Drifting Between Worlds

Delinquency and Positive Engagement among Red Hook Youth

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Acknowledgements

About the Authors

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Executive Summary

Starting in the fall of 2007, the Red Hook Community Justice Center, a community court located in Red Hook, Brooklyn, implemented an experimental after-school program designed to change positive perceptions of youth crime that were thought to be held by many young people residing in the Red Hook Houses, a local public housing project. Known as Youth ECHO, the program engaged teenagers from the Houses in designing community education campaigns for their peers around problems that were identified by the participants themselves: drug dealing and dropping out of school. Using guerilla marketing techniques, the young people designed unique ways to get their core messages – "Dealing Drugs: It's Not Worth It" and "Fast Money is Trash Money. Get it in now. Get it back later. Stay in School" – to other Red Hook teenagers.

This report describes findings from a study that sought to evaluate the program and, more broadly, to understand how and why young people in Red Hook and, perhaps, beyond think about and engage in delinquent behavior. The research involved a multi-method approach. Data were collected between January 2008 and June 2009 through individual interviews with 23 Red Hook youths, and through focus groups, surveys, and program observations of Youth ECHO and the 21 youths involved over its two program years. These 44 teenagers ranged in age from 13 to 18, 60% were female, 91% lived in Red Hook, and 79% lived in public housing.

Theoretical Underpinnings

Youth ECHO was largely based on the view that at least some forms of delinquency had become normative among influential groups of Red Hook youth. This closely followed sociological theorizations of delinquency developed during 1950s and 1960s positing that lower-class youths are socialized with different and unlawful norms. The program responded by applying contemporary theories of influence in an effort to shift some of those norms and change youth perceptions of crime. This did not mean a top-down, "just say no"-style campaign. Instead, Youth ECHO targeted the "influentials" in Red Hook's youth community, working intensively with young popular opinion leaders to induce their endorsement and modeling of pro-social behaviors.

Major Findings

- *Civic Engagement* – Youth ECHO participants unanimously felt that the education campaign work they were doing was important and mattered to other young people. They believed they could make a positive difference in their community and expressed a desire for more opportunities for positive engagement, specifically for programming that was youth-led.

- *Attitudes Towards Work* – Program participants, who received a biweekly stipend, had the desire to be perceived as successful, and felt that the work they were doing contributed to feelings of success. Many expressed interest in building skills that would make them more hirable. Moreover, they had positive attitudes towards work and did not value "easy money" or express a desire to get by without working.

- *Gangs* – Many of the youths involved in the research were involved in "crews" or "teams," which were largely geared around the acquisition of money and status and the projection of an image of material success. While these crews might be nominally associated with more well-known gangs (i.e. the Bloods or Crips), most did not engage in criminal activity beyond occasional fights, smoking marijuana and public drinking – actions which they did not define as criminal.

- *Delinquency/Crime* – Youths associated the concept of "crime" with a very specific set of behaviors, usually violent crime. The petty criminal and delinquent behavior (e.g., fighting, smoking marijuana, underage drinking, cutting school) in which they and their peer group commonly engaged did not greatly trouble these youths, though our research hardly points to a fully formed deviant sub-culture. Moreover, the youths identified basic reasons for committing these petty crimes, saying that "there's nothing else to do" and that they need the money gained through their petty crimes to live.

- *Drift* – David Matza (1964) has argued that delinquents "drift" between conventional and criminal actions—a formulation confirmed by our sample. Despite their desire to effect positive change in their community, Youth ECHO participants struggled with consistently avoiding the activities they were supposed to be condemning, as well as other delinquent activities. For example, a couple of participants reported continuing to sell drugs. During the course of their participation in the program, the numbers of all participants having been arrested and having used alcohol, cigarettes, or marijuana in the past 30 days significantly increased from 43%, 19%, and 29%, to 52%, 33%, and 38%, respectively. These increases were potentially due to one of the cohorts ending their program in the summer, when they had more free time to be engaged in those activities. Other survey data showed that greater civic engagement was correlated with feelings that delinquent behaviors (e.g., skipping class without an excuse, petty theft, smoking and selling marijuana) were not wrong.

Conclusion

The attitudes and behaviors of the young people participating in this study were complex, most closely following two key theories of delinquency. The first is Matza's (1964) idea that youths drift between delinquent and conventional norms and actions. The second is Lawrence Cohen and Marcus Felson's (1979) work on "routine activities," which argues that crime is neither inherently oppositional not pathological but rather mundane – it happens constantly when the opportunity arises. The teenagers in this study often found themselves moving between different worlds and behaviors: delinquent and conventional, antisocial and pro-social. The youths who were most frequently in trouble were the most outspoken in their campaigns against crime.

Our findings suggest that delinquency in Red Hook is most closely related to feelings of boredom that young people feel when living in a physically and socially isolated neighborhood, and, particularly in the case of dealing drugs, as growing out of financial or social necessity. While many participants engaged in delinquent behavior, they simultaneously embraced pro-social behaviors and advocated a desire to improve the quality of their neighborhood through positive action.

Our research suggests that programming and policy aimed at stemming delinquency need not focus on wholesale attitudinal change, as the belief of young people's positive perception of crime is faulty. Indeed, the relationship between attitude and behavior is far more complicated and less predictable than is often assumed. The tension between anti- and pro-social behavior – between the low-level criminal activity of the youths and their articulated desire to affect their neighborhoods positively – suggests that policymakers and community-based organizations must become more sophisticated and nuanced in their approach if they hope to make an impact on delinquency and crime in communities like Red Hook, Brooklyn.

Introduction

Cool kids. Influentials. Popular opinion leaders. Marketers spend millions each year trying to reach this small percentage of teenagers in the hopes that they will adopt their products, lending newly released shoes, jackets, and phones, an aura of "coolness" that – according to some theories – is the secret to massive sales. Over the last decade, theories of influence have gained a certain cachet. Journalist Malcolm Gladwell brought the concept of "influentials" and "early adopters" to national attention, first in his 1997 *New Yorker* article, "The Coolhunt," and later in his best-selling book, *The Tipping Point,* published in 2000. Other books soon followed, including Keller and Berry's *The Influentials* (2003) and Barabasi's *Linked* (2003). Theories of social change and the study of networks, however, have long governed the work of sociologists, epidemiologists, and public health officials (Rogers, 1983). In fact, at the same time that the concept of influentuals was capturing the public's imagination, particularly as applied in the world of marketing and advertising, public health officials began testing the efficacy of harnessing this model to change risk behaviors related to the spread of HIV/AIDS.

In 2007, inspired by Gladwell's work and the success of these public health interventions, the Red Hook Community Justice Center, an experimental, neighborhood-based court, developed Youth ECHO (Expanding Community Horizons by Organizing), a unique effort to reduce youth crime among teenage residents of the nearby public housing development, the Red Hook Houses. Rather than relying on conventional criminal justice responses (arrest-adjudication-incarceration) or standard social service interventions (drug treatment, education, counseling), Youth ECHO proposed to use theories of influence to change youth perceptions of crime. This did not mean a top-down, "just say no"-style media campaign. Instead, Youth ECHO targeted the "influentuals" in Red Hook's youth community, working intensively with young popular opinion leaders to get them to endorse and model pro-social behavior to and for their peers. Youth ECHO used ethnographic research to identify 15 young people who were popular and well-liked by teens in the Red Hook Houses. Program staff actively solicited these "influentials," intentionally including some who were likely to have been involved in criminal behavior. This targeted recruitment was done so that if those who were committing crimes were indeed role models for their peers, if they changed their behavior, perhaps others would follow. Once identified and recruited, these informal leaders participated in an after-school program that ran for the first cohort from March – August 2008, and for the second cohort from October 2008 – June 2009. They received intensive leadership training and were charged with creating and implementing a grassroots, "guerilla" marketing strategy aimed at changing opinions about crime in Red Hook.

The ultimate goal of Youth ECHO was to change the culture of youth crime in the Red Hook Houses. Following theories of influence, and given the success of the HIV/AIDS interventions, launching a similar effort against normative criminal behavior seemed worth testing. From the beginning of research efforts, however, staff began to realize that many of the assumptions underlying theories of influence didn't mesh neatly with how Red Hook youth were thinking about and engaging in criminal behavior. Interviews, group discussions, surveys, and informal observations of Youth ECHO participants' in-session behavior suggest that theories of delinquency and drift more correctly reflect the attitudes and actions of these young people.

Neighborhood Context

Surrounded on three sides by water and cut off from the rest of Brooklyn by an elevated highway, Red Hook is a geographically and socially isolated community. The Red Hook Houses, where the majority of the residents live, were built in 1939 and are comprised primarily of six-story buildings built around courtyards and pedestrian malls (Kasinitz and Rosenberg, 1996). In 1960, the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway (BQE) was completed under the supervision of Robert Moses. After this time, Red Hook underwent a dramatic metamorphosis. The expressway essentially cut the neighborhood in half. Now "Red Hook" refers to the community that sits to the southwest of the BQE (Kasinitz and Hillyard, 1995). After 1960, the demographic makeup of the neighborhood shifted from white working-class dockworkers and their families to poor African-Americans and Puerto Ricans. Over the last fifty years, the population has become increasingly poor, and according to 2000 Census data, 46% of Red Hook residents now live below the poverty line. Once a booming waterfront, Red Hook suffered from the loss of its shipping industry and the influx of heroin and crack in the 1980s. Life Magazine named Red Hook one of the most crack-infested neighborhoods in the U.S. But the nadir came in the early 1990s, when Patrick Daly, the principal of the local elementary school, was shot and killed in broad daylight when he got caught in the crossfire between two rival drug dealers.

According to the New York City Housing Authority, there are currently 6,391 people living in the Houses. They estimate, however, that there could be as many as 2,000 residents beyond this official count. According to the 2000 US Census, approximately 60 percent are African American and 40 percent were Latino. In 1999, 28 percent of the work force was unemployed and the average household income was $10,372. There are at least 1,300 youth between the ages of 10 and 19 living in the Houses and at least another 400 in the surrounding neighborhood (Center for New York City Affairs, 2003).

The Red Hook Community Justice Center

A project of the Center for Court Innovation, the Red Hook Community Justice Center is an ambitious experiment in using the authority of the courts to respond to the challenges of drugs, crime, and disorder. Launched in June 2000, at the heart of the Justice Center is its multi-jurisdictional courtroom in which one judge presides over criminal, housing, domestic violence and juvenile delinquency cases. The animating idea is that rather than simply processing cases, the judge should seek to solve the problems that bring people to court. The judge has access to a broad range of meaningful sanctions for offenders, such as community service projects, on-site social services and youth development programs, and ready access to services to help try and avoid further court involvement. All services are also available to community residents on a walk-in basis.[1]

In planning the Red Hook Community Justice Center, the Center for Court Innovation undertook a needs assessment process to identify community priorities. Through focus groups and surveys, residents articulated a need for the Justice Center to address youth crime and youth development. As such, youth crime is a special area of focus for the Justice Center. The Justice Center sees

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[1] For more information on the Red Hook Community Justice Center, please see: Berman, G. and Feinblatt, J. 2005. *Good Courts*. New York: The New Press, and Berman, G. and Fox, A. 2005. "Justice in Red Hook." *The Justice System Journal*, 26(1):77-90.

young people both voluntarily and on a mandated basis. Mandated young people include teens (16 to 18 years old) with cases in criminal court, young people (under 16) with juvenile delinquency cases in family court, and cases referred by the New York City Department of Probation. These young people receive a combination of services and supervision from the Justice Center.

In addition, the Justice Center seeks to provide opportunities for the neighborhood youth to engage in preventive programming; it is home to a range of programs that seek to attract young people on a voluntary basis. For example, the Justice Center's youth court uses positive peer pressure to ensure that young people who have committed minor offenses pay back the community and receive the help they need to avoid further criminal behavior. Local teenagers are trained to perform the roles of judge, jury, and advocate in youth court cases involving their peers who have committed low-level crimes such as truancy and shoplifting. The Justice Center has also partnered with a local theater company, Falconworks, and the 76th Police Precinct to bring together police and neighborhood youth – two groups that often share a mutual suspicion – to write and perform short plays, fostering not only positive interaction but also allowing both young people and officers to present their perspectives to each other. Other youth programs at the Justice Center include internships, GED classes, a spring/summer baseball league for children, and a summer youth photography project.

Literature Review

Social Change

The theories of influence, social change, and diffusion of innovation often follow a similar trajectory. Social diffusion theorist Everett Rogers argues that when "trend-setters" or popular-opinion leaders in a given social group begin to model a new behavior, they begin to alter perceptions of what is normative. "Ultimately, community members, regardless of whether they have had contact with the original trendsetters, are expected to adopt the new behavior as it diffuses through the community's social networks" (Bertrand, 2004). This echoes structural aspects of Gladwell's example of influence, drawn from a 1943 study of diffusion theory. Gladwell (1997) writes:

> *One of the most famous diffusion studies is Bruce Ryan and Neal Gross's analysis of the spread of hybrid seed corn in Greene County, Iowa, in the nineteen-thirties. The new seed corn was introduced there in about 1928, and it was superior in every respect to the seed that had been used by farmers for decades. But it wasn't adopted all at once...In the language of diffusion research, the handful of farmers who started trying hybrid seed corn at the very beginning of the thirties were the "innovators," the adventurous ones. The slightly larger group that followed them was the "early adopters." They were the opinion leaders in the community, the respected, thoughtful people who watched and analyzed what those wild innovators were doing and then did it themselves. Then came the big bulge of farmers in 1936, 1937, and 1938-the "early majority" and the "late majority," which is to say the deliberate and the skeptical masses, who would never try anything until the most respected farmers had tried it. Only after they had been converted did the "laggards," the most traditional of all, follow suit. The critical thing about this sequence is that it is almost entirely interpersonal. According to Ryan and Gross, only*

the innovators relied to any great extent on radio advertising and farm journals and seed salesmen in making their decision to switch to the hybrid. Everyone else made his decision overwhelmingly because of the example and the opinions of his neighbors and peers.

If innovators are responsible for inspiring early adopters, then logically these are the two essential target populations for anyone wishing to disseminate an idea, a product or a behavior.

Public health researchers, hoping to stem the spread of HIV/AIDS, developed what they term a "popular opinion leader model," which recruited "already-popular people to personally endorse the value of risk reduction behavior change." Studies of interventions based on the popular opinion leader model demonstrate fairly dramatic shifts in both prevalence and frequency of high-risk sexual behavior (generally by magnitudes of 30% from baseline risk behavior levels) (Kelly et al., 2004). Through these methods, groups of popular opinion leaders from different segments of the targeted risk population were identified, recruited, and trained to deliver prevention messages to other members of the target population (Kelly, 2004).

Delinquency

Much of the academic literature on delinquency comes from sociology. Historically, positive criminologists tended to focus on the psychological and behavioral reasons for why the delinquent acts,[2] emphasizing differences between the delinquent and non-delinquent. Contemporary sociologists, by contrast, move away from individual pathology to examine social structures (e.g., class, ethnicity, geography) looking at the subculture of delinquency.[3]

The idea of the juvenile delinquent emerged with the growth of large urban areas in the early part of the twentieth century. In his 1927 book *Gangland*, Frederic Thrasher concluded that gangs, which he characterizes as primarily male groups, grew out of the unregulated and unsupervised areas in interstitial spaces in the modern city – broken-down, ignored neighborhoods with dilapidated buildings, alongside rivers and railroad tracks, and in between "good" residential areas. Thrasher contrasted these urban spaces with the nearby residential and highly organized suburbs, which he argues remained mostly gangless because of established institutions of family, school, church, etc. that provided activities and opportunities for children, supporting their transition from adolescence to adulthood. The environment of urban neglect, however, with

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[2] For example, Yablonsky (1997) discussed how gang members are pathological rather than normal, and their delinquent acts stem from "individual emotional problems." Other positive criminologists focus on antisocial personality stemming from, for example, parental neglect, poor role models, neuroses, or the inability to understand consequences of transgression.

[3] Most of the delinquency and subcultures literature has been dominated by discussions of males. Girls have received a small amount of attention (McRobbie and Garber, 1977), though this is beginning to shift. Perhaps, as Miller (2000) hypothesized, girls involved in gangs, for example, are not nearly as criminal as their male counterparts, especially when it comes to violent crime, and gender serves as a protective factor for girls, allowing them to place limits on gang activities in which they will participate (e.g., they have an easier time of avoiding gun use than gang boys do). Additionally, the reasons for girls' involvement in delinquent behavior are often different than for males: girls are more likely to have been the victims of sexual and physical abuse, causing them to run away to escape problems at home. The research and understanding of girls' delinquency is, as Chesney-Lind and Shelden (2004) say, "sketchy at best." Because of this, the literature reviewed here is largely focused on the male adolescent population that does not necessarily reflect the female experience for delinquency.

shifting populations and disorganization, led to the rise of gangs, especially for young people who were negotiating their identity during their teenage years.[4]

Albert Cohen, whose scholarship was heavily influenced by Thrasher, examined the formation of subcultures, focusing not on individualistic behavior but on collective action. In *Delinquent Boys* (1955), Cohen described how new cultural forms emerge. He suggests that when a number of actors share a similar maladjustment to cultural expectations, they interact with each other to mutually explore and create a new, collective solution in which they find the social support and acceptance they need. These solutions are cultural because they are collective and an actor's participation in them is influenced by knowing that he/she shares the same norms with other participating actors; they are subcultural because the norms are shared only by the actors who somehow benefit from participation. A particular subculture then becomes a community for its members, a group of people with the same norms and values. A subculture of delinquency (and not a delinquent subculture), Cohen argues, occurs as a lower-class boys' solution to the problem of being judged by middle-class values and being unable to meet the middle-class goals set by society.

In response to Cohen, Walter Miller (1958) theorized that lower-class boys are socialized with different and unlawful norms; he suggested that delinquency was synonymous with lower-class culture, and that it was only because the legal system reflected a more dominant value system that the actions of lower-class individuals were "delinquent." For example, lower-class boys evaluated personal status not on "achievement" but along "trouble" potential: getting into trouble achieves several valued ends such as prestige, excitement, and risk. Additionally, the idea of "toughness" was possibly valued in lower-class culture because of the lack of consistently present male figures in pre-adolescence. Again, the focus is on social structures and culture as opposed to individual pathology.

Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin continued this subcultural theory of delinquency in their book *Delinquency and Opportunity* (1960), which argues that the lower-class' alienation from conventional culture leads to opposition, in turn leading to delinquency. By this formulation, delinquency stems from opposition to middle-class morality, caused by poverty and the lack of alternative mobility opportunities for lower-class adolescents; delinquency among very poor inner-city youths is a rational reaction to limited economic opportunities.

The focus on class as it related to delinquency and subculture was the focus of many of the Birmingham (UK) school theorists, who interpreted the actions and behaviors of youth groups through a new-Marxist prism, where culture was always taken as a matter of class conflict. In *Subcultural Conflict and Working-Class Community* (1972), Phil Cohen asserted that the emergence of subcultures is rooted in working-class culture. According to Cohen, subcultures *must* be working-class in origin; they cannot be produced from the middle-class, since subcultures arise from a dominated culture and not a dominant one. He argued that modern urban planning had a disastrous effect on working-class communities; high-density housing developments, which were based on the middle-class nuclear-family model, led to the destruction of communal space, kinship networks, and caused a loss of neighborhood

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[4] As Brotherton (unpublished) put forth, Thrasher's definition of the gang was more open-ended and did not include anything about delinquency, whereas now gangs are defined by delinquency – engaging in transgressive practices that break our legal codes and, according to Brotherton, inspire the social control responses of the community.

supervision, all essential components of a working-class community. Additionally, increasing technological advancements led to a decrease – indeed, the near-elimination – of craft industries, small family businesses, and corner shops, which were replaced by automated techniques, large corporations, and supermarkets. As the local economy contracted, it became less and less diverse. Change in the production process resulted in a loss of semi-skilled jobs and the loss of the traditional ideology of production, which included dignity relating to work ethic and quantity/quality of production. According to Cohen, the shift to an ideology of consumption left workers with not only a loss of their pride in the job, but it put them in a position where they were excluded from the new consumer society as well.

Young people were most affected by these changes, which brought about a strain on the relationships between parents and children. "What had previously been a source of support and security for both," Cohen suggests, "now became something of a battleground, a major focus of all the anxieties created by the disintegration of community structures around them" (1972: 89). Young people responded by forming youth subcultures in opposition to parent culture. Generational conflict allowed for the shift from interpersonal, face-to-face conflict to a collective context. Subcultures brought a sense of community and solidarity that had been destroyed by advanced capitalism. For Cohen, then, subcultures and delinquency became a way to compensate for the loss of proletarian culture.

Similarly, in his 1977 book *Learning to Labor*, Paul Willis discussed working-class youth resistance, focusing on how young school boys ("lads") in an English industrial city interacted with an educational institution that was entrenched with middle-class values. For Willis, counter-culture at school must be placed in the larger framework of working-class culture. The school provides an example of class and social reproduction in a capitalist society. Steeped in a dialectic of opposition, the boys talked to refused to do schoolwork and rebelled against school authority. While teachers and school staff attributed this to exposure to bad influences and individual pathology, Willis states that these explanations "will not do … as proper social explanations for the development of an anti-school culture" (1977: 116). By rejecting the conformist code of the school, students were rejecting incorporation into a middle-class way of life according to Willis. He documents how this rebellion of poor and working class kids against the school, while empowering, ends up preventing their social mobility and thus reproduces pre-existing class inequalities. Ironically, it is their active opposition that actually ends up helping to maintain class divisions.

While much of the literature seems to focus the oppositional nature of delinquency, David Matza (1964) felt like this nature is overemphasized. He posits that the relationship between the subculture of delinquency and conventional culture cannot be purely oppositional, because conventional culture is multi-faceted and cannot be reduced solely to middle-class morality and "ascetic Puritanism" (1964: 37). According to Matza, unlike completely oppositional subcultures, delinquents' justifications for their acts are oftentimes not radical, but rather about status and publicity, unavoidability (e.g., having to defend oneself), or necessity (doing what one needs to do to meet basic needs). Additionally, delinquents often take offense if they are falsely accused of delinquent acts, implying that they concur with conventional assessment of delinquency; if delinquency were oppositional, they would take imputations of delinquency as a compliment. For Matza, delinquents play both delinquent and conventional roles, and they "drift" between criminal and conventional action.

Cohen and Felson (1979) put forth that crime is normal; therefore, they do not look at why people commit crimes, but instead discuss crime as a routine activity that shares many similar attributes of other routine activities: it is mundane and happens constantly. They define routine activities as those "which provide for basic population and individual needs" (1979: 593). Criminal activities are events that take place when the opportunity presents itself, when there is the convergence in space and time of motivated offenders, suitable targets (with value, visibility, and accessibility), and the absence of capable guardians against crime (i.e., something or someone to stop the crime from occurring). For Cohen and Felson, crime just needs opportunity.

In this study, the researchers seek to determine whether, in today's consumer society, the contemporary sociological theories of delinquency still hold for young people, and whether young people involved in the criminal justice system are willing to adopt and model pro-social behaviors for their peers.

Youth ECHO: The Intervention

Starting in the fall of 2007, the Red Hook Community Justice Center implemented an experiment designed to address the positive perceptions of youth crime thought to be held by many young people residing in the Red Hook Houses, the largest public housing development in Brooklyn, New York. The teenage residents are nearly exclusively low-income and Black and Latino; many are disconnected from mainstream social institutions and some are involved in the neighborhood's drug trade. The original funding for the experiment – known as Youth ECHO – was for a program that would try to increase pro-social behaviors and change attitudes about crime among Red Hook youth, employing a marketing campaign to achieve this goal.

Before a curriculum for training participants could be devised, there were numerous programmatic protocols (e.g., behavior management, recruitment, and interview structures) that needed to be put in place. These were drawn from a variety of sources, including another Center for Court Innovation youth engagement project, the Youth Justice Board, which seeks to bring youth voices and input into the policy decision-making process in New York City, and Teen Empowerment, a youth organizing program in Boston, Massachusetts. These policies and practices were combined to create an interview protocol that would identify youth who were both well-positioned socially to spread their messages but were also interested and in possession of sufficient critical thinking skills to engage with the issues investigated by the group. These policies also created a structure of relevant and meaningful rewards and consequences for positive and negative group behavior.

Recruitment for youth programs is often done at schools, community-based organizations, and other places where youths come into contact with adults. Youth ECHO was intentionally designed to engage a cadre of teenagers who were disconnected from mainstream culture. Consequently, recruitment was done at alternative schools (for young people who have had difficulties in traditional school environments), at popular hang-out spots in the neighborhood like the Chicken Spot (a local take-out restaurant), the park, and through word-of-mouth. For Cohort 1, special efforts were made to recruit young people whose names were heard numerous times in ethnographic interviews with other young people in the area (see Methodology section below), having been identified as influential yet disconnected teens in the Red Hook

neighborhood. Applicants for Cohort 2 were recruited through participants in Cohort 1.

Program staff were repeatedly warned that it would be difficult to recruit Red Hook youths, who are traditionally very reluctant to engage in programming. Staff had no problem identifying 15 participants; many ECHO members said later they decided to interview for the program because it was "something new" and didn't yet have a reputation among teens. A broad range of youth were carefully and intentionally selected, from those who were enrolled in school and possessed relatively high levels of executive functioning to those who had been in and out of the criminal justice system, were unemployed, and had dropped out of school. This mix provided a vital spectrum of youth experiences and lent a necessary credibility to the program and its message.

As the background research showed, the program's pro-social message needed to come from young people in order for it to be relevant and to resonate with their peers (Swaner and White, 2009). Giving the young people a say in the issues to be addressed and the resulting strategies and projects was intended to lead to: 1) greater commitment to program, 2) greater commitment to the message itself, and 3) investment in the long-term success of the program.

The Youth ECHO curriculum was derived from a positive youth development model designed to both educate and engage adolescents. In its final iteration, the program curriculum had three key phases: skill-building, research and development, and implementation. The first, skill-building phase front-loaded work on healthy communication, active listening, team-building, and learning styles so the participants developed a sense of cohesion and a healthy group identity. At a weekend retreat, participants honed these skills and, with staff support, decided the issue they wanted to address over the course of the program. (For the first cohort this issue was drug dealing, for the second it was staying in school.) They transitioned into learning about research, organizing, and marketing methods over a more extended period of time, first with program staff leading workshops and then by visiting various marketing agencies for specialized presentations about alternative advertising methods and innovations in the field.

In the second phase, research and development, participants thought through and designed their campaign. They explored their topic in-depth so they understood the underlying individual, community, and structural causes. The group devised a research project to learn more about the issue, including how it is affecting young people and how they are thinking and talking about it. They also conducted and analyzed research with adult stakeholders (e.g. police, teachers, parents, and/or court staff). Based on their findings and drawing on the marketing and organizing lessons, they created a multi-stage campaign to address their issue.

In the final, implementation phase, participants partnered with marketing professionals and other youth programs to carry out their campaign. The culminating project – like the issue itself – was left largely to the discretion of the ECHO members.

Youth ECHO's first cohort consisted of a group of thirteen Red Hook teenagers between the ages of 13 and 18, 92% of whom were African American and 15% were Latino (one person chose more than one race/ethnicity). Six were male and seven were female. These young people selected an anti-drug dealing message: "Drug Dealing: It's Not Worth It" for their campaign. As part of their messaging strategy, ECHO members partnered with 826NYC, a local Brooklyn arts non-profit, to create a documentary, "Knock the Hustle: The New Movement," which explored

the impact of drug dealing on young people in the neighborhood. They also developed a cell phone ring tone, a website with links to youth services across the city (to provide alternatives to dealing), message t-shirts for distribution at events, and a spray chalk stencil to "tag" the message throughout the housing development. In the summer of 2008, the group hosted a Block Party attended by approximately 250 Red Hook residents.

The second cohort consisted of a group of 14 young people – eight boys and six girls, 80% African American and 20% Latino. This group selected dropping out of school as the issue they wanted to address, seeing dropping out as a direct pathway into underground economies (like drug dealing, stealing and robbery). The message, "Fast Money is Trash Money. Get it in now. Get it back later. Stay in School," was sent to peers via text message (through a three-stage, chain letter-style text campaign); stamped onto fake dollar bills scattered around the neighborhood and slipped into the lockers and books of friends at school; featured in several YouTube videos; and on free t-shirts, Tech Decks (mini skateboards popular among young people), and trophies. The latter were distributed to young people 13-16 (those most vulnerable to dropping out or who will have the easiest time reenrolling) at an "End-of-School Bash," a basketball tournament and talent show thrown in Red Hook's Coffey Park.

Methodology

Data were collected between January 2008 and June 2009 by four methods: one-on-one interviews, surveys, focus groups, and program observations. The use of both qualitative and quantitative methods allowed the researchers to gain an understanding of the experiences of teenagers in Red Hook. All interview and focus group protocols and survey instruments received prior approval from the Center for Court Innovation Institutional Review Board, and all informants were asked to sign a consent form before participation (for those under the age of 18, parent/guardian consent forms were obtained as well).

One-on-one interviews

The researchers conducted one-on-one individual interviews at two time points with two separate groups of Red Hook young people. From January to March 2008, 23 open-ended interviews were conducted with teenagers ages 13 through 18 who were Red Hook residents (83%) or Brooklyn residents who spent a significant amount of time in the Red Hook neighborhood (17%).[5] Seventy percent of those interviewed were female, and 70% also lived in New York City public housing. The interview method was chosen because the authors wanted to gain a better understanding of the cultural norms of Red Hook teenagers, especially as they related to delinquent behavior, and hence uncover meaning in the experiences of the young people (Kvale, 1996). The interview protocol included questions about how they spend their free time; what types of "crews" (i.e., informal groups or gangs) they were involved in; whether they or their friends commit crimes, and what the reasons they might do so are; how adults view youth from Red Hook; and how they perceive themselves and their futures. Interviews ranged from 30 to 90 minutes in length. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded for conceptual themes.

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[5] Some participants were recruited through schools, flyering, word-of-mouth and other community-based organizations. Additionally, two adults from the Red Hook Houses were trained as interviewers; because of their cultural "inside" status, they were able to identify and interview harder-to-reach teenagers who were not able to be recruited through the more traditional recruitment methods.

Additionally, the researchers conducted 21 semi-structured interviews in August 2008 and June 2009 with Youth ECHO participants who had remained in the program for its full program cycle. These interviews, which lasted about 45 minutes each, sought to understand how the young people made sense of the work they had done in the community education campaigns, and how it affected their personal growth and their plans for the future.

Youth ECHO participant surveys

Baseline and end-of-program follow-up surveys were administered to 21 members who completed the Youth ECHO program between March 2008 and July 2009. Surveys were used to gather participant demographics and assess their attitudes and behavior regarding civic engagement, delinquent behavior, risk behavior participation, work, and feelings of efficacy. Most survey questions were pulled from national youth surveys[6] that have been tested for reliability and validity.

Factor analysis revealed a civic engagement scale from six items designed to measure how often participants were trying to improve their community. The scale included items such as "I am serving others in my community" and "I am trying to help solve social problems," with a 4-point Likert scale ranging from "Not at all or rarely" to "Extremely or almost always." The scale, which calculated the mean for these six items, had a Cronbach's alpha of .773. A higher mean indicated greater civic engagement.

A feeling-of-efficacy scale was created from the mean of three items that measured whether the individuals felt they could make a difference in their community and in politics ($\alpha = .724$). Using a 4-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree," survey takers were asked to identify how much they agreed with statements such as "People working together in my community can solve our problems," and "I have the skills and knowledge necessary to participate in politics." A higher mean indicated stronger feelings of efficacy.

An attitudes-towards-delinquency scale was created from five items measuring how wrong the individuals felt about specific delinquent behaviors (e.g., skipping classes without an excuse, stealing something worth less than $50, selling drugs) using a 4-point Likert scale ranging from "Very wrong" to "Not at all wrong." A reliability test yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .635. A lower mean indicated feelings that the delinquent behaviors were more wrong.

Factor analysis revealed a seven-item attitudes-towards-gangs scale ($\alpha = .637$). This scale calculated the mean of responses to statements such as "I think it's cool to be in a gang," and "I think you are safer, and have protection, if you join a gang." Responses were coded as 0 ("Not true for me") and 1 ("True for me"). The coding for three items were flipped so that "True for me" was coded as 1 and "Not true for me" as 0. A lower score indicated less positive attitudes towards gangs.

An attitude-towards-work scale was created from five items designed to measure how

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[6] Some of these surveys included the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System, the National Household Education Survey, the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, and the Black Youth Survey.

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participants felt about working and having a job ($\alpha = .633$). Using a 4-point Likert scale that ranged from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree, survey takers were asked to say how much they agreed with certain statements, such as "I admire people who get by without working," and "The only good job is one that pays a lot of money." The coding of one of the statements was flipped so that Strongly Disagree was coded as 4 and Strongly Agree as 1. A lower score implied more positive attitudes towards work.

Other variables included whether or not the survey taker had used alcohol, cigarettes, or marijuana in the last 30 days, whether that had been in a physical fight in the last 12 months, and whether they had ever been arrested.

Youth ECHO participant focus groups

Between August 2008 and June 2009, three focus groups were conducted with Red Hook teenagers who participated in the Youth ECHO program. The first focus group included nine participants from the first program cohort, the second had nine participants from the second cohort, and the third had seven participants and one staff member[7] from the second cohort. Focus groups were conducted to get at the collective experiences of the young people who had worked together on community education campaigns (Glitz, 1998). Participants were asked about their feelings of agency related to their message campaign and work with Youth ECHO, their attitudes towards their campaign issues (drug dealing and school dropouts), the challenges of trying to influence their peers in a positive way, and the experience of working in an institution of justice (i.e., a courthouse). Each group lasted 60 minutes and was audio recorded and transcribed.

Findings

The findings fell into two interrelated categories: delinquency and engagement. The attitudes and behaviors of young people were complex and most closely followed Matza's idea of drift, as well as Cohen and Felson's routine activities model. Positive behaviors were not mutually exclusive of negative ones, and the teenagers often found themselves moving between not only "conventional" and "delinquent" behaviors, but "pro-social" as well. Moreover, the youths who were getting in trouble most often were the most outspoken in Youth ECHO's campaigns against crime.

Civic Engagement

Youth ECHO participants unanimously felt that the work they were doing was important and mattered to other young people. Whether the issue at hand was drug dealing or dropping out of school, all participants could clearly see the effects these issues had on Red Hook. Despite early claims (during the period when they were trying to establish who were the group's leaders and what the group's tone would be) that they were only involved for the stipend attached to participation in the program, participants also stressed that they believed in Youth ECHO's mission and in trying to make a difference in the community. Many said that they wouldn't have

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[7] The staff member was a graduate of the first cohort who was then hired as an AmeriCorps member to work with the program.

even applied if they didn't want to "help." Some expressed in a focus group that while at first they were in the program just for the money and they didn't care at all, they felt differently by the end of the program. "You change, you actually, actually want to help, learn, it's an experience," said one. Another stated, "We got a chance, we have an opportunity, it's a real open opportunity for us."

Indeed, when participants were informed that the program was closing due to funding difficulties, many expressed frustration about the lack of similar programming in the neighborhood. As one participant stated: "I feel like we were the first, like, we're the first to have a program that's about … trying to change the community, that's why I feel like, why [cut] this program?"

During each campaign, the groups expressed simultaneously a belief that the work they were doing was important and a concern that their "target," other young people, might not take them seriously. The first group struggled with the concept of the marketing campaign (that is, with thinking of themselves as using advertising methods to create social change). Instead, they primarily framed their work as trying to help the neighborhood out. The second cohort, perhaps due to changes to the curriculum that strengthened the marketing skills component, clearly thought of the work they were doing as creating change *through* the creation and dissemination of a marketing campaign.

Youth ECHO also led to feelings of empowerment for its participants. One young woman stated that although she was a bit shy when she started the program, she "learned how to speak out on stuff." Another stated that because of Youth ECHO, "We can make a difference now." They talked about how they can use what they've learned in other contexts and how they can speak up about their rights. "How to speak our minds" was something they all felt they were learning to do through the program. One participant summed up this feeling when she stated, "We are the new movement." Despite this, the mean on the feelings of efficacy scale section of the survey went from 2.91 to 2.80 following program participation, though this drop was not significant.

Attitudes Towards Work

As previously mentioned, the bi-weekly stipend and the concept of being employed were extremely important to participants in Youth ECHO. Participants used their paychecks differently, some spending their money on food, clothes, or social outings, with others saving half and giving half to parents or guardians. Participants clearly felt there was a social cachet to having a "job" and an income, however small.

The desire to be perceived as successful was a powerful one. Researchers found that clothing and other status symbols were a central concern. Coveted labels included Prada sneakers, Gucci, Coach, and Nike Air Jordans. Many teens also had Blackberries or Sidekick phones, and iPods or Zune music players. Basically, as one 16-year-old boy explained, young people "just get whatever [is] new."

One young woman, who formerly lived in East New York, said she sees a big difference between the importance of fashion in her old neighborhood and in Red Hook. In Red Hook, she says:

People just look at you different like you – you dirty. Like, nobody cares about you. It – It doesn't matter how – how you are. What you are as a person. It doesn't matter how you act if you like – if you – if you don't dress the way they dress or look the way they look, they just – they just put you out.

All young people expressed a strong desire not to be perceived as "bummy," suggesting a strong correlation between material goods, the perception of success, and status. Despite this, they chose education campaigns that condemned non-legal work, creating anti-drug dealing and stay-in-school campaigns with slogans such as "Drug dealing: It's Not Worth It," and "Fast money is Trash Money. Get it in now. Get it back later. Stay in school."

There was a real tension for Youth ECHO members between the desire to acquire wealth through "legitimate" means and the availability of "fast money" (i.e., cash that you can get quickly without working hard). Having a job, however, lent youths a sense of importance that had a powerful and long-lasting impact on their behavior. Indeed, as ECHO members built their skill-levels and gained confidence in their abilities, many expressed interest in furthering their own professional lives. Several members from the first year, and all of those in the second year, wished to rejoin for the next program year. One first-year ECHO participant, who had dropped out of high school after 9th grade and been involved with the criminal justice system, after completing the first program year joined the Justice Center's AmeriCorps (public service) program and worked with program staff as a co-facilitator for the second cohort. Due to her involvement, she also pursued and completed her GED. Another participant, who had also been arrested during his time at Youth ECHO, interned at the Justice Center, expressing a desire to build his skills to make himself more hirable.

The mean score on the attitudes towards work scale for was 1.85 at baseline and 1.78 at the end of the program (1 signifies more and 4 signifies less positive attitudes), implying that the young people had positive attitudes towards work and did not have a desire to get by without working. In focus groups, several participants said that there was a need for more programs for kids and more jobs for adults in the community "so people can stay off the streets." One member said: "Everybody that has a job out here they don't even live out here so our money is being sent somewhere else, and it's being spent here but being sent somewhere else." When a large multi-national furniture store opened in the area, they were skeptical about what it would mean in terms of jobs for the community. One person stated that, "They hire Red Hook, and then they fire them. Like, that's not right, yo." Another stated that, "There's mad people from Red Hook who work there for like two months, then they drop them." A third member said, "I don't think they like people from Red Hook working in Red Hook." One young female summed up the problem when she said, "When they hire people from Red Hook, I think it's only so they can, like, um, get y'all to back their idea to have something new in the neighborhood, just to get y'all on board, but then they drop you and there's nothing you can do about it."

Working at a Courthouse

Young people's attitudes about working at a courthouse raised issues that young people of color often encounter. One participant stated that, "Like, if you say you work at a courthouse people think you're a snitch or something." Some did not like the security measures taken when they were coming to the program, making statements such as, "I didn't like it, going through the

metal detectors," and "The security was one of the things that bothered me most." Despite this, they were able to overcome these feelings and move beyond stereotypes that young people have about police. As one participant stated, "I didn't like nobody with a badge really, but then … [our mentors], they kinda cool, so I'm like, 'alright,'" referring to the fact that two of the court officers in the building served as mentors to members of the program.

Gangs

Many Red Hook youth, particularly boys, are members of well-known gangs, like the Bloods, Crips, and Latin Kings. While there are rivalries between these gangs, there is very little actual violence between them occurring in Red Hook. More important to young people are teams, typically small groups of three-15 members between the ages of 13 and 18. There are all-boy teams, like 100, Violators, GMG (Green Money Gang), and Soldiers. There are all-girl teams or "crews," like Trendsetters, TBB (The Baddest Bitches), and TDD (Top Dime Divas). ATM (Addicted to Money) and Dynasty are among the mixed-gender teams. As the names suggest, these teams are largely geared around the acquisition of money and status. One young woman, the only female member of ATM, explained that physical indicators of success are requirements for membership. "I don't really know because I didn't make it up," she said, "but I think if you not about money then you can't mess with them. Like, if you a bum, you can't mess with them. If you don't have money, you can't mess with them. If you not pretty or handsome, you can't mess with them."

According to all the young people interviewed, while these crews are concerned with projecting an image of material success, they aren't engaging in criminal activity beyond occasional fights, smoking marijuana and public drinking. They are essentially social networks. Another young woman clarified, saying, "They don't do things like they used to. Like Violators, they name. You'd think they dangerous, but they don't do what they used to, 'cause they saw that they're getting older and they need to calm down." While the crews don't participate in organized criminal activity, they do have a strong rivalry with one another that can lead to altercations. "It's a team thing to say whose crew is better," she continued. "We don't do that, but we don't have no problem – like real, real beef. We just play around like, 'Yeah. We better. Y'all droppin'. Y'all comin' to us. We better.'"

Survey data found that, though young people were involved with these "crews," they didn't have positive feelings towards gangs, or think that gangs made them feel safer. On the attitudes-towards-gangs scale, the mean for the group at the start of the program was .25, indicating extremely negative attitudes towards gangs and gang membership. This suggests that, contrary to analysts like Cohen, Miller, and Cloward and Ohlin, the reasons for involvement in the crews was more about conventional peer groupings than anything related to a desire to resist norms imposed on them by middle-class values. To the contrary, the focus on money and status seems to indicate an embracing of indicators of middle-class success.[8]

Delinquency/Crime

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[8] Another indicator of embracing "middle-class success" that challenges Willis' argument in *Learning to Labor* is that on a survey question about the highest level of education the young people expected to achieve, 60% stated a 4-year college degree or a graduate degree.

While there is a tendency to think of youth delinquency as a fixed state – either a young person is or is not a delinquent – the experiences of Youth ECHO participants and youth interviewed during the ethnographic research phase suggest a much more fluid relationship to delinquent and criminal behavior. Youths associate the concept of "crime" with a very specific set of behaviors. In general, they do not describe the petty criminal behavior in which they and their peer group commonly engage as "crime." That is to say, certain kinds of petty criminal behavior are normative behavior for many of these young people.[9] When asked what they thought of when they heard the word "crime," all the ethnographic research subjects referred to violent crime: gunshots, guns, shooting, killing, stabbing, and murder. All said these kinds of things do not happen in Red Hook. The majority of young people identified robbery as the most common crime committed by young people, with selling marijuana as the second most common. Teens associate robbery with deprivation and with laziness. "People see what they want," one teen explained. "If they can't get it themselves with their money they find a way to get it."

The teenagers interviewed were asked about the primary crimes they thought Red Hook youths committed, and answers varied from marijuana selling and smoking to hopping the train, to fighting, to stealing. When pressed for reasons why they think Red Hook youths commit crimes in general, interviewees identified four basic ideas: 1) there's nothing else to do; 2) the desire to be perceived as cool; 3) the need for money; 4) peer pressure. "Football, basketball – sports," explained one interviewee. "That's the only thing you can do in Red Hook without getting into no trouble." If boys aren't into sports, "basically you're lost. Like, unless you don't go sit there, you go on the corner and sell drugs – go and start trouble unless there's something else to do." Another teen, agreed, saying she believes that many boys end up joining gangs "cause they have nothing better to do." Young people commit crimes, one young woman suggested, because "I guess they need the money. I don't know. Nobody trying to give it to them. Like I said, parents don't care, so they go find it the easy way – make it the other way. Nowadays a lot of kids don't depend on their parents, so they depend on theyselves."

This justification of low-level criminal actions – that parents do not provide for children, that they want things they can't pay for, that there's nothing else to do – were echoed somewhat by Youth ECHO participants. The crimes they referenced most often were fighting, marijuana use, and shoplifting. During several group discussions with program staff, participants could not understand why these activities were illegal and, moreover, could not identify a moral or ethical reason not to engage in them. They understood that they were illegal, so they reasoned they might elect to avoid such behavior to stay out of trouble, but not because they personally felt there was something wrong with the action. They could, however, readily identify right and wrong in relation to what the ethnographic research subjects identified with the word "crime" – murder, arson, robbery, and certain kinds of physical and sexual abuse – and eschewed such behavior. One young woman who participated in the ethnographic research suggested, further, that Red Hook youths avoid committing crimes in the neighborhood precisely because of the feeling of extended family: "[I]f you do something to somebody in Red Hook, it's a big possibility that they know your parents. So, it's like you don't want to get in trouble by your parents. You don't want them to find out, so they'd rather not do it in Red Hook." She was

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[9] More than half of the Red Hook youths interviewed have had a family member incarcerated, and at least half of those young people have had more than one family member incarcerated. Several have lost brothers, uncles, or godfathers to gang or drug-related violence. Although it may not be normative, serious criminal behavior is a part of their lives.

referring here not to normative Red Hook teenage behaviors like fighting, marijuana use, and shoplifting but to issues like stalking, teen relationship abuse, and the use of weapons.

Peer pressure also plays a role in teenagers' behavior. In ethnographic interviews, several young people qualified the term "peer pressure," saying that instead of being pressured into certain behaviors or postures to seem cooler, young people do things to win respect and not be perceived as a "punk" or as "corny" (i.e., scared, or not "down"). One young woman said, "Like I know what I'm doing but sometimes I don't make the right decisions. Like in my mind I'm like this is right but I'll do the opposite of what my mind is telling me…'cause I feel like if I don't do it they'll be like 'Oh, you mad corny.'" As another young woman put it, teenagers will do something "if they got a friend in their ear. But if they by theyself, they won't do it." This distinction emphasizes the degree to which certain behaviors are not merely the result of rebellion or resisting mainstream culture, but are the result of a complex combination of morality, a sense of a larger social or filial responsibility, and feelings of peer social pressure.

Major Themes: Drift

Despite the belief among Youth ECHO participants that their work had a real significance to the community and potential to affect other young people's behavior, they themselves struggled with consistently avoiding the activities they were advocating against. During the first cohort, one young person admitted that she occasionally dealt drugs to make money, and others questioned whether their message to not sell drugs, which they really believed in, would be taken seriously by their peers given that many were marijuana users. During the second cohort, many young people continued to cut classes or even entire days of school, despite group discussion in which they adamantly argued for the importance of education. Ultimately, what they came away with was a global commitment to a set of behaviors – not dealing drugs, staying in school – that they had trouble regularly following.

Despite involvement in the Youth ECHO program, participants also were involved in antisocial behaviors, almost all of which increased during their time in the program. The percent that had used alcohol in the past 30 days went from 43% to 52%; past 30 day cigarette usage increased from 19% to 33%, and past 30 day marijuana usage jumped from 29% to 38%. The percent who had ever been arrested significantly ($p<.05$) increased from 33% before program participation to 52% at the end of the program. Additionally, a Pearson's correlation between the civic engagement and attitudes-towards-delinquency scales revealed a significant (.526, $p<.05$) association: greater civic engagement was correlated with feelings that delinquent behaviors were not wrong.

Participants in Youth ECHO have a critical understanding of how the desire to engage in positive behaviors is often difficult when faced with institutional barriers. For example, when working on their stay-in-school campaign, they began learning about young people who, because of insufficient credits at too advanced an age, are instead counseled out or "pushed out" by schools despite the fact that they are legally entitled to be enrolled in school until the age of 21. As one ECHO participant put it: "The school to prison pipeline. Like, it's set up so like, kind of, like, [the school's] not exactly helping them, so they're going from school and they're gonna drop out and they're gonna be in prison." Another participant added, "In a way the school sets up the kids, a certain type of kids and whatnot, or whatever, they set them up to go to jail from school.

They're leading them to a bad life." Yet while they talked about all the negative aspects of schools (from their point of view, insufficient funding, poor structural conditions, non-relevant work, uncaring teachers), they understood that it was "ironic" that they were trying to convince people to stay in school. "People need to know, you can't ignore the fact that some schools are bad and it is hard, you know but you still gotta keep doin' it … Sometimes you just need to go on, like, everything ain't gonna be perfect, you got to make it, you just got to do it."

Additionally, participants in the program felt that when they did do positive things, reactions were often patronizing. A local newspaper in Cobble Hill, Brooklyn wrote an article about the Youth ECHO program, and while they were excited about being in the newspaper, they were upset by something in the article that stated the program was giving at-risk kids a chance. "I didn't like that shit. I'm not at risk. And they trying to say that 'cause we in the hood…" They were upset that the article seemed to imply that the program was good for them because they were low-income and from Red Hook, and didn't recognize the work that the young people themselves did to try to help their community, i.e., the article focused on how good the program was for its participants, and not how good the young people were for the community.

Deconstructing Assumptions

The literature on delinquency focuses either on individual psychopathology or on the resistance aspect of the delinquency, whereby young people commit delinquent acts as part of their participation in a deviant subculture in opposition to middle-class values being imposed on them. Gladwell's writing about influentials and popular opinion leaders suggests that locating young people who are central to extended social networks and working with them to shift opinions and behaviors of other youth could potentially result in significant changes in behavior and attitudes. This study, however, challenges the assumptions of both these theories. The findings suggest that delinquency in this low-income, urban neighborhood is not rooted in desires to resist middle-class values, adopt a fully formed and alternative subculture, or follow a select group of popular or influential youth; in fact, many of the young people embrace a variety of middle-class values. Although they were not troubled by certain types of petty criminal behavior (fighting, marijuana use, and shoplifting in particular), they saw neither these nor more serious delinquent actions as cool or oppositional to mainstream values, but rather as the result of boredom that originates from living in an isolated neighborhood or as growing out of financial or social necessity. As Cohen and Felson propose, if the opportunity to commit a low-level crime (smoking marijuana, public/underage drinking, fighting, shoplifting or—less often—robbery) presents itself in space and time, youths will often act. And while many participants engaged in delinquent behavior, they simultaneously embraced pro-social behaviors and advocated a desire to improve the quality of their neighborhood through positive action.

Accordingly, Matza's theory of drift and Cohen and Felson's routine activities approach are supported by this study. The young people in the sample played both conventional and delinquent roles: they were getting involved in low-level crime at the same time they were trying to effect positive change in their community, thereby "drifting" between worlds. Their primary justifications for delinquent behavior focused on having to do things out of necessity, or not having anything else to do. For Cohen and Felson, routine activities include those that provide for basic needs, and the criminal acts discussed by the young people in the sample were often for that purpose, hence making them routine. Youth ECHO participants expressed a desire for more

job opportunities, programs, and activities to keep them off the streets and provide them with positive outlets for their energy and need for social engagement. As one male participant stated, if the young people in Red Hook were actively engaged in after-school programs or part-time jobs, they wouldn't be on the street getting "harassed by the cops for no reason, or be[ing] tempted to do something stupid. People get bored, they get crazy."

Implications

The research described in this paper suggests that young people in Red Hook do not value or gain status from antisocial behaviors, nor do they engage in such behaviors as part of broader rejection of a mainstream culture. Rather, they engage in them out of a sense of necessity or boredom. The assumed relationship between attitude and behavior appears much more complicated – certainly less predictable – than the theory of influentials immediately suggests. Youth attitudes towards crime are determined by numerous variables, not the least of which is geography and social milieu. The ethnographic research for Youth ECHO was an important building block to challenging assumptions of when, how, and why youth engage in antisocial behavior. Not only did it give program staff insight into the particular thought patterns and beliefs of their targeted participant pool, it also allowed designers to test certain programmatic assumptions before they were formalized in the program structure.

The findings from the interviews and focus groups underline the importance of youth-adult partnerships and of having access to activities and projects where young people are active participants rather than the recipients of services. That is, young people perceive a distinct difference between programs that are designed to help them and those that allow them to use their skills, "connects," and energies to assist others, or to try to make a difference. This sense of self-worth and efficacy is a core component of positive youth development.

The teens in this study viewed petty crime as normative. Many "disconnected" youth are perceived as being uninterested in community programs. This study suggests that, instead, many of these young people find themselves stuck with educational decisions made when they were younger (as high school dropouts), with poor employment prospects, engaging in antisocial behaviors because, to a certain extent, they do not see other options. Programs that assist those young people looking to reenter school, employment, or otherwise reengage with the mainstream economy are vital to helping this hard-to-reach population realize their own goals. Working alongside them to explore these goals and settle on a plan of action (rather than to set goals and plans in place for them) is essential to helping them succeed. The assumption that these young people are uninterested in participating in programming is faulty; too often, they just aren't approached for participation.

Finally, our research suggests that programming and policy aimed at stemming delinquency need not focus on wholesale attitudinal change, as the belief of young people's positive perception of crime is faulty. Instead, the tension between anti- and pro-social behavior – between teenagers' low-level criminal activity and their articulated desire to positively affect their neighborhoods – suggests that policymakers and community-based organizations must become more sophisticated and nuanced in their approach if they hope to make an impact on delinquency and crime in communities like Red Hook, Brooklyn.

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