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pg. 185

Juvenile Delinquents' Use of Consumption as Cultural Resistance: Implications for Juvenile Reform Programs and Public Policy

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Each year, the juvenile justice system spends billions of dollars to handle approximately 700,000 youths. Yet the rate of recidivism remains high and suggests that this problem and its solutions are not understood fully. The problem of juvenile delinquency exacts a high toll on society in terms of the loss of property, life, and, each year, more disaffected youth. Using ethnographic data as a basis, the authors explore the experiential world of a group of institutionalized, young offenders. By focusing on the meaning of crime and consumption for these youths, the authors hope to shed light on how crime and consumption are used to produce a style of resistance. In the meaning of their possessions, these juvenile delinquents both affirm and disaffirm some of the dominant values in society. The authors use these impulses in the youths' lives to inform the conduct of current reform programs, as well as public policy.

> These young people are convinced that conventional society is unlikely to deliver the goods necessary for a better life.... This sense of cultural resistance and superiority constitutes a critical "vision," an understanding about their chances of getting ahead.... [They are guided by] an ideology of cultural resistance—an oppositional behavior that challenges the dominant culture's premise that respect and obedience will ultimately be exchanged for knowledge and success (Padilla 1992, p. 5).

> This process [of resistance] begins with a crime against the natural order, though in this case the deviation may seem slight indeed—the cultivation of a quiff, the acquisition of a scooter or a record or a certain type of suit. But it ends in the construction of a style, in a gesture of defiance or contempt, in a smile or a sneer. It signals a Refusal (Hebdige 1979).

We are a nation of plenty, and this abundance is readily apparent. Stroll down any street, and myriad cars and homes are visible. Open any glossy magazine, and see pictures of sumptuous foods, beautiful people, glamorous fashions, and possessions too many to mention. Turn to any television channel, and an unending series of consumption images pulse before the eyes (Willis 1990). These images help define and create a way of life—culture and its meaning in people's lives. Yet many people do not have the same opportunity to share in the bounty of society, nor do they have the same opportunity to contest the meaning of things. The meaning of these cultural objects is not given, nor is it fixed. Culture is contested terrain, and its meaning is fought out in the struggle of people living and consuming in their daily lives (Hebdige 1979; Willis 1978).

The dominant groups in society, which control access to institutions such as mass media, are more likely to create and influence culture. Nevertheless, subordinate groups, through their life and consumption, can create their own subcultures; they can resist through style (Hebdige 1979; Willis 1978). For example, it is not uncommon for youths to rebel against their parents or societal values. However, when youths resist through illicit activities (e.g., stealing cars, selling drugs), dominant groups regard them as "deviant" and "unnatural." If we explore the meaning of the crimes and the possessions sought by such youthful "offenders," we might understand better these activities of resistance and how they create an alternative way of life. If the central values of this subculture can be preserved and used to inform programs of reform, we might find new ways to forge a place for these juvenile delinquents as valued participants in a diverse society. We must do more than take these "criminals" and inventory them in our growing warehouses of humanity. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to explore a group of institutionalized, young offenders' cultural resistance against the dominant culture through consumption and suggest implications for reform programs and federal legislation.

We first explore current research on consumption as a form of resistance. Next, we explore an ethnographic account of the criminal activities and consumption of a marginalized group: urban juvenile delinquents (JDs).[1] We discuss the implications of this approach and findings for

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[1]The term "juvenile delinquent" is not used in a judgmental sense. Instead, the term refers to people who engage in serious misconduct that results in incarceration (for more details on the historical use of this term, see Hess 1970). Although female JDs could have been investigated, we chose to limit the scope of our study to male JDs.

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reform programs and public policy in the final section of the article.

Consumption as Resistance

A growing number of scholars propose that consumption is an act of production; as people consume, they are producing a way of life (de Certeau 1984; Hall 1977; Hebdige 1979; Willis 1978, 1990). This consumption also can create forms of life that are defiant. For example, de Certeau suggests that consumers often find themselves in a system they did not create. They are similar to "immigrants" in a foreign land, but they can take the goods of this land and use them in new ways, subverting "then not by rejecting or altering them, but by using them with respect to ends and references foreign to the system they had no choice but to accept" (de Certeau 1984, p. x). Therefore, consumers can reappropriate a system they did not create through consumption that is manipulated toward new ends. As de Certeau suggests, this resistance can be found in the details and particulars of daily life. People are caught in these systems, but they can alter things creatively.

Similar ideas appear in Hall's (1977), Hebdige's (1979), and Willis's (1978, 1990) work. For example, these writers suggest that, through hegemony, dominant groups in society seek social control over subordinate groups so that no challenges exist and people consent unconsciously to the legitimacy of the dominant group's ideas (Hall 1977; Hebdige 1979). The dominant group tries to present itself as the only culture. As Marx states, "The ideas of the ruling class are in every epic the ruling ideas" (quoted in Hebdige 1979). This consent is unconscious because, if cultural hegemony is successful, people believe that the existing culture is the natural order of things (Hirschman 1993; Murray and Ozanne 1991). In addition, access to the means of disseminating ideas is different for each group. Members of the dominant class often control important institutions in society and have the greatest ability to develop and adapt objects in the cultural field (Hebdige 1979). Not only do these groups have greater access, but they also have more time and money. These resources are important because cultural hegemony cannot be achieved completely; it is a continual struggle first to win this territory and then to maintain it (Gramsci 1968; Hall 1977). Nevertheless, though benefiting from the material culture they produce, the people in power are, perhaps, the least able to perceive and develop the revolutionary tendencies in what they have produced; they are "most victim to the illusions and false promises" of their own ideology because they are prospering in the existing structure (Willis 1978, p. 5).

Different groups in society share a common history and can grasp the meaning of each other's culture. But these groups might stand in opposition to one another. This cultural hegemony can be fractured by the marginal groups that struggle against the social control of the dominant group (Hebdige 1979). Because the marginal groups are not benefiting equally from the existing hegemony, they have greater incentive to perceive the contradictory tendencies in society. The way these marginal groups use commodities can set them apart from the dominant groups. "Commodities can be taken out of context, claimed in a particular way, developed and repossessed to express something deeply and thereby to change somewhat the very feelings which are their product" (Willis 1978, p. 6). Although such challenges through style may be indirect, they nonetheless signal resistance.

For example, in Willis's (1978) study of English motorbike boys, he finds that, though these working-class youths were faced with an almost infinite number of possible objects with which to associate, they created a rich subculture around a few central objects: "The roughness and intimidation of the motor-bike, the surprise of its fierce acceleration, the aggressive thumping of the unbaffled exhaust, matches and symbolizes the masculine assertiveness, the rough camaraderie, the muscularity of language, of their style of social interaction" (p. 53). Furthermore, the motorbike boys altered their bikes to amplify the power of the machines (e.g., adding double exhaust, removing baffles on the exhaust). The objects the groups chose, altered, and transformed are ones in which the members can find their cultural values mirrored (Hebdige 1979).

In the next section, we present an in-depth analysis of the meaning of some of the central objects of consumption for JDs, who are a marginal group in society. We explicate the research methodology first.

Research Methodology

The Social Group

Cultural resistance traditionally has been studied using a wide variety of groups on the margins of society (e.g., mods [Laing 1969], skinheads [Clarke 1991, originally published 1976], hippies [Young 1970], Rastafarians [Hall et al. 1976], punks [Hebdige 1979]). Similarly, youth groups are natural sites to explore cultural resistance (Elliott and Ritson 1997). For this study, urban youths who recently had been caught engaging in criminal activities were the focal social group. This group represents people on the margins of society, who are not participating "successfully" in the political economy, from the perspective of the dominant culture. This group was selected specifically to examine its important material objects and their meanings. Juvenile delinquents from inner-city Philadelphia who had been institutionalized provided a convenient sample. Although youths could have been sought out on the street (which would have been more naturalistic), problems would have existed in identifying which youths were JDs. Moreover, this approach would have been more physically dangerous.

The Research Site

Data collection among the JD informants was conducted at St. Paul's Hall, which is a residential facility for court-adjudicated, male youths from 12 to 18 years of age. Its expansive grounds feature athletic fields, gathering areas, a swimming pool, and a complex of residential and administrative buildings. Lodgings also are available for the live-in staff members. A labyrinth of hallways connects the living quarters, dining rooms, and classrooms. The interior is clean but drab, and statues, pictures, and ornaments reveal ties to the Roman Catholic Church.

St. Paul's operates at or near its capacity of 200. The youths' crimes include robbery, assault, burglary, auto theft, and possession and selling of illegal drugs. The vast majority of youths are repeat offenders. During sentencing, judges

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give youths the option of living at the Hall and receiving schooling or going to other, more prison-like facilities. For this reason, youths "volunteer" to enter the program at St. Paul's.

To determine their ability to adjust to life at the Hall, new members are placed in an intake area with other newly arrived youths for observation. If they pass this initial, month-long screening, they are placed in classes according to their academic ability and in a "fraternity" based on their physical and emotional maturity. Each fraternity contains beds and a place for belongings. These belongings may include clothing, a radio, toiletries, cigarettes, and mementos such as photographs. Certain items, including money, are forbidden.

The Data Collection

The JDs studied had been at St. Paul's from three to nine months. Data collection involved three phases. In phase one, a general understanding was sought through 12 in-depth interviews with Anglo-, Hispanic-, and African-American 17- and 18-year-old youths. The questionnaire developed for these interviews opened with simple biographical questions followed by "grand tour" questions and "floating," as well as planned, prompts (McCracken 1988; Spradley 1979). Many of these prompts specifically explored the relationship that the youths had with material objects. All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed and then analyzed.

The understanding gained from phase one was expanded by using more naturalistic methods in phases two and three. In phase two, an investigator volunteered to be a "Life Skills Consultant" for a semester, which involved meeting regularly with approximately 50 members of four different fraternities who ranged in age from 12 to 18 years. Approximately 40% were Anglo- or Hispanic-Americans, 40% African-Americans, and 20% mixed race. As their consultant, the investigator met informally with each group every other week for an hour and made detailed fieldnotes immediately following all encounters. These sessions were generally informal and enabled the youths to speak in group discussions both among themselves and with the researcher. This prolonged engagement fostered trust between the researcher and the youths, which was necessary to avoid evasive tactics during discussions (Douglas 1976). Also, regular, informal discussions were held with the full-time counselors to broaden and deepen the investigator's understanding.

Phase three took place during one weekend and involved an analysis of the youths' bulletin boards. Each adolescent had access to a bulletin board for open self-expression. The researcher photographed 15 boards and interviewed the owners. The boards were selected on the basis of two criteria: (1) the availability of owners for interviewing and (2) the frequency of use (i.e., some boards were used more than others). The youths were asked to explain the significance of each displayed item, its relative importance, and its relationship to the remainder of the items on the board. Notes were taken during each interview, and more detailed notes were made following them.

The Analytical Framework

The general analysis followed the approach Willis (1978) details. Three levels of analysis were used: indexing, homologizing, and explaining. The first part of the analysis (indexing) involves quantifying the objects with which the group spends the most time. That is, though people come in contact with hundreds of objects, some of their relationships are more frequent and longer in duration. Some of these contacts are arbitrary, and others are meaningful. At this stage, the researcher quantifies the relationships and does not worry about the nature of the relationship or its meaning. In this study, for example, cars were an important object to all the youths. At the second stage of analysis (homologizing), the investigator takes the indexed objects identified in the first stage and attempts to determine which of these objects reflect the values, style, and structure of the group. These items make up the group's cultural field and constitute a smaller group than the indexical field. Whereas the indexical stage is quantitative, the homologizing stage is qualitative. Therefore, such an analysis must be based on interpretive data that can develop the social meaning of things. The formal and informal interviews, informal observations, group discussions, and bulletin boards all offered the opportunity for naturalistic inquiry (Hudson and Ozanne 1988). In the final part of the analysis (explaining), the researcher tries to explain the homologies that have been identified. As Hebdige notes (1979, p. 18), "Style in subcultures is, then, pregnant with significance.... [We must] discern the hidden messages inscribed in code on the glossy surfaces of style, to trace them out as 'maps of meaning' which obscurely represent the very contradictions they are designed to resolve or conceal." This part of the analysis tries to put the development of the homologies into a temporal flow and understand how they came about. This analysis explores the directionality and degree of mutual shaping between the group and the objects.

Results

We begin the examination of cultural resistance through material objects by looking at the social context in which resistance-based consumption takes place. The first section examines the JDs in terms of their connection to their peers and the violence of their environment, which sets the stage for the later analysis. Next, we explore the consumption of stolen cars. We investigate the consumption of the car as it sets off a course of actions, whose meanings we probe, including (1) consuming the stolen car, (2) getting money, and (3) buying central possessions. We then examine the meanings and values that are common across these consumption activities. Finally, we explore public policy implications by examining how the JDs' meanings are handled within the existing reform process, as well as by discussing alternatives to this reform, according to our findings and existing legislation.

An Overview

The very survival of the JDs is threatened by the violent world in which they live. Therefore, they join together in small bands. In their criminal activities, such as stealing cars, they become hunters in a concrete jungle. They participate together in the excitement and danger of the hunt. In this activity, they are engaged fully and have taken control of their lives. They live for the moment, enjoying the "kill,"

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returning triumphantly to the urban village, celebrating, and later escaping into sleep. The consumption of the stolen cars affirms traditional social values such as freedom, power, control, and status, but it also indicates resistance. The car means an intense, quick thrill that often climaxes in a ritualized destruction of the vehicle. The damaged car usually is disposed of to obtain quick cash to fuel immediate consumption of sensual and status goods. The youths value the sensual pleasures of food, drink, drugs, and sex, which are shared with friends. They seek goods that give them control and respect in an unkind, uncontrollable world. However, in this environment, the predator also becomes the prey and faces the daily threat of violence and capture. Eventually, these youths are caught and incarcerated. The reform program generally fails to get them to accept and participate in "legitimate" society.[2] When the youths return to their neighborhoods, they return to their peer groups and often continue their illicit activities.

The Context of the Juvenile Delinquents' Consumption

Identity as Part of the Group

Existing literature on JDs suggests that these youths lack social support from their families, schools, and communities and, therefore, turn to their peer groups for support (Jenkins, Heidemann, and Caputo 1985; Marks 1991; Toufexis 1989; Walsh and Beyer 1987; Wolf, Braukmann, and Ramp 1987). These peer groups become the primary force of socialization. When juveniles see parents as uncaring or unable to provide support and when other adult role models are unavailable, they may substitute peer groups for these authority figures (Agnew 1991; Lamson 1983).

The force of the peer group was powerful among the youths at St. Paul's, and younger boys tended to emulate teenagers rather than adults, as the following quotes demonstrate:

> You got to see the little kids around my neighborhood. They see us on weekends; we might kick some butts and stuff. They all hang out, try to be tough like us (Eddie, 17, Anglo-American).
>
> R (Researcher): Who do they [children in your neighborhood] admire?
>
> I (Informant): The other kids, no more than like 20 years old they admire. It's never no more like the parents or older guys, just teenagers they look up to all the time (Pedro, 17, Hispanic-American).

A typical day in the life of these young men involved "hanging with" their friends (Willis et al. 1988). Inevitably, they got into trouble with these companions.

> I: What do you think lured you to start robbing and stealing and stuff?
>
> R: Guess I was always trying to be like my friends. I was trying to be like them (Brian, 18, Anglo-American).

[2]One study conducted at St. Paul's estimated the number of youths that returned to a life of crime. The number of JDs arrested or convicted after 4 months was 12.6% and 31.3% after 24 months. However, these figures do not take into account the number of youths who returned to crime and have not been caught.

> A whole bunch of us, like 40 of us, was running the neighborhood. Troublemakers.... We were all troublemakers, all of us, the whole big nasty bunch of us would start trouble for no reason (Eddie, 17, Anglo-American).
>
> There was always like me I had I had three best friends but I guess there was like ten of us all together. And once in a while like on weekend nights it was 30 or 40 of us.... Drank, partied, steal cars (Devon, 18, African-American).

The youths found social support primarily with their peer groups. Consistent with subjects in prior literature (Agnew 1991; Lamson 1983), they turned to their friends for support, and these friends became their partners in crime (Brownfield and Thompson 1991). But the environment in which they had to survive was uncertain and violent.

A Violent Landscape

The world in which these young men must navigate is inescapably brutal; street fighting and random shootings are common. They believe they must grow up fast just to survive; for example,

> I went up against the fence in the alleyway. Two other kids came up the alleyway with crowbars, and they started rippin' on my shirt and all and punchin' me, and my legs were layin' straight out, and they started beatin' me in my knees with crowbars. I got up—man I was bleedin' out my knees, out of my neck, out of my face, out of my ears and all, and I was bleedin'! (Ronnie, 17, Anglo-American).
>
> R: What's it like growing up in [your neighborhood]?
>
> I: It was tiring. I guess you could say, "Man I want to get out of here!" Like you look around and there was a situation. You figure out who you should be with. You gonna look around now and be like, "Where's so and so?" "He's dead." "What about so and so?" "He's dead too. He got shot in the head." Somethin' like that (Michael, 17, African-American).
>
> R: You're 18 now. How about in five years? What will you be like at 23 do you figure? Just guess—[a] fantasy about what life will be like at 23.
>
> I: The way I want to be or the way I think I might be? I mean 'cause you never know. I might have a downpour and everything go wrong, you know, and I be back into drugs, back to stealing cars. I could be in jail. I could be dead (Steven, 18, Anglo-American).

The youths become desensitized to the widespread violence that is a normal part of their existence. This idea is best captured by the youths' statements regarding their neighborhoods. Many of the youths said they lived in a safe or "easy" neighborhood and then proceeded to describe experiences that clashed with a middle-class meaning of safety:

> I'm not from a terrible neighborhood, gutters and stuff. Ain't no gutters and shit in my neighborhood. You won't get stabbed or anything, really. Just get beaten up. I don't know. People do get stabbed, you know. That's what I said, things are getting a little out of hand (Eddie, 17, Anglo-American).
>
> R: What's it like growing up in your neighborhood, what's the toughest part of growing up in your neighborhood?
>
> I: Really, nuttin's tough about it just, I don't know, nuttin' really. It's easy in my neighborhood.... I know everybody,

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everybody knows me, parents, everybody. See I even had it, got at one time, me and my girlfriend, when I was goin' out, well I still go out with her, but me and her brother got in a fight and, ummm, he beat up two of my friends. So he came runnin' at me and I grabbed him, took him to the ground, and started hittin' him.... I was real mad, I grabbed a lug wrench.... I was like bonk, bonk, and I cracked his head open on both sides and ummm, and then I seen all the blood pouring out (Ronnie, 17, Anglo-American).

This violence is reflected in many of the youths' bulletin boards. For example, one board displayed guns prominently. When investigators questioned the owners of the bulletin boards, the youths said they valued guns. Guns are an important, natural part of their lives and a "tool-of-the-trade" for the youths who dealt drugs. Thus, violence is the normal backdrop against which the youths act out their lives with their friends. Understanding this violent environment is important to understanding the meaning of possessions.

Consuming the Stolen Cars

The meaning of the cars both reflects and generates many of the central values of the JDs and offers an important example of resistance against the dominant culture. Cars were discussed in the interviews, and all of the bulletin boards had pictures of expensive cars displayed. Clearly, some of the meanings of the cars are consistent with the dominant society's meanings. For example, a car represents freedom and control for the youths.

The first car I took it was like it just, it just, made me feel like I got a rush in my body as soon as I heard that car start. And then having the freedom to drive and going anywhere I want, do anything I want with the car, don't have to worry about repairs on the car.... Pick up my friends, just drive around, go places. One time we went to Virginia Beach (Eddie, 17, Anglo-American).

Similarly, the cars most often stolen were expensive cars (e.g., white Trans Am, canary-yellow Corvette, Camero, Jaguar), which the youths then drove back to their neighborhoods to show them off. They would be "on top" (i.e., have status) as they drove around with their friends. But the stolen cars had other meanings that were resistant to the dominant culture.

Although it might seem obvious that the stolen cars were a source of income, stealing cars is not primarily an economic activity for these JDs. The monetary gain from stealing the car is secondary to living out other values. First, the unlawful acts provide a heightened arousal that is seductive (White, Labouvie, and Bates 1985). For many youths, criminal activity is similar to sex, a sensuous and pleasurable activity that must be repeated in a compulsive way for continuous gratification. As one informant (Juan, 17, Hispanic-American) stated, "My mom, she wanted me to stop [selling drugs], and every time I told her I was goin' to stop, I could never stop." Katz (1988, p. 54) calls this experience the "sneaky thrill," which "is not simply utilitarian and practical; it is eminently magical."

It's just [stealing cars], it's weird 'cause when you gettin' 'em, you're sittin' there skitzin' and all and poppin' it up. Soon as you hear 'chk, chk,' as soon as you get out of that parkin' space, you're the happiest person in the world! (Ronnie, 17, Anglo-American).

I've got other friends, they're like, I would really say they're addicted to it because they had a lot, a lot of money you know. They didn't need the money. More the excitement.... They would steal like ten cars a night. They would drive down, ride the bus back, pop another car, drive back, pop another car, drive back.... It's like a natural high for me. It's just great. I think the excitement is most[ly] the reason people steal cars (Chad, 18, Anglo-American).

R: Why do people commit crimes, steal cars, whatever? Why do people do it?

I: A lot of people's excuse is the money, but for me it wasn't the money. It was more the, ah, the challenge of seeing how fast you can do it and that. Like a race. Like my last car I stole was a race between the lady coming out and trying to get in the car, then me popping it up trying to drive away. To me that was fun (Charles, 17, Anglo-American).

Thus, the sneaky thrills of theft provided them with fully lived moments. Growing up in a violent and uncertain world, where many youths saw their friends die, they enjoyed living in the moment.

Second, though stealing is an example of fully engaged consciousness, it also involves taking control. When the youths steal they are taking what they want from society; they are "doin' somethin' you're not suppose to do" (Eddie, 17, Anglo-American). Or as Bob (17, Anglo-American) says, "It's fun. It's fun because you're stealin' someone else's property and then you don't have to pay for it." Part of the pleasure of theft is flaunting social control and authority.

The adventure. It's just like when you go to steal a car, you know it's like all you got to do is look around. I just popped a car, you know. I would be like driving off. You pass a cop you know, you wave to the cop, just smile real big, you're driving a nice car. Then they like turn around and start following you.... Then they turn their lights on and then you just gun it. You know it's like you got to lose them or get caught. It's just fun. It's like cops chasing you, the excitement. Everybody's saying you got money, you got the drugs, you got the girls, everything like that. It was great. You're on the top. Everybody likes seeing you on the top (Charles, 17, Anglo-American).

Me and my friends, we used to go out and steal cars and then, it wasn't fun, it was just tempting. Like you'd see a car you like and then you would just, if you liked it, you would take it, you know (Ralph, 17, Anglo-American).

Third, stealing cars is a social activity almost always done with friends and acted out on the stage of the streets. Contrary to what caution might suggest, these young men often return to their neighborhoods to show off the stolen cars, racing them up and down the streets in front of the homes of their friends. Then they would perform racing stunts that would destroy the integrity of the cars. When these performances were finished, they would sell what remained of the automobiles for parts. If their primary motivation was economic gain, this ritual would not make sense. With the money, they would take these same friends out to buy food or clothing until it was gone. This ritual was repeated regularly, until they were caught by the police and placed at various detention facilities, including St. Paul's.

I: I would go around stealing a car, driving around, doing things. I thought it was fun when I was doing it. Like I was hanging out with people that, you know had did it, stole cars

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and everything but, you know, I was actually having fun doing it. Just driving doing anything you want with it, beating the car up and then, afterwards, find the right person you could sell it for a couple hundred dollars. That is money in your pocket. It buys you sneaks, your clothes or something. Or take a girl out or something.

R: All right, you went out one time and you got yourself a car. Just tell me about one particular time that you did that.

I: Well one night I went out so I like, I just like told my brother to drop me off somewhere, and ummm I went up on this lot, and I took a car from there. Now I went back around, back around my house to pick up one of my friends and it [the car] got a case of beer in the trunk. Yeah, went out drinking then.... I just went down this road. There was all like bushes and telephone poles, so I started playin' chicken with the telephone poles going through the bushes and scratchin' up the car. Sounds crazy, but I guess it was back when it was fun back then (Brian, 17, Anglo-American).

The consumption of stolen cars offered the youths a sneaky thrill, an active assertion of their own control over their destiny in opposition to traditional social controls (i.e., the police), and affirmed their membership and status in their peer group.

The Meanings of Money

Although economic gain was not the primary reason for stealing cars, the resulting money had meaning for the youths that affirmed many of the traditional meanings of money as a source of status and power. Nevertheless, the youths never amassed their money; instead, they routinely spent it on their friends and themselves until it was gone. Money was spread about freely, in a manner reminiscent of traditional potlatches (Barnett 1938), as the following quotes show:

After that [stealing a car] we go [to] town and go to the gallery, buy clothes, buy sneaks, everybody buy the same sneaks.... "Let's go buy sweatsuits, man." Everybody buy the same color sweatsuit. With the hat. Everybody get the same hat (Michael, 17, African-American).

R: Where would it go? What would you spend it on?

I: Buyin' people stuff. I would buy me clothes sometimes, buy sneakers, buy a new pair of sneakers, buy a new jacket and stuff. I don't know, buy all my friends this stuff too, buy them clothes. Then we go out and do something, you know, with my friends (Eddie, 17, Anglo-American).

Thus, an additional meaning of money was as the glue or cement to reinforce social relationships. Persons who had money and gave it away were afforded greater social status because they shared the spoils of their crimes with their community.

Nonetheless, this sharing contains some of the characteristics that are common in other resource-deprived environments. For example, Hill and Stamey (1990) find that homeless persons who were successful in acquiring needed possessions, especially food, often would share with others with the implicit agreement of reciprocity. Stack (1974) describes a similar phenomenon in her description of "swapping" behavior, in which economically disadvantaged black families "swap" the necessities of life so that all families are assured of survival. The same situation appears to be true among the JDs; those who had money shared the spoils of the "kill" with their friends, knowing that they would benefit from the next "kill," even if they did not participate.

The interviewed youths attached a high degree of importance to money and the possessions money could buy. However, they did not believe their desire for money and possessions could be satisfied through legitimate employment (Padilla 1992). Because the youths lack family, educational, and community support, they are unprepared for higher-paying jobs (Jenkins, Heidemann, and Caputo 1985; also see Sullivan and Wilson 1995), and unemployment might run as high as 40% in their communities (Toufexis 1989). Furthermore, the jobs that are available often are perceived as menial or humiliating (Schwendinger and Schwendinger 1985). Youths may prefer to remain jobless rather than take the positions that are available (Mead 1986).

With their sense of self so highly tied to possessions, these adolescents are unwilling to wait to acquire the items. Therefore, many adolescents turn to crime to acquire money and products (Allan and Steffensmeier 1989; Jenkins, Heidemann, and Caputo 1985; Schwendinger and Schwendinger 1985). Criminal opportunities are available and considerably more financially rewarding than the menial careers that these young men are qualified to enter.

Then like I quit [my job at a fast-food restaurant] and like I got into, like my friend was stealing cars and bringing them to [the city] to [a] chop shop and taking the bus home. He was making like $1,500 a car, and it was only like for a half hour of work! (Chad, 18, Anglo-American).

R: How much money could you get a day if you sold drugs? Could you make in a day?

I: All right, all right I'm gonna say in the summer time, all right in the summer, if you come out 11 o'clock—that's 11 o'clock A.M. [to] 11 o'clock at night—and it was a Friday everybody got paid, you could make at least $5,000 (Michael, 17, African-American).

The typical boarder at St. Paul's had quit school and failed to secure legitimate employment. Initial interviews suggested that insufficient job opportunities existed. However, the group discussions on life skills uncovered resentment for the jobs that were available. One youth captured this feeling, saying, "I'm not gonna work at no McDonald's! I had to sell drugs!" (Manuel, 16, African-American).

Given that the youths lack "identity work" that can provide role-based sources of self-esteem, they ascribe status to themselves according to their money and personal belongings, similar to the materialist impulses in society at large (Belk 1985, 1988; Snow and Anderson 1987). As one informant notes, "My neighborhood's a real material neighborhood. Like if you don't have something, you're shit. If someone's got something, you don't got it, you're shit" (Eddie, 17, Anglo-American). Goods are regarded as able to increase the power and security of the owners and transport them from their current, uncertain environments (Furby 1979; Stacey 1982). Possessions, especially money, are afforded magical qualities that transform the owner into someone special (Belk 1988, 1991). States Eddie (17, Anglo-American), "I love money ... 'cause money makes you feel important. Go around with a big wad in your pocket."

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Although money enabled the JDs to buy things they wanted, it also manifested other important values. For example, money was perceived as powerful, giving control to those who possessed it.

> Money to me is power. That's how I think, money give me power. Money gives me the okay to do anything I want to do, stand on my own two feet. If you have money nobody can bother you. You could even slap the President of the United States and get away with it! (Drew, 17, African-American).

> Money. Money is everything in the world. You can't get nowhere without money. You can't have nothin' without money. You can't do nothin', you can't do nothin' without money (Stephan, 15, Hispanic-American).

Although money as a source of power, status, and control is not unlike the values found in society at large, what is unusual is the intensity of the valence of money.

Central Possessions

The possessions that most often were bought with the money from illicit activities, such as car theft and dealing drugs, can be organized into two primary categories: sensual and status products.

Sensual Products

In opposition to the notions of delayed gratification found in middle-class life, the incarcerated youths celebrate immediate, experiential, and sensual goods. For example, they spend a lot of time staying out late, drinking beer, smoking pot and cigarettes, doing drugs, eating, or playing ball. They spend their money going to the movies, the arcade, and hockey games; bowling; and bar hopping ("clubbin'").

> R: What did you spend it on when you got it [the money]?

> I: See, see that's the problem, see you spend it on dumb stuff. All right, that day I bought about five cheese steaks, seven, eight sodas. Thirsty, you buy like four beers, 'cause you know you got thirsty playin' ball then. All right, you gonna take your girl out, spend money on your girl, go get some clothes that match each other, go get some sneaks.... But then you got more than one girl so you can't be buying all these clothes on her so you got to take her [the other girlfriend] out to a movie or something like that. Then in a week your money goes (Michael, 17, African-American).

> R: Then what did you spend the money on when you got it?

> I: Clothes, or somethin'. Just spend the money. You know, when you're down in the streets with your friends. You buy this and that. You drink soda, buy clothes (Stephan, 15, Hispanic-American).

> Regarding what a normal day in their life is like, their answers are very similar: sell drugs, "chill out with my girl," drink beer, hang with buddies, go to the arcade, go shopping downtown, search for girls, and so forth. One young man is quiet, so I ask him directly. He responds: "Go to school. Cut out at seventh period, and go home and take a dump. Then I'd chill with my buddies." I fake ignorance and ask what "chill" means. They tell me it means to relax, hang out, "have a lemonade and a hoagie" (fieldnotes).

Status Products

An important part of this concrete and sensual life involves "hangin' out" with friends on the streets. The streets are like a stage, and the youths are both actors and audience (Solomon 1983, 1996; Young 1991). As actors, they are concerned about how they look and handle themselves. One youth who was interviewed was apologetic about the way he was dressed and said that he dresses better at home but did not wear his good clothes at the Hall because they would get ruined. Most of the possessions they value are part of this public costume for the street stage: cars, clothes, guns, sneakers, and entertainment. As an audience on the stage of the streets, they "stand on the corner," watching girls go by, seeing their friends, and calling out to passing people.

> So they could buy anything—a car, clothes. They can get girls, chains, big chains.... It can get you a girl. Girls like money. They really like boys that got money, you know what I mean (Thomas, 17, African-American).

> When I take a girl out, I got nice clothes on. I got to have money you know. I just, I got to have money. Money is like, I got to get a new pair of shoes every week (Chad, 18, Anglo-American).

> When I asked him what he did with this money, he told me that he bought a car, radio, sneakers, food, and things for his girl (fieldnotes).

An additional status good is firearms. As the bulletin boards made tangible, guns are an essential and public part of the JD's lives (along with expensive cars and women). Informants invariably had experience with ownership and use of such weapons, both for survival and as a means of identifying their place in society. For example, one respondent noted that a gun was always with him not only to provide protection during drug trading, but also as a way to identify him as a person "not to be messed with." This status was in sharp contrast to people who chose to take menial jobs and avoided the lure of the streets, who also were regarded as likely to be killed on their way home and robbed of their meager earnings.

An Interpretation of the Youths' Consumption

Across the JDs' consumption of stolen cars, money, and central possessions, several common themes can be identified. First, the JDs live concrete and sensual lives. They value the moment, and much of their time is engaged in experiential activities such as stealing, eating, drinking, and having sex. This style of identity is manifest in their immediate desire for material objects and in the type of possessions they seek: food, alcohol, entertainment, clothes, and cars. Second, they seek out and want control and respect.

A Concrete and Sensual Existence

The JDs live in the here and now. Surrounded by violence and facing an uncertain future, they live fully engaged in the present. The importance of the present is manifest explicitly in their attitudes toward obtaining desired possessions.

> Like I can't walk through a mall you know and be like, "Oh, I want to get that. I get that next week with my paycheck," or "I'll get that, you know, when I get the money." You know I want that; I want to get that right now! I got to get that! (Chad, 18, Anglo-American).

Their world is not one of abstract ideas or far-off places. It is concrete; it is real.

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It was more fun growin' up when we were younger, when we was a bunch of guys. You want more things and you want, you want girls a lot, so you want girls, you want money.... So you got money, you can get clothes, a car, you got the girl, you get the car and the clothes (Eddie, 17, Anglo-American).

Even when they were seeking abstract goals such as education, the benefits of school did not exist in the far-off future with dreams of good jobs and getting ahead. Instead, the youths valued having some "thing" that they could touch. For example, the youths' bulletin boards had tangible symbols of good academic performance: ribbons, awards, and trophies. Similarly, a high school education was something they could hold in their hands.

See, they'll call my house and they'll be like "Hello." I'm like, "This is St. Paul's Hall, I'd like to speak with somebody there, like we got your GED results." And there will be sweat on my face and my heart, and when they say I pass, see that's why I got confidence, when I pass I'll be really happy. And I'm like, "All right thank you, send me my diploma in the mail. I'll see you at graduation." Like that and I could be, I could be proud. I accomplished somethin' in my life, got my diploma, With that diploma that will do some thing.... That's why I'm really participatin' right now. I'm really, I want this [to get my GED] so bad. That's why I'm tryin' my best to get it 'cause I want it so bad, see I accomplish somethin'. I used to be bad. See everybody, like me, "Look at [him], look how bad he is! If my son be like him, I'm gonna kill him!" or somethin' like that. But now they see he grew on; he got his high school diploma. I tried my best, getting all A's and stuff, got a 93 average, so I'm doin' all right. Take pride in yourself" you got somethin' in your heart; see I did somethin' in my life (Michael, 17, African-American).

Similarly, the consumption of stolen cars is a sensual moment in which they are fully alive.

Getting Control and Respect

These youths led lives free from most restraints (see McCarthy and Hagan 1992). They often lived with their siblings and mothers who were permissive, and they "could do anything that I want.... We don't look up to nobody 'cause around our neighborhood, we run the neighborhood" (Eddie, 17, Anglo-American).

The youths had few restraints placed on them, and they valued having control of their lives. The JDs believed that having control was related to being able to take what they wanted. They were in control if they could do what they wanted and take the things they wanted.

I want a 'Benz' if he [another drug dealer] got a 'Benz', but I just got a BMW or a Lincoln Town Car. I wanted a 'Benz' just like him. I could have bought one, but I want, look at his 'Benz' [and] I don't like it. Shoot him 'cause you don't like it 'cause he making more money than you (Thomas, 17, African-American).

Doin' something you're not supposed to be in this car and you take it anyway, cruisin', I wouldn't get caught. I used to say "I'll never get caught!" Got chased by the cops, never get caught. Chased about seven times, never got caught. Chased on foot, chased in the car, stole cars for years, and I never got caught (Ronnie, 17, Anglo-American).

Part of being in control is being able to handle themselves. Handling themselves involves being able to control a situation physically. If a youth can handle himself, then he gets respect. As one informant stated, "Most people respect me 'cause I guess 'cause of my size."

I: You just can't let anybody get over on you. 'Cause once somebody starts thinkin' that they're over on you, you just got to stay on top, that's why I hung around the kids I hung around with.

R: What kind of things did the 40 of you have that other people wished they had?

I: We just thought we had it all. I don't know. I don't know. We used to sell drugs and stuff on the corner. I don't know just 'cause we used to, everybody was scared of us, so everybody else scared us, wanted to hang with us so they didn't have to be scared of us, wantin' to beat people up all the time...

R: What does it mean to be grown up, to be a man in your neighborhood?

I: You get a car, you're a man. See right here, I'm a man, I got a car. Being respected, you know. People respect you. Being respected, you're a man.

R: What causes people to respect you?

I: Two fists or if they don't, pop (Eddie, 17, Anglo-American).

R: What is it like to be a man?

I: You got to show your toughness around there, like when we get in fights. It ain't just like one on one, we get in a lot of fights where there's 300 kids that'll come down from different neighborhoods and ummm fight with us. You just got to show that, you know, you're crazy (Pedro, 17, Hispanic-American).

Thus, control means being able to handle themselves physically. Given that the environment in which they lived was violent, handling a situation often involved using physical force.

The people who received the least respect were those with the least control. Although many of the JDs used drugs, it was extremely important to them to stress to the researcher that they were not "druggies." They were almost fearful of being labeled as drug users.

It became abundantly clear that this group, as opposed to the younger kids, were drug users as well as sellers. While they all said they were not "pipers" (i.e., crack cocaine users) and argued that the label did not belong to them (one youth showed his bulging biceps as an indication that he was not a user), it was clear that regular use of drugs, such as pot, had become part of their daily lives (fieldnotes).

Probably the people that were least respected were women—"40s (40-ounce bottles of beer) and a blunt (i.e., pot) is all they want"—and drug users, both of whom were unable to handle themselves physically and, therefore, were unworthy of respect.

One interesting point is that they felt little remorse even at this young age for what they did to individuals or the community. They held the user responsible for his drug use and clearly felt that it was his responsibility to control his habit. One young man even told me that there was no such thing as addiction, it was all "in their minds!" This goes along with their negative portrayal of "pipers" and their vow to never become users themselves.... Also, they told me that some women would give them "head

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jobs for a hit" and that "dope fiends would steal anything and give up everything for some dope" (fieldnotes).

Ironically, manifest in drugs is both the desire for and the fear of losing control. Through selling drugs, they receive the money to buy the possessions they desire. But use of drugs is feared because they might lose self control or control of the situation in which they find themselves.

To summarize, control is valued among the youths, and having control means that they physically can handle any situation in which they find themselves. If they do not have control, they do not have respect.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Problems with Traditional Reform

Juvenile delinquents are a largely lower-class, resource-deprived group that is estranged from participating in society and pursuing lucrative, "legitimate" avenues. But they have internalized the success goal of material accumulation (Farnworth and Leiber 1989; Merton 1957). Although they can see the "good life" and want it within the existing system, this life is mostly unattainable. Nevertheless, they are expected to respect and support the existing economic system (Padilla 1992). The youths see and must confront this contradiction in society. Living in a violent and uncertain environment, they resolve this contradiction by gaining control of their lives, taking what they want, and living fully in the moment. They turn to criminal activity to provide money to support the life they seek. But in the act of theft, they live out many important values. When they steal a car, they are fully engaged in the moment, and they resist the authority of a society that will not give them what they want (Hebdige 1979). In these moments, they gain control over their lives. They seek out products that will give them sensual experiences or signal their status in the community. However, the dominant society cannot tolerate this resistance when it takes the form of consuming stolen cars and selling drugs. The youths eventually are caught and incarcerated. In this particular study, the reform program for the JDs was designed to reinforce the work ethic of the dominant culture, implicitly asking these young men to accept their socioeconomic and subordinated status and deny those things in life that they value. A reform program that does not acknowledge the value of control and the concrete, sensual life is doomed to failure.

The struggle between these two worlds can be found best in the analysis of the youths' bulletin boards. Some boards present symbols of life on the streets (images of guns, expensive cars, available women), whereas others present symbols of middle-class life, for which the youths were so ill prepared (academic and achievement awards). It became clear from the engaged observation as a Life Skills Consultant that the youths were told that they could go on to college, vocational schools, or jobs, even though their academic performances were modest at best. For example, of all the youths interviewed or observed, the researcher estimated that only one had any academic chance of survival in junior college.

Perhaps the youths' desire for control is clearest when it is lost. After the JDs become institutionalized, they lose almost all control. Following sentencing, police officers escort adolescents, who are usually in handcuffs, to St. Paul's. The only material possessions these young men bring are the clothes they are wearing. Money, which in their previous life meant control and status, is forbidden. For most, this is the first time they have lived away from family and friends.

St. Paul's attempts to foster intellectual and personal development through a strict code of conduct. Youths do virtually everything in groups, including change classes, attend meals, and use the bathroom. Privileges are few, and rewards, usually in the form of home visits, result from performance in the classroom and appropriate deportment. Variations from expected behaviors are met with swift punishment involving the loss of home visits or, in the extreme, removal from the Hall to a harsher detention center. A wide variety of authority figures, including teachers, prefects of the fraternities, and counselors, monitor and judge the youths' behavior.

The boarders at St. Paul's were angry about their loss of control at the Hall. These young men resented the loss of freedom and privacy due to their incarceration.

R: What's it like at St. Paul's?

I: It's a big camp mostly. There's a lot of rules. They go by the rules. Very strict up here. Like if you to, if, you know, get in a lot of trouble, they're goin' to be hard on you. Can you imagine living here, having someone tell you when to go to bed, when to wake up, when to eat? It sucks! (Eddie, 17, Anglo-American).

I then asked them as a group what they thought of St. Paul's, and they did nothing but complain. They hate the treatment, the food, and so forth. One youth described the experience there as "Hell." However, it is clear that the biggest problem is that these kids run wild at home but are kept under close supervision here and resent it (fieldnotes).

One common reaction was to rebel against the rules. For example, informants often reacted against the dress code by wearing extreme hairstyles (e.g., a "rat-tail" with shaved sides and long bangs was popular). Also, because they were unable to maintain their previous active sexual lives, some members of one fraternity revolted by masturbating publicly.

Legislative Issues

In complex societies such as those that exist in the United States, one important policy question is which groups dominate politically, economically, and ideologically. According to Hebdige (1979, p. 14), "some groups have more say, more opportunity to make the rules, to organize meaning, while others are less favorably placed, have less power to produce and impose their definitions on the world." At this point in time, power is in the hands of the white middle and upper classes (Giroux 1992; Hirschman 1993).

In a postmodern world that affirms pluralism, we can envision a social milieu in which less powerful groups could coexist with their own concept of the world intact. Unfortunately, most cultures are characterized by hegemonic leadership that attempts to force subordinated groups to adhere to the existing social order (Giroux 1992). The hoped-for end result is that the social vision of the dominant culture will seem both legitimate and natural (Hall 1977). But cul-

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tural hegemony is resisted and fractured, and "the struggle between different discourses, different definitions, and meanings within ideology is therefore always, at the same time, a struggle with signification: a struggle for possession of the sign which extends to the most mundane areas of everyday life" (Hebdige 1979, p. 17). Our findings support this position. The JDs represent a "spectacular subculture," characterized by beliefs, values, and behaviors outside the natural order espoused by the power brokers. This meaning is found in the objects the youths appropriate, which they define and which define them.

The failure to incorporate adequately the values and needs of such youths is noted in the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974 (as amended in 1992, PL 93-415; 42 U.S.C. 5601). This law explicitly recognizes the lack of appropriate direction, coordination, and resources necessary to meet the problems associated with delinquency. As a result of this situation,

> Present juvenile courts, foster and protective care programs, and shelter facilities are inadequate to meet the needs of children, who, because of this failure to provide effective services, may become delinquents.... States and local communities which experience directly the devastating failures of the juvenile justice system do not presently have sufficient technical expertise and adequate resources to deal comprehensively with the problems of juvenile delinquency (section 101, #5, 8).

This study attempts to understand the experiential world of these youths and reveals that, from their perspective, it makes sense to resist the dominant society. Thus, it may not be in their best interest to be "reformed" by St. Paul's Hall. However, though a postmodern world celebrates diversity and the empowerment of marginalized groups in society, it cannot celebrate the choices these youths make. The youths are violent, and their actions harm people. Their subculture celebrates theft, drugs, violence, and the subjugation of women. And ultimately, their cultural resistance is not particularly successful. The structures of society are not changed significantly. Perhaps the most important question raised by this study is, What would successful cultural resistance look like? The challenge is to build a theory of cultural resistance not based on despair and isolation, but on hope (Murray and Ozanne 1991).

The Juvenile Justice Act recognizes the necessity of incorporating these youths into society and avoiding their placement in detention facilities, if possible. To accomplish this objective, several programmatic goals were established to help at-risk youths obtain a sense of

(1) safety and structure;
(2) belonging and membership;
(3) self-worth and social contribution;
(4) independence and control over their lives;
(5) closeness in interpersonal relationships; and
(6) competence and mastery, including health and physical, personal and social, cognitive and creative, vocational, and citizenship competence, such as ethics and participation.

Given our findings, there are two primary difficulties associated with these goals. First, they are not mutually supportive or attainable. They ask the youths to embrace the dominant culture while exerting control over their environment. As these data show, our informants were unable to do both, instead choosing to gain mastery on their own terms, which exist outside the legitimate system. Second, the primary vehicle to accomplish these goals is the school system. However, as we discussed previously, the schools in neighborhoods characterized by poverty and crime often fail to provide programs that are meaningful to the present and future lives of young men such as the JDs in this study.

Despite decreased funding for schools in poorer school districts, the school system can empower at-risk youths by providing them with a better understanding of societal inequities and their consequences. If the role of educator were redefined to include that of "cultural worker," students would have "the opportunity to engage in systematic analyses of the ways in which the dominant culture creates borders [between subordinated and powerful groups] saturated in terror, inequality, and forced exclusions" (Giroux 1992, p. 174). Teachers would need to be well grounded in the practices through which the dominant culture marginalizes, trivializes, and excludes subordinated groups in society. For example, as teachers of marketing, we often are guilty of shoring up the status quo. In our classrooms and books, we teach students to receive culture passively. The dominant culture is given; it has a taken-for-granted status. We do not develop students' critical consciousness of their roles as cultural producers.

Such an approach would be consistent with the postmodern view of cultural studies, which regards culture as "contested terrain" and a place of constant struggle among different groups in society (Giroux 1992). Instead of presenting a homogeneous picture of our culture, postmodernism embraces a multinarrative approach that gives voice to different social worlds and histories. Such an approach would provide opportunities for subordinated groups to develop political and cultural vocabularies to help them form and value their individual and group identities. It also provides a valuable paradigm for investigating and understanding the impact of societal inequities on vulnerable populations.

Concluding Comments

Our research suggests that juvenile delinquency is an act of cultural resistance. Furthermore, especially in cases in which youths come from resource-deprived communities, a significant portion of this resistance takes the form of consumption. Findings also reveal that the current system of reform for these youths is not effective, yet something must be done. Therefore, we recommend that the educational system take the lead by retraining teachers to be able to understand and explain cultural hegemony and its impact on consumption as resistance. Our hope is that an approach that views "knowledge as power" will provide disadvantaged youths with the opportunity to seek better long-term solutions to inherent inequities.

Marketing scholars in the consumer behavior subfield are beginning to examine the "dark side" of consumption (Hirschman 1991) and take a postmodern view of consumption-related activities (Firat and Venkatesh 1995). We hope that further research will continue to investigate the macro and unintended consequences of the marketing system on society (e.g., see Martin and Gentry 1997). Particular attention should be given to legislation and legislative solutions

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that are outside the typical domain of marketing but related to a broader consumer-behavior perspective.

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