Deviance Article: Becoming a Hit Man

Answer in complete sentences!

1. Under what conditions do you think a person could become a hitman?


3. How do you use neutralizing techniques to neutralize your own deviant behaviors?

4. Which deviant theory (or theories) does the behavior of the hitman fall under? Explain.
consider “sheer necessity” to the desire to reach a future goal. Liliana and Javier, who decided that they wanted a baby, are an example. Such persons have greater difficulty adjusting to their acts than those who redefine them as “good.” (Even the latter may have difficulty, for redefinitions may be only partial, especially in the face of competing definitions.)

Twentieth, people feel they must justify their actions to others. This process of justifying the self involves clothing definitions of reality in forms thought to be acceptable to others. In order for definitions to be accepted, they must be made to fit into the others’ already-existing definitional framework. In this case, the survivors first justified their proposed actions by redefining the bodies as meat and by saying that they had a duty to survive. After their rescue—speaking to a Roman Catholic audience—they used the analogy of holy communion to justify their act.

Twenty-first, to gain institutional support is to secure a broad, solid base for one’s definitions of reality. Then one no longer stands alone, which is to invite ridicule and may require cutting off oneself from the larger group. In this case, institutional support was provided by the Roman Catholic Church, which, while not accepting the survivors’ analogy of cannibalism as communion, allowed them to avoid the label of sin by defining their actions as allowable under the circumstances.

Finally, note that these principles are fundamental to human life. They do not simply apply to the Andes survivors—or to deviants in general—but they underlie human society. For all of us, reality is socially constructed, and the story of the Andes survivors contains the essence of human society.

Becoming a Hit Man

KEN LEVI

There is no question that we all have deviant desires. If we probe our deeper recesses, we might even find a cesspool of feelings and impulses that we don’t want to reveal to others or, at times, even to ourselves. No matter how we may suppress our desires for deviance, they remain nonetheless.

As you saw with the selection that opened this Part, even highly conforming people, those whose deviant desires are under high control, can do appalling things when the conditions are right. You read how obedience to authority can be so compelling that people will give electrical shocks to strangers. In the preceding article, you read about conforming people who ate human flesh. Again, the situation had to be right.

But killing strangers in cold blood? Methodically shooting men and women because someone offers money for their deaths? Who would do such a thing? And those who would, do they think of themselves as monsters, the way that we might think of them? On the contrary, as Levi shows, just as we have ways of neutralizing our deviance (telling a “white” lie or using the Internet to do a “little” cheating on a class paper), so hit men have ways of neutralizing their deeds. They, after all, just like us, have to live with themselves.

Our knowledge about deviance management is based primarily on behavior that is easily mitigated. The literature dwells on unwed fathers (Pfuhl, 1978), and childless mothers (Veevers, 1975), pillaging bread salesmen (Ditton, 1977), and conniving shoe salesmen (Friedman, 1974), bridge pros (Holz, 1975), and poker pros (Hayano, 1977), marijuana smokers (Langer, 1976), massage parlor prostitutes (Vorlade, 1976), and other minor offenders (see, for example, Berk, 1977; Farrell and Nelson, 1976; Gross, 1977). There is a dearth of deviance management articles on serious offenders, and no scholarly articles at all about one of the (legally) most serious offenders of all, the professional murderer. Drift may be possible for the minor offender exploiting society’s ambivalence toward his relatively unserious behavior (Sykes and Matza, 1957). However, except for the more inexcusable forms of deviant behavior, by definition,
come by, and the very serious offender may enter his career with few of the
usual defenses.

This article will focus on ways that one type of serious offender, the pro-
dfessional hit man, neutralizes stigma in the early stages of his career. As we
shall see, the social organization of the “profession” provides “neutralizers”
which distance its members from the shameful aspects of their careers. But
for the novice, without professional insulation, the problem is more acute.
With very little outside help, he must negate his feelings, neutralize them,
and adopt a “framework” (Goffman, 1974) appropriate to his chosen career.
This process, called “reframing,” is the main focus of the present article.
Cognitively, the novice must reframe his experience in order to enter his
profession.

The Social Organization of Murder

Murder, the unlawful killing of a person, is considered a serious criminal of-
fense in the United States, and it is punished by extreme penalties. In addi-
tion, most Americans do not feel that the penalties are extreme enough
(Reid, 1976:482). In overcoming the intense stigma associated with murder,
the hit man lacks the supports available to more ordinary types of killers.

Some cultures allow special circumstances or sanction special organiza-
tions wherein people who kill are insulated from the taint of murder. Sol-
diers at war, or police in the line of duty, or citizens protecting their
property operate under what are considered justifiable or excusable condi-
tions. They receive so much informal support from the general public and
from members of their own group that it may protect even a sadistic member
from blame (Westley, 1966).

Subcultures (Wolfgang and Ferracuti, 1967), organizations (Maas, 1966),
and gangs (Taborsky, 1962) that unlawfully promote killing can at least pro-
vide their members with an “appeal to higher loyalties” (Sykes and Matza,
1957), if not a fully developed set of deviance justifying norms.

Individuals acting on their own, who kill in a spontaneous “irrat-
ional” outburst of violence can also mitigate the stigma of their behavior.

I mean, people will go ape for one minute and shoot, but there are very few peo-
ple who are capable of thinking about, planning, and then doing it (Joey, 1974:56).

Individuals who kill in a hot-blooded burst of passion can retrospectively
draw comfort from the law which provides a lighter ban against killings per-
formed without premeditation or malice or intent (Lester and Lester,
1975:35). At one extreme, the spontaneous killing may seem the result of a
mental disease (Lester and Lester, 1975:39) or dissociative reaction (Tanay,
1972), and excused entirely as insanity.

But when an individual who generally shares society’s ban against mur-
der, is fully aware that his act of homicide is (1) unlawful, (2) self-serving,
and (3) intentional, he does not have the usual defenses to fall back on. How
does such an individual manage to overcome his inhibitions and avoid seri-
ous damage to his self-image (assuming that he does share society’s ban)?
This is the special dilemma of the professional hit man who hires himself out
for murder.

Research Methods

Information for this article comes primarily from a series of intensive in-
terviews with one self-styled “hit man.” The interviews were spread over seven,
tape-recorded sessions during a four-month period. The respondent was one
of fifty prison inmates randomly sampled from a population of people con-
victed of murder in Metropolitan Detroit. The respondent told about an “ac-
cidental” killing, involving a drunken bar patron who badgered the re-
spondent and finally forced his hand by pulling a knife on him. In court he
claimed self-defense, but the witnesses at the bar claimed otherwise, so they
sent him to prison. During the first two interview sessions, the respondent
acted progressively ashamed of this particular killing, not on moral ground,
but because of its “sloppiness” or “amateurishness.” Finally, he indicated
there was more he would like to say. So, I stopped the tape recorder. I asked
him if he was a hit man. He said he was.

He had already been given certain guarantees, including no names in the
interview, a private conference room, and a signed contract promising his
anonymity. Now, as a further guarantee, we agreed to talk about him in the
third person, as a fictitious character named “Pete,” so that none of his state-
ments would sound like a personal confession. With these assurances, future in-
terviews were devoted to his career as a professional murderer, with particular
emphasis on his entry into the career and his orientation toward his victims.

Was he reliable? Since we did not use names, I had no way of checking the
veracity of the individual cases he reported. Nevertheless, I was able to
compare his account of the hit man’s career with information from other
convicted murderers, with police experts, and with accounts from the avail-
able literature (Gage, 1972; Joey, 1974; Maas, 1968). Pete’s information was
generally supported by these other sources. As to his motive for submitting to
the interview, it is hard to gauge. He apparently was ashamed of the one
“accidental” killing that had landed him in prison, and he desired to set the record straight concerning what he deemed an illustrious career, now that he had arrived, as he said, at the end of it. Hit men pride themselves on not "falling" (going to jail) for murder, and Pete's incarceration hastened a decision to retire—that he had already been contemplating, anyway.

A question might arise about the ethics of researching self-confessed "hit men" and granting them anonymity. Legally, since Pete never mentioned specific names or specific dates or possible future crimes, there does not seem to be a problem. Morally, if confidentiality is a necessary condition to obtaining information about serious offenders, then we have to ask: Is it worth it? Pete insisted that he had retired from the profession. Therefore, there seems to be no "clear and imminent danger" that would justify the violation of confidentiality, in the terms set forth by the American Psychological Association (1978:40). On the other hand, the possibility of danger does exist, and future researchers will have to exercise their judgment.

Finally, hit men are hard to come by. Unlike more lawful killers, such as judges or night watchmen, and unlike run-of-the-mill murderers, the hit man (usually) takes infinite care to conceal his identity. Therefore, while it is regrettable that this paper has only one case to report on, and while it would be ideal to perform a comparative analysis on a number of hit men, it would be very difficult to obtain such a sample. Instead, Pete's responses will be compared to similar accounts from the available literature. While such a method can never produce verifiable findings, it can point to suggestive hypotheses.

The Social Organization of Professional Murder

There are two types of professional murderers: the organized and the independent. The killer who belongs to an organized syndicate does not usually get paid on a contract basis, and performs his job out of loyalty and obedience to the organization (Maas, 1968:81). The independent professional killer is a freelance agent who hires himself out for a fee (Pete). It is the career organization of the second type of killer that will be discussed.

The organized killer can mitigate his behavior through an "appeal to higher loyalties" (Sykes and Matza, 1957). He also can view his victim as an enemy of the group and then choose from a variety of techniques available for neutralizing an offense against an enemy (see, for example, Hirschi, 1969; Rogers and Buffalo, 1974). But the independent professional murderer lacks most of these defenses. Nevertheless, built into his role are certain structural features that help him avoid deviance ascription. These features include:

(1) Contract. A contract is an unwritten agreement to provide a sum of money to a second party who agrees, in return, to commit a designated murder (Joey, 1974:9). It is most often arranged over the phone, between people who have never had personal contact. And the victim, or "hit," is usually unknown to the killer (Gage, 1972:57; Joey, 1974:61-62). This arrangement is meant to protect both parties from the law. But it also helps the killer "deny the victim" (Sykes and Matza, 1957) by keeping him relatively anonymous.

In arranging the contract, the hired killer will try to find out the difficulty of the hit and how much the customer wants the killing done. According to Pete, these considerations determine his price. He does not ask about the motive for the killing, treating it as none of his concern. Now knowing the motive may hamper the killer from morally justifying his behavior, but it also enables him to further deny the victim by maintaining his distance and reserve. Finally, the contract is backed up by a further understanding.

Like this guy who left here (prison) last summer, he was out two months before he got killed. Made a mistake somewhere. The way I heard it, he didn't finish filling a contract [Pete].

If the killer fails to live up to his part of the bargain, the penalties could be extreme (Gage, 1972:63; Joey, 1974:9). This has the ironic effect that after the contract is arranged, the killer can somewhat "deny responsibility" (Sykes and Matza, 1957), by pleading self-defense.

(2) Reputation and Money. Reputation is especially important in an area where killers are unknown to their customers, and where the less written, the better (Joey, 1974:58). Reputation, in turn, reflects how much money the hit man has commanded in the past.

And that was the first time that I ever got 30 grand . . . it's based on his reputation . . . . Yeah, how good he really is. To be so-so, you get so-so money. If you're good, you get good money [Pete].

Pete, who could not recall the exact number of people he had killed, did, like other hit men, keep an accounting of his highest fees (Joey, 1974:58, 63). To him big money meant not only a way to earn a living, but also a way to maintain his professional reputation.

People who accept low fees can also find work as hired killers. Heroin addicts are the usual example. But, as Pete says, they often receive a bullet for their pains. It is believed that people who would kill for so little would also require little persuasion to make them talk to the police (Joey, 1974:63). This further reinforces the single-minded emphasis on making ...
a result, killing is conceptualized as a "business" or as "just a job." Framing the hit in a normal businesslike context enables the hit man to deny wrongfulness, or "deny injury" (Sykes and Matza, 1957).

In addition to the economic motive, Pete and hit men discussed by other authors, refer to excitement, fun, game-playing, power, and impressing women as incentives for murder (Joey, 1974:81–82). However, none of these motives are mentioned by all sources. None are as necessary to the career as money. And, after a while, these other motives diminish and killing becomes only "just a job" (Joey, 1974:20). The primacy of the economic motive has been aptly expressed in the case of another deviant profession.

Women who enjoy sex with their customers do not make good prostitutes, according to those who are acquainted with this institution first hand. Instead of thinking about the most effective way of making money at the job, they would be doing things for their own pleasure and enjoyment [Goode, 1974:342].

(3) Skill. Most of the hit man’s training focuses on acquiring skill in the use of weapons.

Then, he met these two guys, these two white guys … them two, them two were the best. And but they stayed around over there and they got together, and Pete told [them] that he really wanted to be good. He said, if [I] got to do something, I want to be good at it. So, they got together, showed him, showed him how to shoot … And gradually, he became good. … Like he told me, like when he shoots somebody, he always goes for the head; he said, that’s about the best shot. I mean, if you want him dead then and there. … And these two guys showed him, and to him, I mean, hey, I mean, he don’t believe nobody could really outshoot these two guys, you know what I mean. They know everything you want to know about guns, knives, and stuff like that [Pete].

The hit man’s reputation, and the amount of money he makes depends on his skill, his effective ability to serve as a means to someone else’s ends. The result is a focus on technique.

Like in anything you do, when you do it, you want to do it just right. … On your target and you hit it, how you feel; I hit it! I hit it! [Pete].

This focus on technique, on means, helps the hit man to "deny responsibility" and intent (Sykes and Matza, 1957). In frame-analytic terms, the hit man separates his morally responsible, or "principal" self from the rest of himself, and performs the killing mainly as a "strategist" (Goffman, 1974:523). In other words, he sees himself as a "hired gun." The saying, "If I didn’t do it, they’d find someone else who would," reflects this narrowly technical orientation.

To sum up thus far, the contract, based as it is on the hit man’s reputation for profit and skill, provides the hit man with opportunities for denying the victim, denying injury, and denying responsibility. But this is not enough. To point out the defenses of the professional hit man is one thing, but it is unlikely that the novice hit man would have a totally professional attitude so early in his career. The novice is at a point where he both lacks the conventional defense against the stigma of murder, and he has not yet fully acquired the exceptional defenses of the professional. How, then, does he cope?

The First Time: Negative Experience

Goffman defines "negative experience" as a feeling of disorientation.

Expecting to take up a position in a well-framed realm, he finds that no particular frame is immediately applicable, or the frame that he thought was applicable no longer seems to be, or he cannot bind himself within the frame that does apparently apply. He loses command over the formulation of viable response. He flounders. Experience, the meld of what the current scene brings him and what he brings to it—meant to settle into a form even while it is beginning, finds no form and is therefore no experience. Reality anachronically flatters. He has a "negative experience"—negative in the sense that it takes its character from what it is not, and what it is not is an organized and organizationally affirmed response [1974:378–379].

Negative experience can occur when a person finds himself lapping into an old understanding of the situation, only to suddenly awaken to the fact that it no longer applies. In this regard, we should expect negative experience to be a special problem for the novice. For example, the first time he killed a man for money, Pete supposedly became violently ill:

When he [Pete], you know, hit the guy, when he shot the guy, the guy said, "You killed me"… something like that, cause he struck him all up here. And what he said, it was just, I mean, the look right in the guy’s eye, you know. I mean he looked like: why me? Yeah? And he [Pete] couldn’t shake that. Cause he remembered a time or two when he got out, and all he wanted to do was get back and cut this guy that cut him. And this here. … No, he just could not shake it. And then he said that at night-time he’ll start thinking about the guy like he shouldn’t have looked at him like that. … I mean actually [Pete] was sick. … He couldn’t keep his food down, I mean, or nothing like that. … [It
lasted] I'd say about two months. . . . Like he said that he had feelings . . . that he never did kill nobody before [Pete].

Pete's account conforms to the definition of negative experience. He had never killed anyone for money before. It started when a member of the Detroit drug world had spotted Pete in a knife fight outside an inner city bar, was apparently impressed with the young man's style, and offered him fifty dollars to do a "job." Pete accepted. He wanted the money. But when the first hit came about, Pete of course knew that he was doing it for money, but yet his orientation was revenge. Thus, he saw his victim in the face, a characteristic gesture of people who kill enemies for revenge (Levi, 1975:190). Expecting to see defiance turn into a look of defeat, they attempt to gain "face" at the loser's expense.

But when Pete stared his victim in the face, he saw not an enemy, but an innocent man. He saw a look of: "Why me?" And this discordant image is what remained in his mind during the weeks and months to follow and made him sick. As Pete says, "He shouldn't have looked at him like that." The victim's look of innocence brought about what Goffman (1974:347) refers to as a "frame break":

Given that the frame applied to an activity is expected to enable us to come to terms with all events in that activity (informing and regulating many of them), it is understandable that the unmanageable might occur, an occurrence which cannot be effectively ignored and to which the frame cannot be applied, with resulting bewilderment and chagrin on the part of the participants. In brief, a break can occur in the applicability of the frame, a break in its governance.

When such a frame break occurs, it produces negative experience. Pete's extremely uncomfortable disorientation may reflect the extreme dissonance between the revenge frame, that he expected to apply, and the unexpected look of innocence that he encountered and continued to recall.

**Subsequent Time: Reframing the Hit**

According to Goffman (1974:319), a structural feature of frames of experience is that they are divided into different "tracks" or types of information. These include, "a main track or story line and ancillary tracks of various kinds." The ancillary tracks are the directional track, the overlay track, the concealment tracks, and the disattend track. The disattend track contains the information that is perceived but supposed to be ignored. For example, the prostitute manages the distasteful necessity of having sex with "tricks" by remaining "absolutely . . . detached. Removed. Miles and miles away" (1974:344). The existence of different tracks allows an individual to define and redefine his experience by the strategic placement of information.

Sometimes, the individual receives outside help. For example, when Milgram in 1963 placed a barrier between people administering electric shocks, and the bogus "subjects" who were supposedly receiving the shocks, he made it easier for the shockers to "disattend" signs of human distress from their hapless victims. Surgeons provide another example. Having their patients completely covered, except for the part to be operated on, helps them work in a more impersonal manner. In both examples, certain crucial information is stored away in the "concealment track" (Goffman, 1974:218).

In other cases help can come from guides who direct the novice on what to experience and what to block out. Beginning marijuana smokers are cautioned to ignore feelings of nausea (Becker, 1953:240). On the other hand, novice hit men like Pete are reluctant to share their "experience" with anyone else. It would be a sign of weakness.

In still other cases, however, it is possible that the subject can do the reframing on his own. And this is what appears to have happened to Pete.

And when the second one [the second hit] came up, [Pete] was still thinking about the first one. . . . Yeah, when he got ready to go, he was thinking about it. Something changed. I don't know how to put it right. Up to the moment that he killed the second guy now, he waited, you know. Going through his mind was the first guy he killed. He still seeing him, still see the expression on his face. Soon, the second guy walked up; I mean, it was like his mind just blanked out for a minute, everything just blanked out. . . . Next thing he know, he had killed the second guy. . . . He knew what he was doing, but what I mean, he just didn't have nothing on his mind. Everything was wiped out [Pete].

When the second victim approached, Pete says that he noticed the victim's approach, he was aware of the man's presence. But he noticed none of the victim's personal features. He did not see the victim's face or its expression. Thus, he did not see the very thing that gave him so much trouble the first time. It is as if Pete had negatively conditioned himself to avoid certain cues. Since he shot the victim in the head, it is probable that Pete saw him in one sense; this is not the same kind of experience as a "disassociative reaction," which has been likened to sleepwalking (Tanay, 1978). Pete says that, "he knew what he was doing." But he either did not pay attention to his victim's personal features at the time of the killing, or he blocked them out immediately afterward, so that now the only aspect of his victim he recalls is the victim's approach (if we are to believe him).
After that, Pete says that killing became routine. He learned to view his victims as “targets,” rather than as people. Thus, he believes that the second experience is the crucial one, and that the disattendance of the victim’s personal features made it so.

Support from other accounts of hit men is scant, due to a lack of data. Furthermore, not everything in Pete’s account supports the “reframing” hypothesis. In talking about later killings, it is clear that he not only attends to his victims’ personal features, on occasion, but he also derives a certain grim pleasure in doing so.

In a parallel story, Joey, the narrator of the Killer, also observes his victim in personal terms.

It may be that this evidence contradicts what I have said about reframing; but perhaps another interpretation is possible. Reframing may play a more crucial role in the original redefinition of an experience than in the continued maintenance of that redefinition. Once Pete has accustomed himself to viewing his victims as merely targets, as “just money,” then it may be less threatening to look upon them as persons, once again. Once the “main story line” has been established, discordant information can be presented in the “overlay track” (Goffman, 1974:215), without doing too much damage. Indeed, this seems to be the point that both hit men are trying to make in the above excerpts.

The Heart of the Hit Man

For what I have been referring to as “disattendance” Pete used the term “heart,” which he defined as a “coldness.” When asked what he would look for in an aspiring hit man, Peter replied,

See if he’s got a whole lot of heart . . . you got to be cold . . . you got to build a coldness in yourself. It’s not something that comes automatically. Cause, see, I don’t care who he is, first, you’ve got feelings [Pete].

In contrast to this view, Joey (1974:56) said,

There are three things you need to kill a man: the gun, the bullets, and the balls. A lot of people will point a gun at you, but they haven’t got the courage to pull the trigger. It’s as simple as that.

It may be that some are born with “heart,” while others acquire it in the way I have described.

However, the “made rather than born” thesis does explain one perplexing feature of hit men and other “evil” men whose banality has sometimes seemed discordant. In other aspects of their lives they all seem perfectly capable of feeling ordinary human emotions. Their inhumanity, their coldness, seems narrowly restricted to their jobs. Pete, for example, talked about his “love” for little children. Eddie “The Hawk” Ruppolo weekly allowed his mistress to openly insult him in a public bar (Gage, 1972). And Joey (1974:55) has this to say about himself:

Believe it or not, I’m a human being. I laugh at funny jokes. I love children around the house, and I can spend hours playing with my mutt.

All of these examples of human warmth indicate that the cold heart of the hit man may be less a characteristic of the killer’s individual personality, than a feature of the professional framework of experience which the hit man has learned to adapt himself to, when he is on the job.

Discussion

This article is meant as a contribution to the study of deviance neutralization. The freelance hit man is an example of an individual who, relatively alone, must deal with a profound and unambiguous stigma in order to enter his career. Both Pete and Joey emphasize “heart” as a determining factor in becoming a professional. And Pete’s experience, after the first hit, further indicates that the inhibitions against murder-for-money are real.

In this article “heart”—or the ability to adapt to a rationalized framework for killing—has been portrayed as the outcome of an initial process of reframing, in addition to other neutralization techniques established during the further stages of professionalization. As several theorists (see, for example, Becker, 1953; Douglas et al., 1977; Matza, 1969) have noted, people often enter into deviant acts first, and then develop rationales for their behavior later on. This was also the case with Pete, who began his career by first, (1) “being willing” (Matza, 1969), (2) encountering a...
(3) undergoing negative experience, (4) being willing to try again (also known as “getting back on the horse”), (5) reframing the experience, and (6) having future, routine experiences wherein his professionalization increasingly enabled him to “deny the victim,” “deny injury,” and “deny responsibility.” Through the process of reframing, the experience of victim-as-target emerged as the “main story line,” and the experience of victim-as-person was downgraded from the main track to the disattend track to the overlay track. Ironically, the intensity of the negative experience seemed to make the process all the more successful. Thus, it may be possible for a person with “ordinary human feelings” to both pass through the novice stage, and to continue “normal relations” thereafter. The reframing hypothesis has implications for other people who knowingly perform stigmatized behaviors. It may be particularly useful in explaining a personal conversion experience that occurs despite the relative absence of deviant peer groups, deviant norms, extenuating circumstances, and neutralization rationales.

26

The Saints and the Roughnecks

WILLIAM J. CHAMBLISS

When people deviate from what is expected of them, other people react. But on what do their reactions depend? Do they depend simply on the nature of the deviance itself, or is more involved? If so, what sorts of things?

It is these fascinating questions that Chambliss examines in this study of two groups of delinquents in the same high school. He found that although both groups were involved in serious and repetitious delinquent acts, one was perceived as a group of saints, while the other was viewed as a bunch of roughnecks. After analyzing what influenced people’s perceptions, and hence their reactions to the boys, Chambliss examines the far-reaching effects of those reactions. He indicates that in the case of the roughnecks, people’s reactions helped lock the boys into behaviors that continued after high school, eventually leading to prison or to low-paying jobs. In contrast, social reactions to the saints helped set them on a life course that meant not only staying out of prison but also entering well-paying positions of prestige.

EIGHT PROMISING YOUNG MEN—children of good, stable, white upper-middle-class families, active in school affairs, good pre-college students—were some of the most delinquent boys at Hanibal High School. While community residents knew that these boys occasionally sowed a few wild oats, they were totally unaware that sowing wild oats completely occupied the daily routine of these young men. The Saints were constantly occupied with truancy, drinking, wild driving, petty theft, and vandalism. Yet no one was officially arrested for any misdeed during the two years I observed them.

This record was particularly surprising in light of my observations during the same two years of another gang of Hanibal High School students, six lower-class white boys known as the Roughnecks. The Roughnecks were constantly in trouble with police and community even though their rate of delinquency was about equal with that of the Saints. What was the cause of this disparity? the result? The following consideration of the activities, social class, and community perceptions of both gangs may provide some answers.