

REVIEW 1

From jacket cover of *Street Children of Cali* Lewis Aptekar

Marshall H. Segall, Associate Dean of Arts and Sciences,
Syracuse University

"Here is a book -- a psycho-ethnography of children who are among the 40 million street people of Latin America -- that combines approaches rooted in anthropology, clinical psychology, and tough-minded investigative journalism. Aptekar has constructed a vivid portrait of life on the streets of Cali, Colombia; courageously and sensitively, he enters the world of the gamines, and shows it to us almost from an insider's perspective. "Clinical psychologists, social scientists, and social workers all can learn from Aptekar's blending of qualitative and quantitative research techniques, and so can anyone with a concern for street people. "

Children through the streets of urban Latin America. Visitors from developed nations, unused to unsupervised children in such profusion and accosted by importunate children selling trivial goods or services, wonder who they are, where they come from, where they go. They are often explained as the abandoned offspring of the very poor, or the product of delinquency and degeneracy, giving rise to ambivalent feelings of pity and fear in both local and foreign observers. Systematic and careful studies of this large population have been lacking. Observers often take the self-serving and mendacious responses of these gamines as true indicators of their lives, tending to reinforce the highly colored and romanticized view of street children. Aptekar's rigorous study of the children, based on a year of close contact, provides real information on where the children come from, where they go at night, and how they survive, socially and economically. The resulting picture is revealing not only of social realities in Latin America but also of the adaptability and resourcefulness of children in ways startling to western middle-class conceptions of child development.

REVIEW 2

(From Duke university blind review)

I recommend Aptekar's very strongly. The book is unique in its topic, and well-written, and has all the chances for (re)establishing the reputation of Duke University Press among the leading academic publishers of psychology literature as an innovative publisher who finds and publishes valuable manuscripts in the field, before the 'mainstream' of the field realizes the relevance)in the topic and its coverage in these manuscripts.

REVIEW 3

Emmy E. Werner
University of California, Davis

This book is a compelling and compassionate account of the lives of 56 Colombian boys (ages 7-17), who are among the estimated 40 million children living on the streets of Latin American cities. In 1984, the author, with a team of Columbian psychology students, followed these boys at work and play in the streets of Cali, and interviewed them in a drop-in shelter, run by a Catholic priest, and in a detention center, run by the state. Aptekar' book presents an elegant synthesis of data gleaned from participant observations, psychological tests and the news media.

The author dispels a number of popular misconceptions about the lives of these boys. He examines the validity of three hypotheses about the probable causes that propel children to live on the streets. The first alleges that they are recently arrived rural migrants, unprepared for city life; the second views the children as victims of family abuse or neglect; the third assumes that they come from a subculture that does not value productivity. The evidence he presents, albeit on a small and select sample of street children, challenges these assumptions. The majority of the boys he studied were born and lived in the city; they were in intermittent contact with family members or other caring adults, and they did not denigrate productivity. They were propelled to the streets to find an alternative way of coping with abject poverty, which is remarkable for its adaptability and resiliency.

Aptekar presents finely drawn psychological profiles of children and adolescents who represent different ways of coping with life on the streets. He introduces us to small entrepreneurs who live by their wits, and to young victims of circumstances beyond their control. The majority of the boys, he concludes, are either making a successful adjustment to life on their own, or get by with the help of adult benefactors or peers. Only a minority (one out of four) become "forsaken" teenagers who turn to delinquency and substance abuse, or develop serious mental health problems. We do learn from Aptekar's data whether the boys on the streets fare better or worse than their siblings who stay at home.

The author examines a number of options for providing health care, vocational training and employment for the street children that take into account individual differences in their life styles. Most importantly--he sets the "problem" of the street children in the historical and socio-political context of the society which they inhabit context that is often overlooked by well-meaning organizations concerned with improving the lot of these children.

The book is highly recommended for cross-cultural researchers, psychologists, health care professionals, social workers and policy makers in international organizations who are concerned with the fate of the children of the poor. It is an eloquent testimonial to their valor as well as their vulnerabilities.

REVIEW 4

This manuscript is very important for contemporary developmental psychology, **which in** its mainstream is based on Western affluent middle-class understanding of child development. Aptekar's book fills a part in the wide gap in existing psychological literature which **includes extremely** few thorough descriptions of children's lives and psychological phenomena in the context of non-Western and non-middle-class cultural contexts. Aptekar demonstrates in good style how and why many of our (North-American, as well as those of affluent Colombian) common-sense ideas about the street children, their adaptation to street life, and their reasons for becoming street children, are inaccurate because of our

(outsiders') pre-conceived notions about the subject matter. The author of the book has studied street children in Colombia in ways that demonstrate high ecological validity and remarkable sensitivity of the author towards the phenomena he studies. He uses his respect for, and clinical understanding of, complex psychological phenomena in highly productive ways. The phenomena described in the manuscript cannot be reduced to the state of quantified 'data' that flourish in maintain psychological writings in the USA and Europe, but which remain highly informative as far as the understanding of their, underlying psychological phenomena is concerned. In contrast with that tradition of psychology's mainstream, Aptekar's presentation of the data is well-phrased and thorough. It preserves the actual quality of the phenomena in a masterful manner.

I expect Aptekar's book to be enthusiastically welcomed by those psychologists who are seriously interested in overcoming the culture-boundedness of their science. Others, who adhere to the 'traditional' psychology may find it of less interest. However, the latter case will only increase the value of the book for progress in contemporary child psychology, and for educating the intellectually serious wider readership. For the latter, reading Aptekar's book may serve as a useful source for understanding how misleading our American pre-conceived notions about the lives of 'disadvantaged' children in other cultural contexts can be.

Aside from the readership in North America and Europe, the book would be welcomed by child development specialists in the Third World. University instructors in the Third World countries are generally dissatisfied with child psychology teaching literature published in Europe and North America which is almost completely useless in their respective cultural contexts. I can see Aptekar's book become used at university-level teaching of psychology in these countries, provided that the book becomes accessible to them in terms of its cost, and available through world-wide distribution networks. In the U.S., the use of the book in university education can be expected in both upper-level undergraduate and graduate teaching, albeit in courses that are interdisciplinary, or with an international focus. The use of the book in 'mainstream' courses of psychology does not seem to be expectable on any wider scale.

REVIEW 5

April 19, 1989

The Times of the Americas

Gamines, myths, legends- and stereotypes: Aptekar's work sheds some light,

By Aeon Segal

Times of the Americas Correspondent

It was 2 a.m. on a cold, wet night in Bogota, shivering in the mist at 8,500 feet. The downtown area was deserted except for one all-night restaurant that served a delicious, nourishing hot caldo, a kind of Colombian chicken stew. As we enjoyed this late night repast, our attention turned to a hand of scantily clad, fearsomely grimy children who rapped on the plate glass and gesticulated. These were Bogota's gamines, or street children. We gave them the leftovers from our meal and they trooped off into the night.

Most major cities in Latin America from Tijuana to Buenos Aires have their street children. Columbia's large cities are said to have more than their share. Are these children (mostly males) abandoned, abused, orphans, adolescent rebels, petty thieves, or something else? No reliable estimates of their numbers exist at national or regional levels but figures as high as 40 million have been produced for all of Latin America.

The street children are subject to myths, legends and stereotypes. They are often seen as users of drugs, especially marijuana, inhalants such as glue, and *basuco*, a low-cost residue made from coca paste. They are often charged with a wide range of crimes, from petty theft to vandalism to drug trafficking.

Two influential films have been made about street children. In 1947, in Mexico City, Luis Bunuel directed *Los Olvidados* (The Forgotten Ones) about children scavenging in the city garbage dumps. It was a sympathetic portrait of their struggle is complemented by a careful reading of for survival in a world which had forgotten them. Hector Babenco's 1980 Academy

Award-winning Brazilian film *Peixote*, is about a gang of street children who move from eroticism to lethal violence. Ironically, its child-star was to die several years later in a shoot-out with the police.

Psychologist Lewis Aptekar, working with a Colombian research team, recently published one of the first detailed close-up empirical studies of *gamins*, based on work in Bogota and Cali: *Street Children of Cali*, (Duke University Press, 1988). Although based on a sample of 56 children ages 7 to 17 and therefore not subject to generalization for other countries, it is complemented by a careful reading of academic and popular materials.

The data confirm that of the children studied, "rather than being pitiful victims, most were faring adequately given their poor circumstances in an impoverished country".

The researchers did not find evidence of the homosexuality, child prostitution, and drug abuse which is often attributed to street children by the Colombian media. Life on the streets was often a "healthy even a measured choice", rather than a reaction to a broken family or abandonment and abuse.

The street children that were studied displayed a variety of resilient individual coping mechanisms. The most serious problems occurred post-puberty when the public came to see them as threats rather than as sympathetic figures.

Government programs directed at street children in Colombia and elsewhere are often characterized by short-term detention with little or no rehabilitation or education. Revolving-door reformatories are generally costly and ineffectual, especially if their objective is to remove children from the streets when there are few other options.

The most promising are often low-cost, non-profit centers operated by church organizations. The centers in Bogota and Cali provide street children with a warm meal, a shower, a recreation area, and a place to wash clothes with no further demands made on them. A child who seeks over-night accommodations must accept the rules of the center, which include adoption of a work ethic with responsibilities, while undergoing a combination of education and training. He must also renounce life on the streets. Many more children take advantage of the no strings attached day services than enter the formal program.

Psychologist Aptekar recommends that programs directed at street children begin by recognizing their individual differences, especially post and pre-puberty groups. He concludes that "macroprograms should start with the assumption that the children can and should be included as part of the labor force." This means vocational training for the informal and service sectors where the prospects for employment are most likely.

Much of the funding for non-profit organizations working with street children in Latin America comes from North American and Western European charitable contributions. What has yet to emerge are Latin American middle classes which have overcome their fears and stereotypes concerning the children on their streets. The *Street Children of Cali* is an important study because it helps us to understand who these children are.

Mr. Segal is the Florence J. Gould Visiting Scholar at the American College in Paris.

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Mr. Segal is the Florence J. Gould Visiting Scholar at the American College in Paris.

The Times of the Americas

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REVIEW 7

Eric A. Wagner
Times of the Americas
February 22, 1989
Page 15

New look at Colombia's *gamins*

challenges existing stereotypes

Do you ever wonder why there are so many street children in Latin America? Where do they come from, and what happens to them? If you do, this is the book for you.

Recent estimates have indicated that there may be as many as 40 million street children in Latin America. The largest number of them are in Mexico, Brazil, and Colombia. These children, mostly boys, are generally seen in negative terms. They are thought to be dangerous, active in delinquency and criminal activity, often on drugs, engaging in homosexual activity, and so forth. The relatively few girls on the streets are thought to be prostitutes.

As Lewis Aptekar describes the street children in a careful study of Cali, Colombia, these popular stereotypes are simply not true. The children, collectively called *gaminés*, were not starving and were not generally emotionally injured. Many of these children had taken to the streets to escape the control of their families, or were asserting their independence from adult authority. Most of them had not been abandoned by their families.

Aptekar is a psychologist who blended the research methods of clinical psychology, field anthropology, and journalism to study Cali's street children. As part of his Fulbright research, he worked with 12 psychology graduate students from the Universidad del Valle in Cali. Together they carefully studied 56 children. Many of whom were part of a program for street children called "Bosconia."

The researchers spent a good deal of time getting to know the children and eventually were able to observe a number of their daily activities and talk with them about their reasons for leaving their families. It is these parts of the book that are most interesting, because the reader is able to see life on the streets through the eyes of the children. This is why the book is fun, reading at times more like a novel than the scholarly work that it is.

For this reader, the least interesting parts of the book were the psychological profiles that were developed for the 56 subjects. Each was given the Kohs Block Design Intelligence test, the Bender-Gestalt test, and the Human Figure Drawing test. These tests, along with observing the children and utilizing the ideas and perceptions of street children generated by other observers, allowed them to develop a pretty sound understanding of the emotional and intellectual levels of the children. They discovered that street children were not emotionally handicapped or intellectually weak. Most of them were quite similar to other children from the lower social classes who were the same ages.

Aptekar divides the children into pre-puberty and post-puberty groups. The pre-puberty group is divided into the *gaminés*, who left home to become independent, and the *chupagruesos* who were forced to leave their homes and had far more emotional problems. The post-puberty group was divided into the "forsaken" children, the survivors, and the fortunate ones. Each of these groups is examined in terms of family structure and why they became street children.

There are fascinating and insightful anecdotes throughout the book. While this view of street children sometimes seems romanticized it is a needed corrective to the current almost totally negative view of street children. It shows clearly that the numbers of street children are almost certainly highly inflated, and that "street children rarely lived permanently in the street and were only occasionally abandoned in the sense of having no place to go" (p. 39).'

This is an extremely important book and ought to be read by everyone with an interest in children and cities in Latin America.

REVIEW 8

DEAN D. KNUDSEN

Purdue University

From *Contemporary Sociology*, V18 1989, p 931

Three major hypotheses have emerged to explain the large numbers of street children, especially in Latin America. First, families, are abusive; in such cases the mother often chooses her male partner rather than her children, who then leave for street life. Second, street children are recent migrants from rural areas who are culturally unprepared for modern life. Third, these children are the natural products of the impoverished neighborhoods they live

in. Each interpretation has had its supporters, but rarely has anyone attempted to research the issue.

While this book is an important contribution to the literature on street children, it also tells us much about families, youth, social control, deviance, and poverty. Focusing on fifty-six street children in an urban area of Colombia, Aptekar explores the myths and realities of their lives. Careful analysis of historical data, of interviews with children, of observations, and of cross-cultural adaptations of psychological tests (Kohs Block Design, Bender-Gestalt, and Human Figure Drawing) suggests that political factors have several of the problems, already suggested been the dominant consideration in defining the marginality of street children.

Rather than being abandoned, these children exist in well-defined social arrangements that have historical and cultural roots as well as functionality for their families. Unlike middle and upper classes, which emphasize protection and control of children, most families in the poor *barrios* and *suburbios* not only allow their children independence in the streets but believe it is important for them.

Independent, cunning children who choose to leave home (*gamines*) function well in the streets, in contrast to dependent, attaching children who are forced to leave home (*chapagruesos*); this distinction emphasizes the importance of primary groups and labeling for behavior. Aptekar notes the reality of changing expectations at adolescence by the finding that most street children appear to develop into steady workers, with only a small percentage becoming delinquent, alcoholic, or unfit for productive adult life.

The rich data of this volume are not directly applicable to North American. However, there is much to recommend it for those interested in families and children, particularly those concerned with over control and over programming of children's lives.

REVIEW #9

Alice Schlegel University of Arizona
FROM THE JOURNAL OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL RESEARCH

Street children have been very much in the news. Films like *Pixotte* and *Salaam Bombay* depress us with the horrors of street life for the young in Third-World cities, while the pathetic runaways and throwaways parade before us on television specials about desperate youth in America. The street children of Colombia have been the subject of considerable social scientific investigation since the 1970s, and they had appeared regularly in the popular press of Colombia for almost a century before that.

The most recent of such studies is this book by psychologist Lewis Aptekar, who investigated the social and psychological adjustment of these children in Cali. Psychological tests were administered to a group of fifty-six boys ages seven to seventeen, and these and other boys were observed by Aptekar and his coworkers in their natural settings, the street and the social service center where they come to get food.

Aptekar's findings indicate that street life is not permanent for most boys: it is a temporary interlude, or children drift between living on the street and with family or guardians. (I say *boys* because there are very few girls on the street; the relatively small number of girls who do not live in families live in charitable or state institutions.) These children are not generally underfed and do not use drugs or alcohol extensively. Scores of IQ and adjustment tests are within the range for children of their social status.

Living on the street requires resourcefulness and planning. The boys are perfectly ready to find and "adopt" benefactors, sometimes former street boys who have made a successful adjustment to adulthood and who give them food, shelter, and even employment. The younger ones, considered cute in spite of ragged clothes and dirty faces, do quite well at begging; in fact, gangs of adolescent street boys bring these children into the gang and treat them well, as the little ones are an economic asset. Although their lives seem carefree, much of the street boys' time during the day is spent in finding a

safe place to sleep. Night is not a pleasant time for street children-unlike their home dwelling contemporaries, who can snuggle into a safe and cozy bed, street boys may be cold, are vulnerable to danger, and often have to wait late into the night until adults have left a public building where they have staked out sleeping quarters. Nightmares and enuresis are not uncommon.

There are two major kinds of social groups among these street children. The prepubertal boys travel in friendship dyads or small groups, gaining emotional strength and gratification from their chums. The adolescent boys from structured gangs that work together to acquire and share out goods. (Some, but not all, of these gangs are delinquent.) These are truly "foraging" bands: leaders lead only so long as subordinate members are satisfied, and a domineering or unfair leader finds his gang melting away. Unless these adolescents find a benefactor, their future is uncertain. Unlike other Colombian boys, they have no family to make the necessary connections for them through circles of kin, godparents, and associates.

Aptekar sees the street children as part of the phenomenon of the lower-class, matrifocal Colombian family, where boys, even before puberty, are expected to be out of the home most of the time. They are not, therefore, usually the product of family pathology (although they might claim to be in order to earn the sympathy of a listener). Girls are less likely to leave because mothers keep them at home instead of extruding them. Aptekar believes that street boys in other Latin American cities are also the consequence of a family pattern rather than social or psychological pathology. Yet, when one thinks of those children huddled together at night for warmth and safety, perhaps after sniffing gasoline fumes to quiet their anxieties, one cannot see this as a nurturant environment or one that helps children get through difficult times. The study would have been enriched by more discussion of the family and by observations of lower-class families with and without street boy members.

We are left with the haunting image we encountered in the introduction: a Latin Huck Finn, standing in the marketplace, bold and free. Suddenly, he takes the corner of his blanket into his mouth and begins to suck on it-just a little boy after all, insecure in a dangerous and unpredictable world.

REVIEW #10

From World Development, Vol. 17, No. 11, pp. 1853-1859, 1989. Pergamon Press plc. Printed in Great Britain.

With a sensitive, sophisticated mixture of psychology, ethnography and journalism Aptekar and his Colombian team have produced exciting analytic advances for those who seek more effective social programs. *Gamines* here do not conform to stereotypes; their coping skills varied widely. Social origins mattered. Children leaving home by choice moved toward entrepreneurship or delinquency; victims of circumstances, in contrast, tended to seek patrons and become more marginal workers. Patriarchal culture sees street children as a threat to control and order; official programs thus ignore the coping abilities of many. Alternative programs must entail a macro strategy to change social attitudes and bring such children into the labor force with an appropriate diversity of micro efforts. Prescriptions also build on comparative Latin experience.