

Chicano Group Resents Sheriff's Label Of Gang

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Maria's son joined the Northside Locos when he was 15-years-old.

For him, the group represented a place to meet friends and talk — a place where each member gave support to the other.

But for others in the community, the Northside Locos meant fear and violence. The group represented what they consider the worst of the youth gangs where murder is a part of life.

Whose picture is right?

A group of Chicanos in the community say the youth gangs are something that can not be defined in simple black and white terms.

To them, the groups are a normal part of a Chicano's life — a life where there is often discrimination and misunderstanding from the Anglo community.

They admit there are problems, but said stereotypes should not be placed on Chicano youths.

Their comments came this week in the wake of a sheriff's office report which defined four area youth gangs and told of their often violent way of life.

The report told of how members are initiated into the club by being beaten by other gang members.

It also claimed violence was an integral part of the gangs and predicted an increase in gang membership in the near future. Membership has already risen by 400 percent, the report said.

"You say they are a gang because they wear Pendleton shirts and khaki pants," said Dan Alejandrez. "Well, you could say there is a gang that hangs out at Light-house Field and wears funny black suits.

"What's the difference?"

Alejandrez, who has children of his own and currently attends UCSC, took issue with the sheriff's reports. He said the so-called gangs are more of a support group for Chicano youth than an organized operation which concentrates on violence.

"They are a support system for each other because there is no support coming from anywhere else," said Alejandrez. The Chicano youth identify with each other in school. They like the same music, the same parties and the same style of clothes.

Naturally, they want to spend time with their peers.

"It's a form of a big extended family," said 24-year-old Raquel Mariscal, who works with youths in the Northside Locos gang.

"A lot of time the older guys will tell the younger ones, 'hey, you're messing up.'

"It's like a family. The older guys take care of the young guys."

The two admit there are problems, but say they are not as big as has been reported.

According to Maria (not her real name), a dark-haired woman whose son belongs to the Northside Locos, her son joined the group to be with his friends.

"He considers them his friends — some are even relatives," she said.

The traditions of hanging around in the downtown area and gathering together goes back a long way.

"My husband and I met in Watsonville and we used to do the same thing — hang around the plaza.

"Some of the mothers get together and talk," said Maria. "We just cry on each other's shoulders. The articles in the paper are so embarrassing. We just hang on to each other — its all we can do."

"What else is there to do in Watsonville?" asked Maria.

Maria said she is angry and upset because of the attention placed on the gangs. She claims law enforcement "exaggerates" claims of violence.

"They (the gangs) take the blame for everything," said Maria. "If they stand in the park, the police tell them to move on."

"They have no place to go."

Sheriff's reports linking violence to the gangs do not help.

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paper are so embarrassing. We just hang on to each other — its all we can do."

Other reports of a strict dress code for gang members are also false, said Alejandrez.

"It (Pendleton shirt, t-shirt and khaki pants) is not a dress code for gang members. My father still wears khaki pants."

Cruz Zazarmora, a member of Barrios Unidos and a student at UCSC, said the dress pattern of the chicano youth is not rooted in the history of youth gangs but in economics.

"They are the cheapest things to buy and they last the longest," he said.

Khaki pants are strong and durable, said Alejandrez. Pendleton shirts do not wrinkle easily and are warm. T-shirts are cheaper than buying a more expensive shirt. Just because a Chicano youth wears this type of clothes does not mean he is a gang member, he said.

Alejandrez told of discrimination in schools against Chicanos and the makings of the so-called gangs.

"When a Chicano goes to school, he is put down because of his style," said Alejandrez. "He says, 'hey f— these people' and soon he is moved out of the mainstream of the school."

He meets others who are like him and soon they congregate to talk and hang out.

The group becomes their world.

What is needed to solve the problem?

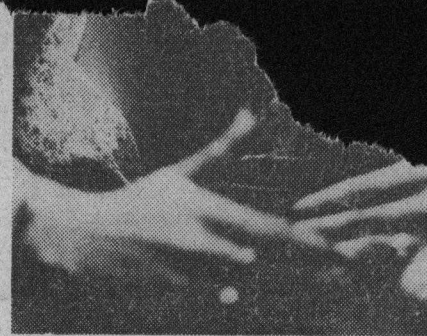
Alejandrez said he would like to see more understanding in the community.

He also said people should be aware of some of the good things going on — such as the Barrios Unidos (United Neighborhood) organization which sponsored a youth conference and is attempting to work with young Chicano people in the county.

Alejandrez, who is a member of the group, thinks the organization may be a ray of hope for the youth.

Zazarmora said he would like to see a cultural arts center where exhibits and plays could be staged dealing with the Chicano culture.

"There are a lot of youths out there who have a lot of talent," he said.



Raquel Mariscal

Zazarmora, who is a muralist himself, also talked of car shows and cultural events which could benefit youth.

"We're not saying we are going to get everyone together and it is going to work," said Alejandrez. "We are not going to get 1,000 people together. If we get 50, that's good.

"Then we have leaders out there."

Alejandrez said he and members of Barrios Unidos are not saying there is no problem with youth.

"We know. We go to the funerals, the hospitals, the jails, and we go to court.

The violence is there, the group agreed. But who is responsible?

"Is it the schools? Is it the job market that doesn't want to hire a Chicano youth because he wears Pendleton shirts, has tatoos and cruises?" asked Mariscal.

"It just doesn't rest on the individual person. The factors for violence are many."

"It just doesn't rest on the individual person. The factors for violence are many.

"If we could just pinpoint those," she said, "we'd be a lot farther ahead."

SANTA CRUZ COUNTY IN THE 1940's

Here's what was happening in Santa Cruz County during the first week in October of 1940:

The city of Santa Cruz was promised \$95,181 in federal funds for a municipal airport if Congress would okay additional support monies.

The largest group benefiting from relief aid in the county during July was the blind.