~~and work~~ that ~~has~~ have to get done; the social relationships and people ~~that are within their~~ these settings; the emotions and motivations brought to the settings or activated by being in them; and the degree of stability and persistence over time (often, across three or more generations) of gang and family circumstances. Gangs provide some semblance of a shared "peer family" and security, however unhealthy and "warped," as Vigil says, these groups might have become for youth.

The depiction of families that managed to make it without much gang involvement is a particularly valuable feature of Vigil's work. Families without gang involvement are better off,

have fewer children, ~~and~~ and more social capital, and are less troubled in many ways. ~~He~~ Vigil describes the daily lives and parental monitoring strategies of families that are physically in the projects but not of the gangs' worlds. Some of the practices of these parents include: sustaining a predictable family routine, ~~parents' sheer presence and availability~~ being present and available, engaging in monitoring and surveillance efforts, fostering a sense of family pride, ~~the~~ making use of community services and programs, ~~engagement~~ engaging in education, maintaining a focus on successful models, and offering affection plus strictness, as well as just getting out of the projects and participating in the wider world. Vigil comments that these strategies may seem "deceivingly simple," yet they ~~were~~ are powerful in mitigating gang, neighborhood, and structural influences. These kinds of practices are largely absent in the families of gang members. Vigil comments that families with high gang involvement not only had no set mealtimes in which families ~~sometimes sat~~ would sit together, but ~~had~~ did not even have a ~~no~~ pot on the stove or any food in the house to eat; often there was no schedule or family activity routine at all.

Vigil also is careful to describe the wide range of variation among gang members and their families. He unpackages the ~~category~~ categories "gang member" and "gang family," and in

this way brings us closer to understanding the complexity of these se categories. These families and communities are multiply marginalized, and have been across several generations. Vigil describes Families—families are described according to their conventionality and the ir degree of parental and kin control. ~~Some families can buffer the influences of the many pushes into gangs, pulls away from them, personal psychology, and interruptions (family or other buffers from gang influences) during childhood and youth development. [I thought the previous sentence was a bit unclear so I deleted it. OK, or would you like to rewrite?]~~

The ~~sheer~~ exposure to chronic stress, danger, insecurity, and violence is difficult to overcome in the projects. Vigil comments that these days, "the bullets whizzing around are marked 'For Whom It May Concern.'" Jeffrey Kling also describes the relief of mothers who get out of dangerous project housing, and away from "bullets [that] got no name." And Xavier Briggs, Susan Popkin, Tama Leventhal, and Gretchen Weismann ~~also~~ describe the relief girls ~~felt~~ feel once they have moved away from the constant fear and harassment they experienced in housing project neighborhoods.

Vigil's work also stands out for its psychocultural perspective, particularly in its use of case materials. Vigil provides emotional depth ~~to~~ in many of his accounts. His

research provides evidence regarding sexuality (which Vigil describes for girls as sometimes constituting frank abuse ~~from~~ by males), violence, the needs for belonging and "twisted" kinds of intimacy, protection, early childbearing, and hyper-masculinity. Gang members foresee a shortened life expectancy, and this knowledge is accompanied by a sense of despair and fear/hyper-aggression. Vigil describes a kind of "perpetual conflict" in the lives of gang families at every level. Internalization of multiple marginality combines with self-preservation as well as self-destruction in some of these accounts. Vigil finds that there is community, parental, and intra-psychic denial at times concerning these aspects of negative behaviors in gangs and in some of the families. Characteristic of the study as a whole, he comments that such a phenomenology of denial "surely is not a productive strategy" either for families themselves, community activists, researchers, ~~and policy~~ or policymakers.

Gangs are "institutions of last resort" for offering protection, resources, and a sense of power ~~for to~~ youth and their parents. Vigil remarks that collective efficacy used to play a greater role in local community vigilance, and in the past there were some controls on gangs, but that this form of social capital has greatly declined. Gangs that in the past ~~at least in part~~ functioned at least in part to protect a

community, now are predators in the much harsher current world of guns, drugs, and cash--the "cold despair" of today, as Vigil describes it.

Vigil identifies poverty as a key thread tying his story together. Persistent violence or the threat of violence ~~has to be another central factor for children~~ (~~residents~~ identified by residents ~~this~~ as the most disliked aspect of their lives) is another central factor for children. ~~He~~ Additionally, the author mentions that about a third of the families in his study were on AFDC in the 1990s; welfare policy changes have drastically reduced that number ~~since this study was done~~ in recent years. What have these policy changes done to patterns of work and resources in for families? And what about ~~Are~~ current policing practices --are they making a positive difference?

After inventorying the long history of community and intervention efforts, Vigil asks if we can develop better prevention and intervention strategies that fit poverty-stricken populations with gangs. ~~Vigil inventories a long history of community and intervention efforts.~~ There is tension in the community between wanting and needing outside intervention from police and others, ~~as well as~~ and feeling anger at outside forces ~~and combined with~~ a desire for community-based solutions. The long list of policy changes and recommendations that conclude the book, if enacted, would amount to a transformation of the

world of the projects and gangs today, and I suspect that Vigil would be the first to ~~concur~~ admit that such a transformation is unlikely. We need much stronger research designs and evidence on what kinds of policies and programs truly have impacts on families, and ~~both that~~ can be both sustained and scaled up in the real-world circumstances Vigil describes. The Projects offers those interested in undertaking effective interventions a full account of the contexts for which such interventions will have to be designed and implemented in order to succeed. It also suggests some outcomes that matter to families and children, which interventions might usefully address: (fear reduction, the establishment of family routines, engagement in community programs, and an increase in increasing positive connections outside the community.) ~~that matter to families and children, which interventions might usefully address.~~

Finally, it is very much worth appreciating that Vigil grew up in these barrio neighborhoods, sold papers on the streets there, and knows in a personal way whereof he speaks. Vigil does not offer easy, romanticized depictions of gang and community life, nor simple solutions, and he is clear that things are getting much worse from the nearly fifty-year perspective he brings ~~to the community and gangs~~. He is one of those who not only did not have a gang life, but who has had a remarkable and successful research and teaching career, ~~much of~~

~~which~~including, I am happy to say, ~~include~~ his years at UCLA studying for his PhD and subsequently as a faculty member and colleague of mine ~~at UCLA~~. Throughout his career, ~~he~~ Vigil has ~~continues~~ continued to bring new evidence and insight to our understanding of Chicano history, culture, gangs, and family and community life.

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