Title
A Rua é Nossa (The Street is Ours): In Search of Childhood and Rights on the Streets of Guarulhos, Brazil

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A Rua é Nossa (The Street is Ours): In Search of Childhood and Rights on the Streets of Guarulhos, Brazil

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Anthropology

by

Alicia Taylor Bolton

December 2012

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The fieldwork and writing of this dissertation have been some of the most significant and difficult challenges I have ever experienced. I would never have been able to finish this program and my dissertation without the guidance of my graduate advisor and committee members, help and support from family, my boyfriend, and friends. I am deeply and eternally grateful to all of you.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my father for his unconditional love, support, friendship, and guidance. You gave me life, heart, and the foundation to make it in the world.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

A Rua é Nossa (The Street is Ours): In Search of Childhood and Rights on the Streets of Guarulhos, Brazil

by

Alicia Taylor Bolton

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Anthropology
University of California, Riverside, December 2012
Dr. Juliet McMullin, Chairperson

This dissertation examines the intersection of agency, subjectivity, and rights among children and adolescents living and working on the streets of Guarulhos, Brazil. Beginning with the children’s descriptions of their living and working conditions, this research situates their knowledge in order to provide a holistic examination of a child’s living and working context and conditions. Their narratives are contextualized within the international discourse on childhood and children's rights. The major principle of this discourse is that childhood should be safe, carefree, and happy. Approaches are characterized by a range of appropriate settings, experiences, and relationships that do not apply to all children, particularly poor children.

This project investigates the life course of street and working children: who they are, what brought them to the street, the nature of their work, the conditions they face while on the street, and their decisions to remain on the street or not. Examining their life course provides essential details to understanding the impact of the political economy on individual lives. Their subjectivities are contextualized within a political economy of the street and conditions of poverty, violence, and marginalization. Given their place in
society, they are often excluded and constituted as invisible. As such, the project is an examination of children’s agency in actively shaping and transforming their lives.

Drawing on the tensions between structural violence and individual agency, this research creates a space for children’s voices regarding their lived experiences, moving them from invisibility in society to active participants in their struggle to live and contribute to our understanding of humanity and human rights.

This project also occurred at a critical time for Brazil, as the country, or select portions of it, is experiencing tremendous economic growth. Brazil is also actively implementing programs targeted at combating child labor and extreme poverty. While much has been written about the effects of these government efforts in rural areas, there is a lack of research on their effects in urban settings. Data collection was ethnographic and relied on qualitative anthropological methodologies that included participant-observation, mapping, life histories, and semi-structured interviews with street and working children in Guarulhos.
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Chapter 1 Introduction

Most writing about children and young people living on urban streets in developing countries assumes, or even insists, that they live in disorganized, illegal misery. They are often described as psychologically (and irretrievably) damaged, unable to form relationships as the children that they are, and definitely destined for emotional, social and economic failure as the adults they will become. Definitions of and attitudes towards street children that permeate the literature also include their being involved with drugs and crime and as completely cut off and unattached from any kind of a family structure (Kuznesof 2005:866-867).

Discussions of street children and child street laborers continue to be scant. When these children are discussed in the literature, it is usually in reference to their vulnerability and victimization. They are all too often portrayed and referred to as victims, exploited objects without ties. Drawing on Eric Wolf and other scholars, these children have been completely de-historicized and may be referred to as “a children without history” (Wolf 1982, Biehl 2005:148 and Kovats-Bernat 2006:2-3).

Anthropologists have paid a conspicuous lack of attention to the role that children, particularly street children and child street laborers, play as social, cultural, political, and economic actors and producers. While street children and child street laborers are referred to as abandoned, their agency has also been abandoned. In the introduction of their edited volume Small Wars: The Cultural Politics of Childhood, Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Carolyn Sargent argue that:

Despite a decade of anthropological research and writing on the body, almost nothing has been written on the body of the child, on children’s body practices, tactics, and meanings. How do older children create, establish, and maintain bodily autonomy and how do they project extensions of the body both in the home and on the street? How do children create safe spaces, establish fictive families, mark territories, colonize, and domesticate these spaces? How do they interact with adults who are neither their parents nor teachers, including police, shopkeepers,

Why Street Children and Child Street Laborers?

I have chosen this project because of my interest in children’s rights and children’s participation in research (Swift 1997). I have also chosen this project because I would like to move the “child-centered” literature towards a truly child-centered literature (Scheper-Hughes & Sargent 1998). Talk of street children and child street laborers has never really been wholly about them. Although anthropologists have long talked about children, they have and continue to remain in the background, silent and absent. Children continue to be portrayed as powerless victims (Morrow & Richards 1996). In this way, children, particularly street children and child street laborers, have been marginalized within and by the literature. These children are left without identities, and are known only as street children or child laborers. We are not given any information about who these children are (Montgomery 2001).

Research and the literature on street children and child street laborers focus on the identifying characteristics of a street lifestyle and culture as opposed to the children themselves and their lived experiences. For this reason, this project attempts to account for the sentiments, identity formation, and lived experience of children and adolescents that live and work or once lived and worked on the street. I have tried to capture their experiences and attitudes as they move throughout the various stages of street life or what has been referred to as their “street careers” (Goffman 1961, Becker 1973 and Karabanow 2004).
This research is purely qualitative and does not seek to understand the prevalence of street children and child street labor in Guarulhos nor does it claim that the findings are representative of all street and working children. It does not provide any answers or solutions nor does it resolve issues related to the phenomenon of street children and child street labor. The purpose of this project is not to develop and provide a typology of street and working children and their families as so many have (see for example Offit 2008 and Aptekar 1994). The stories in this work are specific to a particular group of people, in a particular place, at a particular point in time. However, I do believe that their stories and life courses can and do provide general information and understandings of the lives and experiences of this particular population of children and adolescents.

I hope that this dissertation provides a critical vision of a society that has made living and working on the streets an attractive option, and sometimes an only option, for some children and adolescents (Boyden 1990 & 1997, Alves 1991 and Rizzini & Butler 2003). When we think and talk about why there are children and adolescents on the street, whether to live or work, we tend to quickly point our finger first at their families who are to blame for perpetuating their cycle or culture of poverty and violence. Then maybe only after the family will we point our fingers at the state. This is what I did myself. I spent the first couple of months in the field angry at the families of these children and adolescents. However, I now hope that my research challenges this all too common and dangerously erroneous notion that poor people are responsible for their situations of poverty and suffering (Sharff 1988).
The goal of this dissertation is to prioritize experiences of suffering, injustice, and marginalization. During my time in the field, I was forced to face and confront directly on a day-to-day basis the misery and suffering of these children, their families, and communities, for which I am extremely grateful yet deeply wounded. The purpose of this research was to come to know these children and adolescents, listen to them, take them seriously, and understand their lives as understood and told by them in order to bring their lives and stories into view and let their voices be heard. I also wanted to see if what I had been reading in the anthropological literature and writing on the issue over the last six years as a graduate student was what I would actually find, if it matched what they had to say, their stories. I felt it necessary to see if these children and their lives are correctly portrayed and understood, or not, in the popular and academic literature (Offit 2008). I also hope to show that amidst their marginalization and suffering, their lives are made up of hopes, dreams, and goals for a better future.

I initially set out to work with street children and child prostitutes. However, upon my arriving to the field I quickly realized that this was not going to happen. The crack epidemic that hit Brazil was a major barrier in terms of working with street children, which I will describe more below. The reality of the street not being safe by day, and child prostitution requiring me to carry out my field research either on the street at night or in some of the most dangerous favelas (slums), which are now known as comunidades (communities), made it nearly impossible for me to carry out the project. I was not willing to risk my life while in the field. I have a family and a home that I love and had to return to. Dying was not an option for me.
My project shifted in that it came to include child street laborers, particularly the invisible labor of children working on the street. I chose to focus on this particular population of children because they are the ones I encountered the most on the street. Upon my arrival to Brazil and my entering the field, or going to the street, the large majority of children and adolescents I found on the street were there to work. I also chose to carry out my work with child street laborers because they are so common, particularly in urban areas in most cities of the developing world, yet they go about their lives with their work largely unnoticed. This is why I refer to their work as “invisible” and to them as Brazil’s “invisible” children. They are also “invisible” in the sense that the income that many of these children bring in is much more substantial than other research and popular opinion assumes (Offit 2008).

Just as the large majority of the literature and media, I was also very focused on what I viewed as the most suffering, miserable, vulnerable, and at-risk children. There is greater shock value with street children and child prostitutes. I myself fell victim to the problematic and erroneous hierarchy of suffering type thinking (Charmaz 1999). Many, or the large majority of child street laborers, are not barefoot, dressed in rags, and passed out on city streets or busy sidewalk paths. If they were, people might take notice and their situations might be viewed with more urgency. In terms of numbers, I would argue that there are more working children than street children, however, they still somehow fail to capture the attention of the public, government officials, international aid agencies, and academic researchers (Offit 2008).
Street children in many ways have come to represent or become the symbol for all poor marginalized children and adolescents (Rizzini, Barker & Cassaniga 1999 and Ennew 2000). This may be because they are the most visible and speak most strongly to the lack of concern for children in need. However, there are many children who are not living on the street who also live in conditions of extreme poverty, marginalization, and violence, lacking access to basic resources, education, social programs, rights, and what has been defined and accepted as childhood (Rizzini & Butler 2003). For the purpose of this research, I define children and adolescents as under eighteen years of age (this is also how “Projeto Meninos e Meninas de Rua” (PMMR) and Brazil’s 1990 Child and Adolescent Statute define children).

**Statement of the Problem**

This dissertation project, “A Rua é Nossa (The Street is Ours): In Search of Childhood and Rights on the Streets of Guarulhos, Brazil,” examines the intersection of agency, subjectivity, and rights among children and adolescents living and working informally on the streets of Guarulhos. Beginning with the children’s understandings and descriptions of their living and working conditions, this project ethnographically situates their knowledge in order to provide a holistic examination of a child’s living and working context and conditions. My work investigates the life course of street children and child street laborers; who they are, what brought them to the street, what they do to adapt to and survive on the street, the conditions they face while living and working on the street, and their decisions to remain on the street or not.
Following the work of Lauren Berlant (2011), I examine the youth’s life course as a process of becoming. I also draw on Joao Biehl (2005) by examining how their lives took form, the events that led to their street situation, and sometimes unfortunately to their deaths. Such an examination demonstrates how their struggles work in the production of their subjectivities as street children and child street laborers. Examining their life course provides essential details to understanding the larger impact of the political economy and structural violence on individual lives (Ennew & Swart-Kruger 2003 and Kenny 2007). It also provides insight into the child and adolescent’s social experience of poverty and violence. Finally, I chose to look at their life course because a major interest, at least for me, is the paths that people take.

Despite growing concerns about child labor, there have been few studies on the issue. Fewer have carried out research with the children themselves. To this end, this project examines child labor from the perspectives of children working on the street in Guarulhos, Brazil and government and non-government responses to their labor. The children's narratives are contextualized within the international discourse on childhood and children's rights. The major principle of this discourse is that childhood should be safe, carefree, and happy. Approaches are characterized by a range of appropriate settings, experiences, and relationships that do not apply to all children, particularly poor children.

The research focuses on subjective knowledge including the ways in which inner life processes are transformed amid social, political, and economic forces, violence, and social suffering (Biehl, Good and Kleinman 2007). Their subjectivities are
contextualized within an examination of their social, political, and economic marginalization and the international discourse on childhood and children’s rights (Boyden 1997, Sharff 1988, Farmer 2005 and Veloso 2008). Subjectivity refers to individual experience and the larger social structure in which it is embedded. It refers to one’s social existence and social life as it is actually lived – it is always social. It has to do with lived experience and the complexity of that experience and our deepest sense of self. An examination of subjectivity is an attempt to understand what matters most in people’s lives (Biehl, Good and Kleinman 2007). No real consensus exists on how to properly study subjectivity but it has to do with privileging the first-person point of view of the subject, attempting to understand the subject in their own terms without imposing or projecting categories or theories from our own culture onto them (Cabezas 2004). An examination of subjectivity requires looking at the individual while also outward at the larger social, political, and economic processes that manage individuals.

Political economy here is used to refer to larger political and economic structures and systems in which relations of power, privilege, and marginalization are played out and resources are distributed, or not (Hecht 1998:195). A political economy of the street includes an examination of scarcity, abandonment, violence, poverty, and marginalization (Bernat 1999). In this way, this work examines the political, economic, and social context and how it shapes the lives and sentiments of children and adolescents living and working on the street (Biehl, Good & Kleinman 2007). The experiences of these children and adolescents can only be understood within the context of everyday violence and
material deprivation and scarcity, which is internalized and embodied (Scheper-Hughes 1992 and Biehl, Good & Kleinman 2007).

Specifically the research focuses on understanding and describing their lives and how they manage to survive on a daily basis under extremely difficult circumstances. In turn, these structural constraints raise important questions regarding the children’s agency in actively shaping and transforming their lives. Agency is used here to describe the active role taken by an individual under adversity. While much of the literature refers to these children as robbed and deprived of childhood and rights, whether by the state or the family, I argue that by taking to the street, whether to live or to work, they are taking the childhood and rights assigned to them into their own hands.

Agency and subjectivity are examined in the context of ordinary lives that are lived and experienced in non-ordinary spaces, or what Joao Biehl refers to as non-spaces, where lives are lived on the outside (Biehl 2005 and Biehl, Good & Kleinman 2007). In these non-spaces, as well as in other spaces, agency does not always have the drama, excitement, and life changing results that we might expect or hope for. Agency is not always a “mode of heroic authorship” or “self-reflective personhood” (Berlant 2011:124). It also seems that agency is often understood and treated as resistance, however this is not always the case (Johnson 2003). I do want to glorify or portray these children and adolescents as heroes who are transforming their lives and worlds. Although their agency may not always be visible, it is there, whether it be in the brutal acts of violence that some of these children and adolescents engage in or even in their own deaths (Kovats-Bernat 2006).
By using words like agency, I hope that I have not inflated the consciousness, awareness, and intention of these children and adolescents, as this would make their decisions appear overly meaningful. This is not because they are children. I would make the same argument for adults. Agency does not always mean full conscious intentionality, but instead is often an action or a moment that is made up of the unknown, with unknown consequences. Also problematic is that many associate personal individual agency with responsibility. This idea of personal responsibility masks how poverty and government policy make it impossible for some to access life, or something even remotely close to life. Instead, their agency in many ways has more to do with these children simply doing their best with what they have available to them, as they are stuck in lives in which they have little to no control over (Berlant 2011).

Finally, agency does not always lead to transformation and freedom, as we will see, but instead can lead to further marginalization, suffering, and destruction (Berlant 2011 and Biehl, Good & Kleinman 2007). The actions of these children and adolescents, as Biehl states, in many ways are: “predetermined and contingent, caught in a constricted and intolerable universe of choices that remains the only source from which they can craft alternatives” (Biehl 2005:19). I refer to their taking to the street as a “choice” only in that the street is the only available option to them. In this way, their “choosing” to go to the street is an act of agency while also at the same time a “choice” that is contingent upon their lack of agency (Biehl 2005).

This project examines the lived experiences of street children and child street laborers and the structural violence that they endure (Marquez 1999 and Biehl 2005).
The term structural violence is appropriate for this project because it speaks to the particular circumstances of these children as historically situated by social, political, and economic forces, such as poverty, that affects their daily lives, shapes their decisions, and constrains their agency (Farmer 2005). The project traces these children’s violent exclusion from society and their own struggles against this exclusion as expressed through their constrained agency (Schwartzman 2001 and Biehl 2005). While much of the literature refers to these children as “abandoned,” whether by the state or the family, I argue that amid adversity and all odds, they are making and creating their lives, and sometimes their deaths, on their own terms. This project gets at these terms.

In the anthropological literature on street children and child labor, there is a tendency to make social structure the focus while overlooking the children’s subjectivities and agency, rendering them invisible. Even more invisible is children’s work. Most studies on child labor have come from the field of economics, are quantitative in nature, and do treat children as agents or actors in their own rights (Levison 2000). The actual ways in which children work on the streets have not been examined and have all too often been explained through their position of dependence on and exploitation by adults, with their autonomy not recognized (see for example Hansson 2003 and Offit 2008). Children are not recognized as agents, but even less so as economic agents (Levison 2000). The children in this study are creating work activities and spaces that are their own, and they become the owners of those activities and spaces (Myers 1988). Children’s agency, as constrained as it is, is explored in their paid independent labor and in their ability to work and survive on the streets.
Violence and Social Change Among Street and Working Children in Guarulhos, Brazil

A tremendous amount has been written on the paradigm shift that has occurred over the last three decades in the discourse on street and working children at both theoretical and practical levels. This includes changes in public and state perceptions of these children who went from being viewed and treated as a social problem to subjects of rights (Ennew & Swart-Kruger 2003). However, there is a complete absence throughout the literature on the actual changes that have occurred on the streets and in the daily lives, lived experiences, and activities of these children and adolescents during this period.

Brazil has also been experiencing significant structural changes, including their growing economy and recent increased government efforts to reduce the incidence of child labor and combat extreme poverty. While much has been written about the effects of these larger structural changes and government efforts in rural areas, there is a lack of research on the effects of these changes in urban settings.

Frequent violence against street children and child street laborers continues, whether by members of their group, competing youth, family members, community members, the police, or adult strangers. Violence may very well be one of the few constants in their lives. The particular violence that these children experience begins with their poverty, which is typically what brings them to the street in the first place. Although the reasons for their being on the street have essentially remained the same over time, there have been significant changes in their experiences and activities on the street. These changes have impacted group dynamics and formation, transformed and
exacerbated existing forms of violence, and produced new forms of violence on the street.

Females are more present in all spaces in Brazilian society, including on the street. While there has been an increase in the number of females living and working on the street, their work in particular continues to be invisible. Any mention of females and work has been reduced to their silent, hidden, invisible, and usually unpaid domestic work that is carried out in the private sphere of the home or to that of prostitution (Glauser 1994, de Oliveira 1995, Inciardi & Surratt 1997, Kilbride et al. 2000 and Raffaelli 2000). Girls are also often reported to earn less than boys (Offit 2008). The actual ways in which females live and work on the street have not been examined and are all too often explained through their position of dependence on males, with their autonomy not recognized (Hansson 2003 and Ruvero & Bourdillon 2003). The literature on the street continues to be dominated by the experiences of males, rendering females invisible. It is for this reason my dissertation project brings into view the lived experience of females and their particular and gendered experiences on the street (Levison 2000).

Although previous research on drug use among street and working children is limited, the paucity of any current studies on the issue is troubling. Consumption patterns among this particular population of children and adolescents, their family members, and society at large, has radically changed over the last decade. In the past, drug use consisted mostly of glue sniffing and marijuana (Noto et al. 1997). Today, more and more children and adolescents are using harder drugs such as crack and even more
recently oxi, which much cheaper than crack, is a cocaine derivative that contains kerosene or gasoline, acetone, battery fluid, and other chemicals. Not only are the sensations produced by and the effects that result from these harder drugs different than previous “softer” drugs, these harder drugs have also had significant effects on the individual, group interaction and formation, family structure, and society at large (Inciardi & Surratt 1997). I did not want crack to be so present or prevalent in this project, but there was no way of avoiding it. Crack was everywhere. It has spread from the lower to middle and upper classes, thus gaining more attention and concern from public health and government officials throughout the country.

The issues raised in the literature on street and working children are nothing new. Instead, they only seem to be all too familiar statements and problems that are treated as if they were a recent phenomenon (Filho & Neder 2001). Despite previous studies, there is a need for more current research that examines the current situation of these children and the reality on the streets. Many changes have occurred over time and there are new factors that are largely overlooked and remain unknown about the daily lives and activities of these children, their families, and communities. This dissertation is a contribution to that end.

Research Site

This research took place in Guarulhos, Brazil in “Projeto Meninos e Meninas de Rua,” (Project Boys and Girls of the Street, PMMR, also referred to as o projeto or the project, see Figure 1) and on the streets. Unlike many researchers who carry out their work with street and working children in non-street settings, my main research site was
the street (see for example Wright et al. 1993a & 1993b, Wittig 1997, Tierney 1997, Aptekar 1988a, 1988b, 1988c & 1988d and Marquez 1999). I also made occasional home visits when possible, in order to meet the families of the children with whom I had been working in order to observe the social, economic, and physical environment in which the children and their families live.

PMMR, established in 1990, is a non-governmental organization that assists children and adolescents living and working on the street, and their families, in Guarulhos. The organization provides social and political intervention and defends the legal rights of these children. PMMR also seeks to assist these children to re-establish links with their families so that they can permanently return to their homes, communities, and schools, getting them out of their street situation. PMMR also helps the families of these children by helping them access projects and programs of public assistance and getting necessary documents.

Figure 1, Projeto Meninos e Meninas de Rua (PMMR), photograph by Alicia Bolton, 6/16/2011
As a community and street-based organization, PMMR emphasizes their "street education" approach when working with children living and working on the street as opposed to more traditional institutional approaches. Their emphasis on street education requires the work of "street educators." The role of the street educator is innovative and interesting in that they are directly involved with the children and adolescents and respond to their needs in the places where they live and work: the street.

Street educators wear many hats. They are all at the same time outreach workers, advocates, intermediaries, and friends. Some of the street educators at PMMR, at least in the past, were former street children themselves, however this is not so much the case today (Salami & van Beers 2003 and Suave 2003). Street educators typically work in two-person teams, as any less would pose safety issues to the street educators themselves and any more would be intimidating for the children. They approach the child on the street, befriend them, and work with them to resolve their immediate needs.

Street educators are the first point of contact with the children. The objective is to create links with the children so that they can gain access to and therefore connect with the child’s family, community, and school in order to understand and identify what brings the child to the street. They then work with the family by linking them to necessary resources, programs, and organizations provided by government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with the goal of meeting their needs in order to eliminate the child’s need to go to the street (Rizzini, Barker & Cassaniga 1999). NGOs are currently the primary source of support, assistance, and programs for this population (O’Haire
They are largely doing the work that the government should be doing and are working towards getting the government to do the work that it should be doing.

Street educators usually engage the child through some sort of activity such as drawing or a game like finger soccer, Uno, Dominos, or jump rope. While in the field, I spent many hours mastering both Uno and Dominos and re-developing my jump rope skills on the street.

As Irene Rizzini asserts, “An interest in these children is without a doubt a very political project. In many ways, the organizations that are working to “save” these children are really working to “save” Brazil” (Rizzini 2006). Similarly Markinhus, the director of PMMR, who is a former street child and child street laborer himself, states:
“The problem of street children presents us with the issue of social class in Brazil. The street child is a factor that points out the problem of social class.”

PMMR works to raise the political consciousness of the children and adolescents it serves. This includes their participation in political demonstrations and conferences in order to involve these children and give them a voice in the larger political discussions that are about them (Bernat 1999). I was fortunate enough to be able to participate in a couple of these events that occurred during my time in the field.

Figure 3, International Day for the Eradication of Child Labor street protest, Photograph by Alicia Bolton, 6/17/2011

However, the large majority of children and adolescents utilize the project to meet their immediate needs. They use the project as either a resting place, a space to play and watch movies, to get something to eat and drink (which they would often complain
about), to take a shower, to get clothing, or a place to mess around when they are bored or high, as they know they will not be welcome anywhere else (particularly when they are high).

I chose to work with PMMR because its members are on the streets on a daily basis, thus allowing greater access to the children. I did not study this organization but did examine children’s access to and experiences with it. PMMR served as my introduction to these children and their families. My affiliation with PMMR was vital for this research, which would not have been possible without them. Not only was I under serious time constraints of carrying out this very difficult research project in a matter of an extremely short nine months, but I was also faced with issues of mistrust that are omnipresent on the street, particularly among this population of children and adolescents who have very real and understandable fears of the tutelary councils (Conselho Tutelar, which is responsible for the wellbeing and safety of children and adolescents and is essentially Brazil’s child protective services) in addition to their exposure to high rates of violence, sexual exploitation, and disappearances (Hunte 2009). For these reasons, these children and adolescents would not only have not taken the time to talk to me, particularly as an unknown foreign researcher, but my safety and survival would also very likely not have been possible.

My affiliation with PMMR, volunteering as a member of their street educator team, was essential for reasons beyond time constraints, issues of trust, and personal safety. Unlike one-way approaches to research and data collection, this approach created a relationship of mutual exchange and reciprocity between the child and adolescent
participants and myself as well as between PMMR and myself (Carey 2001 and Little 2004). During my time in the field as both researcher and “street educator,” I accompanied these children, adolescents, and their families to hospitals, welfare and housing offices, psychologists, drug clinics, and to the civil defense (defesa civil or protecao civil) to report the complete lack of sanitation in some of the children’s homes. My presence as an Americana, or North American, was often helpful in accessing that which was most often inaccessible in terms of services and treatment to this particular population. In terms of PMMR, my presence was helpful, as I was often filling the place of street educators, as the project experienced very high employee turnover.

I chose Guarulhos because of my knowledge of the city, my access to organizations like PMMR, and my language ability, which are the result of my previous research there. I also chose Guarulhos because it is unique and the social processes related to street children and child street laborers are under examined there. The research thus far on this issue has been carried out in Rio de Janeiro and the Northeast of Brazil (Alves 1991). I chose Brazil because it is an emerging economic superpower and is the world’s sixth largest economy while also a country with one of the world’s most unequal distributions of wealth (Biehl 2005).

Guarulhos is a municipality in the State of Sao Paulo and belongs to the Metropolitan area of Sao Paulo. With a population of 1,221,979, it is the second most populated city in the State, after Sao Paulo capital, the 13th most populated city in Brazil, and the 52nd most populated city in the Americas. It is the most populated non-capital city in Brazil and holds the 2nd largest GDP in the State and 8th largest in the country
(Wikipedia). It is home to Brazil’s major international airport, which is the second largest airport in Latin America. Guarulhos also has the second largest concentration of comunidades (slums) in the State of Sao Paulo, with over 400 comunidades.

Also important is that Guarulhos is a neighboring city of Sao Paulo capital, which is the largest and wealthiest city in South America, the third largest city worldwide, and Brazil’s commercial and industrial center (Alves 1991). Similar to the rest of Brazil, Guarulhos is a city with a tremendous amount of wealth while also at the same time a city with extreme poverty. However, unlike Sao Paulo capital, those who are living in the segregated and marginalized spaces of Guarulhos are seriously lacking access to resources, social services, programs, and public policy, which are essentially non-existent.

Research Methodology

With the support of a Fulbright IIE, I completed nine months of fieldwork - from March 2011 through November 2011 – during which all of my data for this dissertation project was collected. Data collection was ethnographic and relied on qualitative anthropological methodologies that included participant-observation, mapping, life histories, and semi-structured interviews.

This research called for a more flexible and situation-based methodology, which required a more improvisational type of ethnography (Schwenkel 2009 and Cerwonka & Malkki 2007). In other words, this type of project called for less rigid, less formal, and less structured fieldwork methods, which consisted of what some anthropologists have referred to as “hanging out” (Stoller 1997 and Schwenkel 2009). Paul Stoller in his
ethnographic fieldwork with Harlem street traders stated that using “a less open-ended and more intensive approach, the results would have been far more limited” (Stoller 1997:90). This type of research then called for a fair amount of flexibility, which included relying on more informal and even spontaneous interactions and unplanned interviews, which were often in the form of guided, informal conversations, along with regular visits to particular locations that had been mapped out, which is a method that I will describe below (Schwenkel 2009).

All of my field research was carried out during daylight hours and in the open. While the street presents various dangers by day, it presents significantly more at night. Working on the streets at night would have been too risky and would have made my survival unlikely, especially as a solo foreign female researcher.

All participants gave verbal consent to participate in this project. I never paid anyone nor did I purchase food or anything as compensation for an interview, life history, or participation in this research (see for example Offit 2008, Huggins & Rodrigues 2004 and Kovats-Bernat 2006). Such an approach would have been detrimental to my research, to my relationships with the children and adolescents, and to my finances. Word would have spread so quickly that a foreign researcher from the United States was paying children for interviews and their participation would have become too costly. I would have had every child, adolescent, and adult in Guarulhos wanting to participate. I also did not want this to affect my research by creating problems of possible coercion. I wanted them to participate, or not, on their own will. Given my constant concern with taking children away from their work, I typically interviewed them while they were
working, resulting in minimal interference with their work and their ability to earn money.

Participant-Observation

I conducted observations while also participating in the day-to-day activities of PMMR, volunteering as a member of their street educator team (Ferreira 1980, Vogel & Mello 1991, Fenelon, Martins, & Domingues 1992, Hecht 1998, Gregori 2000, Goode & Maskovsky 2001 and Offit 2008). I essentially worked as a street educator so much that all of the street educators at PMMR would always tell me that I should also be receiving payment from the project. My participation in PMMR’s daily activities provided me with a street affiliation, which allowed me to access the lives of these children and adolescents and establish relationships with them, participating in their lives and observing their activities on a daily basis. This first-hand observational data was integral, as it revealed strategies the children use to succeed on the streets, patterns of identity formation, ways in which they manipulate their social identities, and networks of social relations. My participant-observation data accompanied and added to interviews and life histories. This approach was particularly useful, as combining these methods mutually reinforced each other, allowing for a more detailed and accurate picture of the children’s life course (Bernard 1994 and Kilbride et al. 2000).

I spent most of my days walking around with a PMMR street educator, sometimes two, and on a few occasions alone. However, my being alone proved to not be the most successful approach. Most of the children and adolescents were more open and trusting of me when other known PMMR members were around. Whenever I conducted an
interview, the participant and I would find a location to carry out the interview while the street educator(s) would continue making their rounds throughout the streets of the city center. I did not participate in or carry out any of the children’s work activities, but I did watch them while they worked and had them explain their work to me, teaching me how they perform their job duties. I did try *malabares* (juggling, which I will discuss in chapter 4) on a few occasions, although not for payment, and it is incredibly difficult.

Because of my pre-established contacts with PMMR, I was able to begin fieldwork immediately upon my arrival to Brazil. I spent the first three months – March 2011 through May 2011 - volunteering as a member of the street educator team at PMMR as well as to preparing life history and interview questionnaires. Three months of volunteering was necessary to establish relationships and develop trust with key informants. This time was devoted solely to participant-observation in order to get a sense of what was going on and how things work to better understand issues and dangers on the street and how to best approach these children for interviews. There was no recording of any kind or any field notes taken while in the field during these first three months. During this time, I also began selecting young adults with whom I would conduct life histories.

Pure observations were also conducted of the children while working on the street. This method allowed me to observe the ways the children interact with their customers, their peers, and the many others they encounter through their working and living on the street. It also provided insight into the tremendous variety of children’s working and living patterns and conditions and revealed how limited our current notions
of street children and child labor are, especially in terms of gender, exploitation, and rights, which are the major focus of this dissertation.

Mapping

I created a map of each neighborhood and identified which areas have high concentrations of street children and child street laborers. Although these children are a highly mobile group, there are particular places in the city where they tend to work, sleep, gather, and spend their time on a regular basis (Szanton Blanc 1994, Agar 1996, Gross, Landfried & Herman 1996, Bar-On 1997 and Offit 2008). Mapping allowed me to compile a list of the occupations in which the children are engaged in each locality, as there is considerable variation in type of work according to location. I was also able to determine the types of work boys and girls are involved in, as activities and spaces are gendered.

Field Notes and Photographs

I kept detailed descriptive field notes and took photographs of the children, the facility of PMMR, the street environment, homes, and communities of these children (Kilbride et al. 2000). While I share some pictures of the children and adolescents throughout this dissertation, I do so with great caution, as pictures can actually be incredibly problematic in that they can misrepresent this population of children (Offit 2008).

Life Histories

Life histories were conducted with six young adults (3 females and 3 males) who formerly lived and/or worked on the street as children. These individuals had longer
histories on the streets, a clearer understanding of what they were doing, and were better able to articulate it (Naverson 1989, Hecht 1998 and Montgomery 2001). Life histories serve as longitudinal accounts and explored the life course of each individual and the larger key events in their lives. They explored what brought them to the street, how long they lived and/or worked on the street, turning points in their lives, and where they see their lives going. Life histories reveal how the broader social context contributed to the children’s particular situations and circumstances of living and working on the streets.

The primary goal of life histories was to understand how things work on the ground level. They were not used to generalize to all street children and child street laborers. They were audio recorded and I met with the young adults and carried out most of the life histories at PMMR, with the exception of one that was carried out on a park bench in a plaza and another on the street in the young adult’s place of work, where they park/guard cars (Hecht 1998). Life histories were rarely completed in one sitting, as attempting to collect such a large amount of information in one session would have been physically taxing for the informant. I built on these life histories and they were told over the course of my field research (Montgomery 2001).

Life histories typically lasted between one to two and a half hours. Life histories were more like lengthy, in-depth conversations. I asked open-ended questions to keep the conversation flowing (Hunte 2009). I simply talked with these young adults, allowing them to tell me what they wanted to tell me and talk about what they felt was important in their lives. I met with them as they wished, as many times as they wished, on their own terms (Biehl 2005).
Semi-Structured Interviews

Building on issues raised in the life histories, I conducted a total of 47 semi-structured interviews (16 females and 31 males) with children and adolescents living and working on the street. Designed as informal conversations, the interviews elicited basic socio-demographic information. The primary focus of the interview was to get at a deeper yet comparable understanding of their lived experience of poverty and violence on the street. Interviews focused on their work, sources of income, family, violence, drugs, perceptions of poverty, education, future goals and dreams, and social networks and support (Agar 1996). I also interviewed young adults who have continued living and working on the street since childhood.

Because these children are typically unwelcome in many public spaces, interviews were conducted on the street itself in their place of work, but always in the open. Given the constant movement of these children, as they are nomadic in their living and working places, and the daily dangers that they experience, I was not always able to interview or keep track of the same child, leaving me with brief and incomplete interviews (Marquez 1999 and Kovats-Bernat 2006). According to Filomena Gregori (2000), one of the greatest difficulties in studying street and working children is their constant mobility, as they often move between the homes of family members, various aid and disciplinary institutions, and places on the city streets. This type of movement has been described as a survival strategy among the poor and marginalized in Brazil. These families frequently break up and regroup in order to meet minimum, short-term, basic needs. Gregori refers to this constant movement as "circulation," and sometimes even
calls it instability, which she argues is one of the few constants in the lives of these children (Fonseca 1986 and Gregori 2000).

The children were identified through an organization-based and snowball sampling technique through PMMR and their knowledge of the streets and these children as well as through the children, adolescents, and young adults themselves, who served as key informants (Agar 1996). Participants were chosen based on those who were willing and open to talk with me. Although this is not a gender-based study, I tried my best to maintain a gender balance in the sample. However, this was not possible as there are more males working on the street than females, which is why I interviewed more males. Interviews typically lasted between 15 and 45 minutes. Some were cut short because of major distractions on the street, especially as they were working, had their friends around, and there was a significant amount of noise, particularly from high car traffic.

The methods used in PMMR were different from the methods used on the street. Within the “safe” confines of PMMR, I worked in a significantly more secure environment, which provided a particular and more private and quiet location to interact with participants and conduct interviews and life histories. The children, adolescents, and young adults responded to me and my interviews differently, as PMMR does not have the distractions or dangers of the street. They also prohibit any kind of drug use, which made the interview process easier.

Issues of trust are omnipresent on the streets and I was without a doubt viewed with suspicion by some children and adolescents all throughout my time in the field, and was therefore never able to speak with them. This is also partly due to the fact that those
who did not want to talk were less accessible and more suspicious because they were in more precarious situations of forced labor or were engaging in sex work. These children did not want to speak because they possibly had more to hide or maybe it was for some other reason.

I initially attempted to interview participants one-on-one. Children, like adults, speak differently when in the presence of their peers than they do in private conversations. One-on-one interviews also allowed topics that each individual raised to be explored in more detail (Hecht 1998). Some of the children and adolescents themselves seemed to enjoy the one-on-one time and having the time and space to themselves to be listened to, which I am certain is not a common occurrence in their everyday lives. Although attempts were made to interview the children alone in a more private yet open, safe, and comfortable setting, this was not always possible due to the presence of other child street laborers and to Brazil not placing a tremendous amount of importance or emphasis on privacy (Hunte 2009). Instead, the opposite is true, and people’s personal lives are actually quite public.

Because of the high incidence of drug use and abuse, particularly with crack, I was not able to carry out any interviews, or lengthy conversations for that matter, with children and adolescents living on the street. I realized early on that trying to carry out interviews and conversations of any kind with those living on the street would be extremely difficult, if not impossible. The young adults with whom I did carry out life histories who previously lived on the street all confirmed the inability of those still living on the street to sit through an interview or even have a conversation.
I had daily conversations with PMMR staff members, and carried out a three hour interview with Markinhus, PMMR’s director, who is a former street child and child street laborer himself. Conversations with staff members provided an organizational and historical perspective (Agar 1996). I had informal conversations with the family members of some of the children during home visits (Hunte 2009). Home visits made it possible to observe the social, economic, and physical environment in which the children and their families live. Informal conversations with family members serve as a supplemental understanding of the domestic conditions that lead to these children living and working on the street. There is also a complete absence of the voices of the children’s families throughout the literature. The only mention of family is as the source of abuse, neglect, and abandonment. However, to be clear, visits were made to mothers and therefore information was obtained from only the mothers of child and adolescent participants. PMMR works with the mother just as government benefits are distributed to the mother of the child. Therefore very little is known about fathers and their role.

When visiting the homes of the family members of child participants, I was always accompanied by a PMMR staff member. All of the families of the children and adolescents I worked with live in comunidades. As I have already worked and carried out ethnographic research in multiple comunidades in Sao Paulo, Brazil, I am well aware of the importance of being known by community members when entering a community. PMMR is a well-known and well-respected organization in these communities, as it is an organization that works with them and on their behalf.
I maintained contact with the large majority of participants throughout my time in the field even after carrying out interviews and life histories with them. This allowed me to gain additional information about the participant as well as information about other children and adolescents. This also allowed me to crosscheck their testimonies with other children and adolescents as well as with my own observations. Conversations, interviews, and life histories that were carried out with other children, adolescents, young adults, PMMR staff, and family members also allowed me to crosscheck information and confirm statements.

Getting what might be considered the “truth” or accurate information can be difficult with anyone, not just children. Adults also tell “stories.” Some of the “stories” that many street and working children and adolescents have developed are what have been referred to as scripts and can include lies about their age, family background, and their reasons for being on the street (Felsman 1989, Leite & Esteves 1991 and Gregori 2000). Misrepresentation, or what might even be called manipulation of self, is in many ways a survival tactic and even strategy of defense among this particular population of children and adolescents (Aptekar 1990a & 1990b).

All participants retain their anonymity in all instances through the use of pseudonyms. Interviews and life histories were recorded, transcribed, and translated to the best of my ability, by me. Along with my own field observations, the data derived from these interviews and life histories are presented as case studies and serve as the foundation of this dissertation.
I quickly came to realize that the children, adolescents, and young adults with whom I spoke wanted to talk and tell their stories and they wanted someone to listen. I believe that their wanting to talk and be heard was one way they went about understanding and making sense of their lives. It was a form of remembering and meaning making, or discovering meaning in their actions and lives (Kleinman 1988, Good 1994, Mattingly 1998 and Biehl 2005). It was also a part of the process of their becoming and creating something new, particularly for the young adults who previously lived and worked on the street (Deleuze 1995). For these young adults, it was in many ways their attempt at another chance at life (Biehl 2005). It was also their way of getting their stories out to the world in order to reach other people in similar situations with the hope of preventing them from doing the same thing and going down the same path. This is what all of the young adults told me. They all hoped that their participation in this research and getting their stories out might save someone from all of the mistakes and pain that they went through. They hoped that their stories might save someone’s life.

**Significance of the Study**

This research could directly impact the struggle for children’s rights, particularly in places of economic distress where children face violence, marginalization, and invisibility. This requires bringing cultural anthropology more directly into the discourses and spaces where journalists, social workers, activists, economists, and policy makers have and continue to dominate. Much of the literature on street children and child labor comes from international agencies and non-governmental organizations. Data
then are collected within the framework of programs and not research and theory. Good research is where interventions and solutions must start (Montgomery 2001).

Most research in anthropology, and therefore anthropological theories and methods, has focused on adults as the normative group (Marquez 1999). Much of the anthropological research on children and childhood has been approached from the perspectives of adults, failing to be truly child-centered (Bucholtz 2002:525). We need to begin situating children within political and economic forces as well as within theories of subjectivity, political economy, structural violence, and social suffering. While there are many theoretical discussions and perspectives of structural violence and social suffering, very little involves or is about children (Korbin 2003). In this way, this project is based on a new kind of ethnography that is no longer bound or dominated by adult testimony in order to understand social and cultural processes. Children are important and relevant informants, particularly in discussions of their own worlds and their own lives (Schwartzman 2001, Chin 2001 and Kovats-Bernat 2006). This project is about the active participation of children in the research process in order to collect more accurate data with children as opposed to about children (Ennew 1994, Johnson et al. 1995, Connolly & Ennew 1996, Johnson et al. 1998 and Hutchby & Moran-Ellis 1998). As Montgomery states, “we are writing children out of their own story” (Montgomery 2001:174). This project has as its goal to write children back into their own stories and their own lives.

Nancy Scherper-Hughes (1992) has demonstrated the lack and therefore need for more qualitative data on the structural role of poverty as a major form of violence. Both
Scheper-Hughes and Daniel Hoffman (1993, 1997 and 1998) have written about street and working children in Brazil and the everyday violence that they experience. However, there is no explanation as to how this everyday violence shapes and affects the lives and subjectivities of these children. Child agency is often a response to the structural constraints and abuses of those rights, which are constraints that condition their lives and activities. Anthropology can and should investigate and respond accordingly (Kovats-Bernat 2006). Anthropology can make visible the sources of violence, exclusion, and invisibility in the lives of these children, capturing the social, cultural, economic, and political structure while also at the same time the individual and their subjectivity (Biehl 2005). I hope that this work is a contribution to that end.

This project occurred at a critical time for Brazil, as the country, or select portions of it, is experiencing tremendous economic growth. Brazil is also actively implementing programs targeted at eliminating child labor and combating extreme poverty. Although their situation is context specific, information gathered can be extrapolated and used to inform the global struggle for children’s rights and its relationship to structural violence. A final goal is to enable a social science not merely about children, but for children (Kovats-Bernat 2006). By understanding the causes of children living and working on the street from the child’s perspective, this project bridges the gap between academia and the wider society. It applies directly to a non-governmental organization in Guarulhos that works with this particular population of children and can be brought to bear on their practices as well as the practices of other similar organizations. Finally, because this is a global problem, this project has policy implications that will extend to other regions of
the country as well as beyond Brazil. My goal is to create, through the stories of these children, a rigorous text describing and explaining this social phenomenon within its cultural, political, economic, and historical context. Without this, effective approaches that ensure the healthy development, education, and futures of our world’s youngest citizens will not be possible.

**Organization of the Chapters**

This dissertation has eight chapters, including the introduction. Chapter 2, “Critical Terms and Theoretical Framing,” includes conceptual definitions and a literature review, which places the children within the literature and their street situation within historical and contemporary anthropological knowledge and urban contexts.

In Chapter 3, “To the Street: The Process of Becoming a Street and Working Child” I introduce the children, adolescents, and young adults with whom I worked and their life stories. Their stories are contextualized in relation to demographic information in order to provide a larger picture of their lives, giving a sense of the social and economic conditions in which these children and their families live, which are often conditions that bring these children to the streets in the first place. I also examine the various forces that led to their street situation (Biehl 2005).

Chapter 4, “Experiences On the Street: The Experience of Being a Child Street Laborer and the Socio-Economics of Child Street Labor” examines the children’s subjectivities and agency. This chapter focuses on the socio-economics of child street labor and examines the children’s jobs, income earned, what they do with the money they earn, and the roles they play in the economies of their households and as active agents
pursuing their own interests. It also explores who makes the child labor decisions, so again, I am looking at child agency. In this way, children’s agency, as constrained as it is, is explored in their paid independent labor on the streets (Levison 2000). Finally, Chapter 4 includes experiences and impact of being on the street, with a focus on violence, disappearances, being solicited for sex, and work and education.

Chapter 5, “Experiences Of the Street: The Lived Experience of Being a Street Child and the Political Economy of the Street” examines the children’s agency, identity formation, and subjectivity. This chapter focuses on a political economy of the street and provides insight into how children and adolescents live and survive on the street. It examines the children’s income generating activities, what they do with the money they earn, group formation and organization, and daily survival tactics and strategies. Chapter 5 also includes experiences and impacts of being of the street, with a particular focus on the economic, social, and political processes that shape their subjectivities, including violence, disappearances, sex work, and crack and oxi (Biehl 2005).

Chapter 6, “Leaving the Street: A Look Back on Street Life” is based on the life histories of six young adults who lived and worked on the street as children and provides insight into how they interpret their experiences there. It also highlights the subjective processes by which these children and adolescents, given their constraints and against all odds and expectations, discover and create another chance at life (Biehl 2005). This chapter also includes an examination of the social changes that have occurred on the street and among this particular population of children and adolescents over time.
Chapter 7, “The Best Interests and Rights of Which Child?: Disputes and Tensions” examines government and non-government responses to street children and child labor and issues regarding enforcement of legislation pertaining to child rights and protection, particularly among poor children. The children’s narratives are contextualized within the international debate regarding children’s rights. This chapter challenges current laws, policies, and approaches to the situation of street children, child laborers, and children in need, demonstrating how these children are actually searching for and creating the rights and childhood that these discourses claim they should have. It also attempts to challenge current representations of Brazil’s economic growth as well as it being a country of the future.

Finally, Chapter 8, “Conclusions and Recommendations”, summarizes the major findings and contributions of this work and presents practical applications and implications for policy, programs, and future research.

I hope that this work is interesting but more importantly, I hope that it is accessible. What would be the point of talking to these children and asking them to talk about their lives so that I can write about them in such a way that they would most likely not be able to understand? It would be meaningless and disrespectful. It would defeat the purpose of this project and goes against what I believe anthropology is all about.

I have tried my best to let these children and adolescents tell their own stories, to be the storytellers of their own lives. We always assert ever so passionately about how we need to give the marginalized a voice and let them speak and be heard. Yet, we somehow always manage and continue to speak over and for them with our fancy
academic language, terms, jargon, theory, and analyses. As a result, they continue to be invisible and unheard (Biehl 2005). For these reasons, I have included the minimum of analyses and cold and distanced theories, and have done so only because it is expected of a dissertation. Our analyses and theories often undermine our informants and their knowledge. They are the experts. They know their lives better than anyone else and tell their stories better than anyone else could. They are the ones that want to speak and be heard and need a voice. I hope that these children and adolescents are heard. However, I must also state that in privileging the point of view, perspective, and lived experience of children and adolescents, focusing on and highlighting their lives as told by them, I have done so, mostly due to serious time constraints, at the expense of other perspectives and voices.
Chapter 2 Critical Terms and Theoretical Framing

This chapter consists of a critical examination of the research that anthropologists have done and in turn contributed to the literature on street children and child street laborers and its consequences. I examine how the topic and discussions of street children and child street laborers are produced, reproduced, and represented. I use the available literature to discuss a variety of the fundamental terms, issues, and themes related to this topic, with a particular focus on Brazil. I also include and discuss work done in Haiti, Ghana, South Africa, Paraguay, Colombia, Guatemala, and Venezuela due to the paucity of research done on the topic. This chapter examines topics, which include: the birth of the street child, childhood, street children and adolescents, child street laborers, the house and the street, socialization and the process of going to the street, the family, social invisibility, structure and agency, and subjectivity. It also calls for a deconstruction of the child and the street. In other words, I attempt to deconstruct the literature and policies of street and working children while also putting together a picture of these children from their perspective, exploring and demonstrating the tensions between the two.

In this chapter I examine the categories used to talk about street children and child street laborers, and children and childhood in general. I also examine the changes in categories, research, theory, and practice as related to the powerful human rights discourse – the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child – which emphasizes children’s rights as citizens and active agents through their ability to create change in their own lives. I trace this paradigm shift in the context of Brazil, although this transformation has occurred on a global level.
This chapter is ultimately a conversation between anthropologists who write about children and different experiences of childhood in a variety of contexts. It explores and addresses the intersections and tensions between subjectivity, agency, and structural violence in relation to the particular circumstances of street children and child street laborers. This chapter is a theoretical conversation that examines various discourses and debates that bring insight into how we think and write about street children and child street laborers, and all children for that matter, and ultimately how we think and write about structure and agency and the intersections between the two, particularly in discussions of childhood.

The Birth of the Street Child

The phenomenon of “street children” across the globe is a historical event, with specific origins (Anthony & Cohler 1987:8).

During the 1970’s and 1980’s Brazil experienced massive migration of people from the poorest parts of the northeast to major cities of the country. This resulted in extremely rapid urbanization, which caused increasing social and economic strain, resulting in the proliferation of favelas – squatter settlements or slums (Black 1996 and Rizzini & Cassaniaga 1999). Structural problems, such as poverty, which were occurring in most cities throughout the developing world, were worsened by the economic crisis and recession. This resulted in the growth of a number of people working and searching for work in the informal sector and in unprotected servile occupations. The large majority of these people are reported to be women and children. Economic stress and the need for children to enter the work force in order to help support the household are viewed as the major causes behind the street child phenomenon (Black 1996:128-132).
The “street child” has been a central focus and topic of debate for international agencies since the United Nations International Year of the Child in 1979 (Ennew 2003:4-5). During the 1980’s, street children received an increasing amount of publicity. The phenomenon was highest at this time in Latin America when these children were reported to be seeking out a living and existence on the streets with minimal to no adult support or help from their families (O’Kane 2003:4). It was also at this time that international agencies and non-governmental organizations began to identify street children as the subjects of humanitarian concern while also at the same time the products of the chaos that development was causing in cities throughout Latin America and elsewhere in the developing world (Black 1996:23).

The literature on street children from the 1980’s was particularly aimed at giving these children back their childhood, implying that they have the possibility to even think about Western middle upper class constructions of childhood made up of a home, a family, play, school, and no responsibility. During this time, street children were referred to as throwaways or runaways due to poverty, family breakdown, and dysfunction (Ennew & Swart-Kruger 2003:2-4). This basic and generic model of street children has remained mostly unchanged since 1979 (Ennew 2003:4-5).

A new image of street children has emerged as a result of journalistic accounts and their being popularized internationally through academic research, non-governmental organizations, and organizations such as UNICEF. The new “street child” is a combination of the old, “exploited, poor and oppressed,” with the new street child who is, “strong and astute… a surviving hero for whom it was necessary to create critical

**Childhood**

Theories of childhood, the process of socialization and the relationship between the generations cannot be divorced from the structural makeup of society in general (Asquith 1996:103).

In order to understand street children and child street laborers and the ways in which they have been produced and situated in the anthropological literature, we must first begin with an examination of childhood and what we understand as childhood, particularly a proper childhood for children (Hecht 1998 and Montgomery 2001). Tobias Hecht argues that "divorced from a critical examination of domestically based childhoods, street children cannot be understood" (Hecht 1998:21).

In his book, *At Home in the Street: Street Children of Northeast Brazil*, Tobias Hecht describes two types of childhood present in the urban northeast of Brazil: nurturing childhood and nurtured childhood. The former is experienced by poor children who must help support their family starting very early in life while the latter is lived by children from middle and upper-class families who remain economic liabilities until they graduate from university. These two types of childhood, although opposites in many ways, are lived in the home. In this way they are both placed in opposition to childhood lived on the street (Hecht 1998:92).

Over the past two to three decades, a tremendous amount has been written on children and childhood, which has largely been the result of the feminist movement and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 (Montgomery
2001:156). In the past decade, there has been a shift in the way we talk about children. Childhood is currently understood as a social construction. The experience of childhood is viewed as deeply tied to the larger social and economic structure of the community and the family. Therefore, childhood cannot be separated from an understanding of the larger social context (O’Kane 2003:1-2).

Some anthropologists argue that the child is used as a form of ideological control within state socialization processes (Ennew 2003 and O’Kane 2003). In other words, children carry the very heavy symbolic weight of adult political agendas. Concepts of children and childhood appear to be based on Western middle and upper class cultural models. These culturally specific models and knowledge structures have been globalized by the welfare activities of many international organizations, the media, and human rights treaties, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, resulting in the globalization of “the child” (Ennew 2003:3).

Childhood then for middle and upper classes in modern industrialized society is viewed as separate and distinct from adulthood. Children are viewed as in need of protection from the adult world of work, responsibility, sexuality, and politics. However, many children do not have the luxury of experiencing this particular standard and notion of childhood (O’Kane 2003:3). We need to recognize plural or many childhoods, ridding ourselves of this essentialist fallacy of “the child.” Children experience a variety of childhoods in many different ways (Ennew 2003:4).

Children become central in discussions of feminist and anti-feminist arguments. They are only part of women’s experiences and not their own. They are not treated as
subjects in their own right (Montgomery 2001:16). In her edited volume *Child Survival: Anthropological Perspectives on the Treatment and Maltreatment of Children*, Schep-Hughes examines threats to child survival and reactions to them. In the introduction, she states how she attempts, “to point out some of the common threads that unite the experiences and practices of parents, especially mothers” (Scheper-Hughes 1987:23). She then refers to women as “prisoners of motherhood” (Scheper-Hughes 1987:23-24).

However, she fails to recognize that her examination of childhood occurs through an examination of motherhood and is reported by and through the experiences of mothers. In this way, Scheper-Hughes confines childhood to motherhood, making children the prisoners of mothers and therefore women the prisoners of motherhood (Scheper-Hughes 1987).

Anthropologists need to look at childhood, socialization, and development outside of the normative bounds of the mother, adult, family and home. We need to explore what childhood looks like outside of adult and institutional control. Some argue that the reason that we have not yet done this is because it is too terrifying and tragic for us (Kovats-Bernat 2006:89).

**Street Children and Adolescents**

Stripped of human agency and placed in a pantheon of faceless victimhood, street children become objects in a largely adult debate that does more to enhance the status of those who crusade in their behalf than to shed light on the myriad ways children in fact live violence (Hecht 1998:122).
The Numbers Game

The actual number of street children has proven difficult and problematic. Estimates of the number of street children in Brazil have ranged from 39,000 to 17 million with many numbers in between (United Nations 1996a & 1996b, UNICEF 1998, World Health Organization and other organizations, Barker & Knaul 1991, Campos et al. 1994, Pinto et al. 1994, Inciardi & Surratt 1997 and Hecht 1998). In Sao Paulo alone estimates of the number of street children range from 5,000 to 500,000 (Schep-Hughes & Hoffman 1997:2). Although it is said that a vast majority of these children are boys, the Brazilian government has estimated that there are approximately 800,000 street girls. This number includes those of and on the street, which I discuss below (Inciardi & Surratt 1997).

Many of the publications and much of the literature on street children focus on the magnitude of the problem. Talk of these children is with numbers, and the numbers given are huge. These numbers are repeated throughout the literature, year after year and they are always said to be growing. However, no sources are provided nor is there any evidence for these numbers. More importantly, numbers tell us nothing about the lives of these children (Montgomery 2001).

The numbers or estimates are not always talking about the same children. This may be due to the fact that no one can agree on definitions. It is unclear what the literature means by “street children,” resulting in multiple interpretations, further obscuring definitions (Ennew 2003:5). Some have argued that the numbers are also problematic because they are representative of the political agendas of international

The Naming Game: Definitions and Categories

Concerns with how to identify and classify street children have also generated much discussion. Starting in the mid 1970’s to early 1980’s, street children became a public concern and the focus of much research (Agnelli 1986, le Roux & Smith 1998 and Wright 1990). Initially, research treated street children as a homogenous category. No distinctions were made between children who work on the streets and children who live on the streets, between children who participate in the informal work sector and those who engage in illegal activities, or between children who maintain family ties and those who do not. It was only towards the end of the 1980’s that attempts were made to distinguish between different kinds of children found on the street and categories were developed to describe these differences. Unfortunately, the current trend in the literature on street children is largely focused on categories and dichotomies, which are meant to explain the lives of these children (Naverson 1989).

Filomena Gregori (2000) has discussed the development of the term “street children” in Brazil and the assumptions that underlie the term. Popular opinion, the media, institutions, and international organizations have produced and reproduced a multitude of inaccuracies. The term “street children” came about in the 1970’s and refers to a variety of experiences that children have on the street (Williams 1993). Gregori asserts that even in the most extreme cases, these children rarely, if ever, completely lose ties with their family. Gregori also urges against defining these children only in terms of
the street, which has been all too common in the research thus far on the issue, as the large majority of these children maintain some degree of contact or ties with their families while also at the same time utilize other public and social spaces beyond the street (Lucchini 1997 and Gregori 2000).

The term “street child” in and of itself has become quite a controversial and problematic term, and is slowly disappearing from both academic and welfare literature, (the United Nations, UNICEF, WHO, etc.). The term is thought to contribute to and further the stigmatization and discrimination against these children and adolescents (Invernizzi 2001). Much of the welfare literature has replaced the term “street children” with “urban children at risk” (Kapadia 1997). Although this new term is intended to be more representative of the heterogeneity of the lives and circumstances of these children and adolescents, it raises the question of, “At risk of what?” (Panter-Brick 2002:148).

The term “street child” is considered generic and is said to mask the tremendous variation in the lives and experiences of these children and adolescents (Raffaelli & Larson 1999:1). It is thought to obscure their actual lifestyles, which often fluctuate and change, taking them on and off the streets. The term is also considered to be misrepresentative of the varying age ranges, which includes teens, pre-teens, young children, and infants (Panter-Brick 2002:149).

The term “street child” implies or suggests deviant behavior and is used in opposition to “the child,” “the family” and “the home,” placing these children and their families outside of that which is considered appropriate and normal for children (Nieuwenhuys 2001:552-553). The term does not take into consideration that these
children are often on the streets for recreation, social interaction, and to help their families financially. Finally, the term is viewed as problematic because it makes the street the most defining aspect of the child’s existence and does not acknowledge any other aspects of their life, such as ties to their family, friends, community, institutions, and organizations (Aptekar 1989b, 1989c & 1989e and Marquez 1999).

By the mid 1980’s UNICEF coined a term to cover all categories of disadvantaged children: Children in Especially Difficult Circumstances (CEDC). This catchall phrase was originally created to include children with disabilities, children affected by organized violence, child victims of armed conflict, abused and neglected children, unaccompanied children in disasters, and street and working children (Boyden & Mann 2000). Of these categories of children, street children were the most targeted by UNICEF programs, not because they were the worst off, but because they were the most visible (Black 1996). CEDC is now linked to and almost synonymous with street children. However, the term completely fails to acknowledge the structural causes of these children’s struggles and situations (Moss et al. 2000 and Ennew 2003:7).

Mark Lusk, in his 1989 study with children found on the streets in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, differentiated between four different groups or categories of children. Lusk is said to have created one of the first typologies for street children, which included: 1) family-based street workers; 2) independent street workers who occasionally sleep on the streets; 3) children who live on the streets and have no contact with their families; and 4) children of street families, which are usually centered around the mother (Lusk 1989 & 1992 and Black 1996).
Originally established by UNICEF to differentiate between street-based and home-based street children are the terms children and adolescents “of the street” and “on the street.” Those “of the street” are said to not maintain or have any contact with their family. These children “leave” home, where hunger, abuse and neglect are common, making life on the street more desirable. Those “on the street” work on the street and often return home to sleep (Panter-Brick 2002:150). UNICEF’s distinction between children “of” and “on” the street makes a further distinction by identifying “abandoned children” within those “of” the streets (Felsman 1984 and Ennew 2003:5).

Confusion continues to exist between those “of” and “on” the street (Thomas 1995 and Wright et al. 1993a & 1993b). Researchers continue to obscure the lives of these children, and confusion still permeates the literature (Offit 2008). My work views and treats those “of” and “on” the street as separate. Children and adolescents “of” and “on” the street rarely, if ever, interact with one another, use the street in different ways, occupy different spaces, and carry out different activities on the street, including survival strategies and income generating activities.

Also problematic is that not all children found on the street are living or working there. While the focus of this work is children living and/or working on the street, I also had contact with and came to know children who were merely on the street where they would spend most of their days either because they were expelled from school or had nothing to do. Other children would accompany their parents who work on the street, but they themselves did not work. These children often played on the street while their parents worked. Their parents did not want to leave their children at home alone and
unattended. However, they feared getting in trouble by the tutelary council for their children being on the street.

According to Save the Children Fund, “a street child is any minor who is without a permanent home or adequate protection” (UNESCO 1995). First and most importantly is the problem of how we define “home.” What is considered adequate protection, and according to whom? There are many children who sleep both at home and on the street. Many street children and adolescents also spend a significant amount of time in orphanages, institutions, and correctional facilities, which this definition does not take into consideration. These spaces could also fit under the category of “home” and “adequate protection” (Ennew 1994a & 1994b and Panter-Brick 2002:149-150).

Hecht describes these children and adolescents as playing in the street, working in the street, sleeping in the street, and living in the street. However, according to Hecht, the street should not be used to define the whole of their identity and existence (Panter-Brick 2002:151). We do not refer to ourselves as “home people,” so why would we define these children in such a way? Finally, “street children” do not only use the street as their public space. As previously mentioned, they also use other public spaces or domains including orphanages, shelters, non-governmental organizations, and institutional and correctional facilities (Lucchini 1996 and Ennew & Stewart-Kruger 2003:14).

Many non-governmental organizations continue to use the term “street children.” The term has proven to be extremely powerful and appealing to the international welfare and charity market, as it speaks directly to the West’s need to save these children who
represent both a violation of the purity of childhood and a need for moral reform. Nieuwenhuys calls this the “global compassion market” (Nieuwenhuys 2001:551).

“Homeless” is one of the currently accepted terms used for children and adolescents found on the street, a term that has its own problems (Glasser & Bridgman 1999 and Chamberlain & Johnson 2001). It is used as a replacement for what is considered to be the stigmatizing category of “street children.” However, not all children found on the street live on the street. Their existence as homeless and as having no family or as victims of family breakdown is created through public discourse. Although the term “home” is based on the construction of the other as “homeless,” it can refer not only to individuals’ homes, but also to institutional homes such as non-governmental organizations, orphanages, or any place of residence, including the street. We must also take into consideration that home may not always be permanent. The research has failed to demonstrate high numbers of orphaned or abandoned children living and working on the street who have completely and permanently cut ties with their families (Ennew & Swart-Kruger 2003:5). I have chosen to avoid the word homeless because I think it obscures their situations. Also, many of these children have “homes,” but the situation is much more complicated than merely having a home or not.

When we refer to street children as “homeless,” we only reinforce and create a need for interventions, which usually call for adult control over children (Ennew 1994). The term also reinforces social constructions of an ideal “family” and “home,” which ignores the social networks and ties that these children do have. “Homeless” suggests that social and agency workers are fulfilling some need or lack in the lives of these
children, implying the desire and need to bring their lifestyles and behaviors in line with that of the larger social body and with public perceptions and stereotypical notions of what a normal and appropriate childhood is (Ennew & Swart-Kruger 2003:10).

Some anthropologists argue that street children should not so much be viewed as “street children,” but instead as members of the working poor (Susser 1996, Aptekar 1988d:6 and Kilbride et al. 2000). Other anthropologists assert that while these children should be considered members of the working poor, they should also be viewed as members of the world’s homeless population. However, Ida Susser, in her article “The Construction of Poverty and Homelessness in U.S. Cities,” points out how “homeless people appear homeless rather than displaced” (Susser 1996, Aptekar 1988d and Kilbride et al. 2000:416). The same argument can and has been made for street children (Susser 1996 and Kilbride et al. 2000).

The current trend in the anthropological literature is to make a distinction between street children and working children, street-living children and street-working children, and family-based street workers and independent street workers (Barker & Knaul 1991, Ennew 1994, Consortium for Street Children 1998, Raffaelli 1999 and Valentin 1999). The focus and emphasis then has shifted from the street, or the places where they are found, to their work, or economic activities carried out on the street.

PMMR uses the term *Crianças e Adolescentes em Situação de Rua*, or Children and Adolescents in a Street Situation. “Street situation” is an all inclusive term and includes all children and adolescents who are on the street, whether they are living on the streets and have fragile family ties, working on the street and return home regularly, or
spend most of their days on the street simply hanging out. Unlike “on” and “of,” the term “children in a street situation” problematizes the situation the children are in as opposed to the children themselves.

Patrick Shanahan defines street life as a “culture.” He asserts that the worst insult for a male street child in Accra, is to not be called a “street child.” He believes in the need to validate the position of the street child, which is apparent in his statement, “the street is a living entity in the life of a street child” (Shanahan 2003:2). Shanahan acknowledges how afraid we are of the word “street,” especially in conjunction with the word “child.” The street plays an important and central role in the lives of these children and adolescents. Shanahan is not glorifying the streets, but he is stating that denial of or failure to recognize and understand the important role that the street plays in the lives of these children and adolescents will result in a lack of understanding and a lack of effective interventions to the problem (Shanahan 2003:2-3).

Benno Glauser, who has worked with street kids in Asuncion, uses the term “street children” to refer to a particular group of children with a special relationship to the street. He also links and equates the term with that of abandoned children. Like Shanahan, Glauser argues against using “of” and “on” the street. Although those on the street maintain contact with their families and often sleep at home, they still share a similar lifestyle to those of the street, therefore making them a “street child.” When we separate the word “street” from the word “child” we fail to acknowledge and accept the components of life on the street and its true realities (Glauser 1994, Kilbride et al. 2000 and Shanahan 2003:3).
Both Scheper-Hughes and Daniel Hoffman have written about street children in Brazil and the everyday violence that they experience. However, there is no explanation as to how this everyday violence shapes and affects the lives and subjectivities of these children. Scheper-Hughes also discusses the disappearances of street children. However, she examines these disappearances through the stories of adults, particularly mothers, defining childhood in relation to motherhood and abandonment and therefore under the control of and dominated by adults (Scheper-Hughes & Hoffman 1993, 1997, and 1998).

Hecht juxtaposes the “street child” with the “home child.” He questions what makes a child consider himself or herself a street child. Through his fieldwork and research, he discovered that it is partly due to the amount of time spent on the street without returning home, but it has more to do with a child’s relationship with his or her mother. When a child abandons or is abandoned by their mother, they become a street child (Hecht 1998:115 and Panter-Brick 2000:152-153). According to Hecht’s argument then, “home” is completely bound up in maternity and is demonstrative of one’s relationship to their mother while “street” is indicative of a negation of one’s mother as well as an abandonment of any relationship with one’s mother. It seems that Hecht’s home/street binary is an extension of the presence/absence binary of Scheper-Hughes (Hecht 1998:115 and Kovats-Bernat 2006).

These distinctions are thought to explain the different ways that children experience the street and the relationship that they build with the street. Street children do not make up a homogenous group. The cross-cultural variation in the lives, histories, and demographics of street children makes any single definitional framework of analysis
impossible. While this debate takes the public and material spaces that these children occupy and use into consideration, it neglects to mention the effects it has on the formation of the child’s subjectivity while occupying such spaces (Kovats-Bernat 2006:29). Finally, although these terms and concepts that are applied to these children, that affect them, and that contribute to general knowledge about them - of, on, presence/absence, home/street, abandoned, at risk, a risk, homeless, street-living/street working - may be theoretically useful, they are irrelevant to their day-to-day realities and lived experiences.

These categories and dichotomies also reinforce and reproduce intervention strategies that call for adult control over children. These labels suggest a need to reform these youngsters. They are used to attempt to describe their personhood and to explain their lives and situations while at the same time they are used to blame them and their families (Biehl 2005:53). Finally, all of these categories and distinctions essentially maintain and support the original UNICEF typology and binary “of” and “on” (Panter-Brick 2002:150).

In Sleeping Rough in Port-au-Prince: An Ethnography of Street Children and Violence in Haiti, Christopher Kovats-Bernat (2006) refers to a child as a street child only if the child identifies him/herself as a street child. The term “street child” in Port-au-Prince is suggestive of a particular relationship to the street. According to Kovats-Bernat, the way in which we define street children is a matter of deciding what the appropriate use of public space is. Use of the term “street child” is also dependant on the physical appearance and dress of the child, as street children are very easily distinguished
by their dress. Kovats-Bernat states that street children view their circumstances as
extending beyond the superficial absence of a home or shelter. Instead, they look more to
the causes of their displacement. Street children in Port-au-Prince, when referring to
other children that are not *of* or *on* the street, talk about “school” children as opposed to
the “home” children that Hecht discusses (Kovats-Bernat 2006:40-46).

Kovats-Bernat discusses how fundamental the street is to the identity and
personhood of the children for whom it is home (Baker 1998, Kilbride et al. 2000 and
Kovats-Bernat 2006). It is the very basis for how they are perceived by society as well as
how they perceive themselves. Even when these children find themselves affiliated with
or living in an institution, such as an orphanage, they continue to refer to and describe
themselves as street children, even after many years of being off the street. From the
perspective of those whose formative years were spent on the street, they will always be
from the street (Kovats-Bernat 2006:51).

*Street Children: Resilient or Risks, Victims or Violent*

Because these children violate our ideas about children and childhood, they are
not seen as children at all. They are portrayed and viewed as nuisances, dangerous, social
ills and threats, and a violation to the public’s safety and rights (Schepers-Hughes 1992,
Huggins & de Castro 1996 and Stephens 1995). As Panter-Brick points out, we refer to
these children as both “at risk” while at the same time we consider them “as risks”
because they challenge and violate social norms and views of childhood (Veale et al.
2000). These children are conceptualized as both victims and as violent themselves
According to Nguyen, “Risk is used to constitute specific populations as targets for intervention” (Nguyen et al. 2003:458).

Nancy Scheper-Hughes also discusses how these children are seen as either victims or delinquents and are considered “out of place” and therefore in “need” of help from adults to return to where they need to be. They are seen as vulnerable, incompetent, and inferior to adults and are therefore dependent on them. They are portrayed as powerless in society. The West’s construct of childhood assumes that children should lead safe and carefree lives (Jackson & Scott 1999). This notion of childhood reinforces the idea of “family” as the normal structure within which children should grow up (Ennew & Swart-Kruger 2003:6 and Panter-Brick 2002:147).

Many anthropologists highlight how street and working children and adolescents have proven themselves to be highly competent and resilient through their remarkable ability to work and survive on the streets and to even contribute to the livelihoods of their families (Ennew & Swart-Kruger 2003:6 and Panter-Brick 2002:147). Hecht points out how these children and adolescents satisfy many of their needs, make important decisions about their lives and take responsibility for their actions, including having chosen “essa vida” (or “this life,” as many call it) of “freedom” on the streets. These children construct their own worlds and create and develop their own social and supportive networks (Hecht 1998). Although many of them are not under the direct supervision or care of an adult(s), this is not to say that they do not have any form of contact with adults.
Many of them do through orphanages, projects, institutions, correctional facilities, work, and their daily interactions with passerby.

A greater understanding of childhood is needed. We need to be cognizant of the fact that childhood is socially and culturally constructed and is therefore experienced in a variety of ways. We must rid ourselves of this ethnocentric notion of childhood. Beazley argues that street children have not lost their childhoods, but instead, experience childhood differently (Beazley 2003:17).

We need to move beyond a sole focus on the street, as there is more to the lives of these children than what is stated in these classifications and binaries that their lives have been reduced to and which are most often based on physical location, social neglect and abuse, and economic activity (Panter-Brick 2002:154). Street children and child street laborers come from different backgrounds and the reality of their lives defies any neat categorization (Glauser 1990 and Bourdillon 1994:518).

**Child Street Laborers**

Efforts at preventing children from working in the street threaten the position of poor urban children within the home. The more difficult it is for children to bring in resources to households that not only desperately need the fruits of child labor but morally expect them, the more vulnerable the child’s status becomes…. Declaring the street out of bounds [for the child] will only make the home less viable (Hecht 1998:198).

Child street laborers are often confused with and labeled as street children simply because of their mere physical presence on the streets, where they are often seen and found. However, these children are not street children and do not view themselves as street children. They actually laugh at being labeled in such a way. Similar to their
parents and other members of their families, these children are instead members of the working poor (Susser 1996, Aptekar 1988d:6 and Kilbride et al. 2000).

Child labor, which is defined as waged work undertaken by underage minors, differentiates between the exploitation of children and activities that help the child develop through processes of socialization. The first, which is seen as harmful, is tied to waged labor whereas the latter, which is viewed as acceptable, includes housekeeping, taking care of siblings, and assisting adults without pay (Nieuwenhuys 1996:242).

UNICEF defines working children as children who work, part-time or full-time, paid or unpaid, within or outside of the home/family setting, and in conditions that are exploitative and damaging to their health and development. According to UNICEF:

Children should be protected from hazardous work, inappropriate work, excessive hours of work, work that may stunt their growth, and work in harmful environments… [and should be] provided with an environment that fosters their healthy, happy growth and development.

The International Work Organization (IWO), the Federal Constitution of Brazil (article 227) and Brazil’s Child and Adolescent Statute (article 60) determined that sixteen years old is the minimum age to begin working while fourteen years of age is the maximum obligated age for school. Article 227 states that:

It is the duty of the family, society and the state to assure with absolute priority the rights of children and adolescents to life, health, food, education, leisure, occupational training, culture, dignity, respect, freedom, and family and community life, and in addition to protect them from all forms of negligence, discrimination, exploitation, violence, cruelty, and oppression.

All of these articles were adopted with the objective of eradicating child labor. They were accepted in 1973 in Brazil and in many other countries.
Many children work. Their occupations range from shining shoes, watching and washing parked cars, selling cigarettes, flowers, newspapers and candy, juggling, carrying groceries and hauling trash, to drug trafficking and prostitution. According to the literature, younger children often start out begging on the streets. As they get older, they are reported to begin to rely on petty theft and crime. While most children on the streets are boys, according to the Brazilian government, there are an estimated 800,000 girls that live and work on the streets. Approximately two-thirds of these girls are said to work as prostitutes (Inciardi & Surratt 1997:3). According to the literature, theft becomes a way of life for many boys just as prostitution does for many girls (Lucchini 1994 and Pereira Alberto 1999:5).

Myers demonstrates how the issue of working children has been presented as a dichotomy. On one side, the core of the issue is that children are engaged in any kind of economic activity. This side argues that children and childhood should be primarily devoted to study and play. If there must be work, it should be light and made up of small chores around the home. Even when children in the work force are not mistreated, their participation takes away from adult wages, which is a factor that creates the poverty that forces children to work in the first place. Proponents of this view argue that all working children are “at risk.” The ultimate goal then is for the total elimination of child labor (Myers 1991).

Proponents of the other side argue that work, when under appropriate protection and supervision, is important to the socialization of young people because it serves as training and a means of developing self-esteem (Ochs & Izquierdo 2009). Children’s
participation in economic activity is viewed as acceptable as long as the activity meets healthy development. While this side is supportive of the elimination of children participating in hazardous work, they argue that young people that want to work should have the right to do so. They also view a lack of employment opportunities for young people as equally problematic as exploitative working conditions. Proponents of this view assert that prohibiting child labor without first raising the income of the families of these working children will result in even greater troubles for the poor, creating even more destitute conditions for children. They argue that the most important issue is to protect and ensure the safety and development of children who do work (Myers 1991).

**The House and the Street**

Roberto da Matta has discussed the dichotomy between the private and the public through the domains of the house and the street. The house symbolizes the private, which is representative of the personal, the family, the mother, protection, order, safety, cleanliness, and honor while the street is linked to the public and symbolizes the impersonal, disorder, danger, violence, disgrace, vagrancy, and illegitimacy. Any ties to or association with the street is viewed as a threat to the house, or the private domain (da Matta 1987 and Kuznesof 2005:861). For da Matta, this dichotomy comes from colonial, or slave-based, relationships and institutions. His dualistic explanation of the oppositional universes of the house and the street are intended to be representative of the way in which social life is organized in Brazil, which is often based on that of unequal ties and relationships (da Matta 1987 and Caldeira 2000-140-144).
In Brazil, and Latin America in general, the street is referred to as a rhetorical battleground. It is viewed as a site of political activity where the children who live and work there serve as symbols and are used for adult political ends. The street is also a very gendered space, where females are associated with the private or the house (casa), domestic work and prostitution and males with the public or the street (rua), drugs and robbery (da Matta 1987 and Ennew 2003:9). Da Matta’s model, which is based on very clear and sharp distinctions between the house and the street, may be outdated and in need of re-examination.

Hecht discovered that a dual and rival world exists for street children: “the home” and “the street.” The “home,” as reported by street children, is based on much more than physical closeness to one’s mother. It also includes helping one’s mother and contributing to the household and family income, which may mean leaving home so that there is one less mouth to feed. “Home” for these children is also linked to attending school. Many of these children refer to the home as “a vida boa,” or the good life, which means being on the right track. The street, which they refer to as “essa vida,” or this life, refers to sleeping on the street, stealing, and using drugs along with other illegal activities (Hecht 1998).

Teresa Caldeira (2000) argues that these binaries, as any and all binaries, imply and assume distinctions that do not apply to everyday social life and practices. According to Caldeira, these incredibly misleading and stereotyped oppositions of the house and the street, public and private, have problematically become a major theme and trend in the anthropological literature on Brazil. When we associate the house with the
private and personal and the street with the public, impersonal and violent, we immediately make violence and disorder a problem of the public realm and of public relationships, and therefore of the poor, while removing it from the house or the private realm, and therefore from the rich (Caldeira 2000:140-144).

The constructed polarities of purity and danger as related to the public image of street children are very apparent in our ideas and discussions of cleanliness and purity and the need to remove or eliminate these children in order to establish social hygiene and order. Street children have been referred to as “children out of place,” demonstrating the power of social constructions of the street and its association with dirt as “matter out of place” (Douglas 1966). Mary Douglas’ “matter out of place” serves as an example of how social constructions of street children and dirt are used to explain the tremendous violence that these children are exposed to and experience due to their being constructed as the “other” that is “out of place” (Stephens 1995, Douglas 1966 and Ennew & Swart-Kruger 2003:9).

**The Street**

This research challenges more traditional and typical assumptions about the street as a passageway or transitory space (Lefebvre 2003). Public spaces in Brazil, particularly for the poor, are more than mere transitory spaces or passageways. Instead, they are extensions of the home. In this way, the street often serves as an extension of the home for the poor, particularly poor children (Kovats-Bernat 2001).

Kovats-Bernat refers to the street in Port-au-Prince as a deeply contested space where children compete with vermin, other street children, police, and death squads.
Although the street for some children is home, it is a violent, indifferent, and unloving home. However, he also argues that the street is just as structured as any “normative” institutional structure, such as the family, the home, and the school. Kovats-Bernat equates the structure and constraints of the street on the agency of the child to that of a baby gate, the timetable of school, household rules, and codes of discipline (Kovats-Bernat 2006:34-37.)

Although many children mention the freedom, independence, and economic opportunity that they experience on the street as well as their ability and freedom to play with more frequency than at “home,” they also mention that there is more to fear than to enjoy about the street. Their preference for the street is the result of their experiences that led them to the streets in the first place and keeps them there, which is most often the “home” and the “family” that we argue these children need to be a part of. Some of these children talk about the streets in the same way that they talk about the “home,” referring to both as sheltering but also violent places without care (Kovats-Bernat 2006:36-37).

For street children in Port-au-Prince, the street is not viewed as a place to live in opposition to the home. For them, the street is home (Kovats-Bernat 2006:60-61).

The children that have been affiliated with programs or have lived in institutions, which usually have the goal of “rehabilitating” these children, usually return to the street. Most street children state that the problem with these programs and institutions is that they assume that these children would prefer to leave the street for a more sheltered and structured environment. Many children complain that these programs and institutions have too many rules. They state that although they do not have a house, they have a
street and that the other children with whom they live, sleep, and work are like their family, they take care of each other. These children state that even if they had other options and alternatives, they would not leave the street (Kovats-Bernat 2006:73-76).

Children are not passive products and recipients of the all too commonly accepted unidirectional notion of socialization. They are also characters in the making of their lives and subjectivities. We need to further explore the material and social conditions in which these children live and are socialized. The street and not “responsible” adults, plays a major role in the socialization of street children (Kovats-Bernat 2006:7). The street is the space in which the large majority of physical, social, and cultural development of these children takes place. It is within this space that these children develop their identities, their subjectivities are shaped, and they begin to view themselves in relation to or as separate from the rest of society (Kovats-Bernat 2006:74).

**Socialization: To the Streets**

For street children, life on the streets is not so much a problem as the solution to a variety of problems (Bourdillon, 1994:529).

The street has been referred to as the site of transition as well as the space of socialization and transformation for the children that live and work there. According to the literature, a small minority of children on the streets are completely on their own – orphans or children that have abandoned or been abandoned by their parents. Many of the children found on the street have and maintain some kind of contact with their families. Although poverty is often believed to be the direct cause of children being on the streets, it is also said that many “leave” home, where hunger, neglect, and physical and sexual abuse, make life on the streets seem more “attractive and peaceful” than life at
home. Unfortunately, on the street these children become victims to urban violence, including illiteracy, chronic hunger, extermination by death squads, abuse by police, prostitution and sexual exploitation, drug use and addiction, and sickness and disease, including HIV/AIDS (Medeiros et al. 2001:37).

Kovats-Bernat reports poverty as the main reason for children being on the streets in Haiti. Poor families in Haiti often have to decide which of their children will go to school and which will go to the street in order to contribute to the household income while also freeing up needed resources like food and water. Once they have had contact with the street, these children often experience a feeling of freedom that they did not have in their homes and find themselves spending less time in the home and with their families. Over time and through physical separation, these children explain a social separation in which they gradually cross the boundary that separates the home and the street. The longer they have been on the street, the greater the separation from home (Kovats-Bernat 2006:108-109).

Kilbride et al. discovered that a majority of the street children they interviewed had families that were living in the slums, which supports the argument that there is an association between street children and poverty (Kilbride et al. 2000:18). The children in their study reported poverty and an inability of their families to provide them with food as the key factors for their being on the streets. Family problems, in addition to poverty, were also considered important factors to the children, particularly divorce, abuse, abandonment, alcoholism, and a lack of love. Parents sending their children to the streets to beg was another factor mentioned by the children (Kilbride et al. 2000:58).
Children living and working on the streets of Caracas (Marquez 1999) and in Colombia (Aptekar 1988a, 1988b & 1988c) are reported to leave home gradually when changes occur within the home. No sudden abandonment takes place. This change is most often a mother who either dies, struggles with drug and alcohol addiction, or is unable to care for her children because she has to work. Similarly, Dodge and Raundalen (1991) in their study on street children in Mozambique wrote about how almost all street boys reported some family tragedy or poverty related issue as the reason for their leaving home.

In her examination of street children, to whom she refers as “urban children in distress,” Cristina Szanton Blanc (1994) discusses what she refers to as a “country diagnosis.” This implies that children living and working on the street are products of culture as opposed to structural inequality (Farmer 2005). She also keeps with the tradition by providing the reader with typologies of families that produce street children and child street laborers, which are usually described as parents with low education levels who themselves began working at a young age (Edmonds 2001, Kassouf 2002 and Nagaraj 2002).

et al. 2000:103). Lewis Aptekar (1988a, 1988b, 1988c & 1988d) makes the argument that a female-headed household in Colombia socializes boys to leave home around the time they reach puberty, which is when they are expected to make a living on the street. The absence of a father and the presence or introduction of a stepfather seems to be another factor that pushes children to the streets, as there appears to be a large number of street children with stepfathers. In this case, the mother is said to choose her new boyfriend or husband over her child (Aptekar 1988a, 1988c & 1988d, Le Roux 1996, Kilbride et al. 2000, Dodge and Raundalen 1991 and Marquez 1999).

The poorest households are said to be those headed by women (Black 1996). All family problems appear to be the result of a female-headed household and the absence of a father or the presence or introduction of a stepfather to the home (Alves 1991:72-73 and Marquez 1999:99-102). Such a view only further stigmatizes poor families by placing the blame on them, particularly females (Ennew & Swart-Kruger 2003:2). Responsibility implies condition, and many of these families do not have even the minimal conditions, economically speaking, to care for their children (Biehl 2005:181). When we refer to the phenomenon of street children as a problem of family dysfunction or breakdown, female-headed households, and stepfathers we fail to recognize larger structural inequalities that have marginalized these children and their families (Naverson 1989 and Marquez 1999).

Poverty alone cannot account for children living and working on the street. Other children faced with and living in similar economic conditions maintain ties with their families and do not exchange their homes for the street (Alves 1991:72-73). It is also not possible to conclude that street children are more likely to come from broken or single-
parent families, as other children from the same or similar households are not living or working on the street (Ennew 2003:9). Unique combinations of personal, social, and economic circumstances must be taken into consideration. There is no typical street child. We must always keep in mind each individual child and their unique personal, social, and economic circumstances (Hecht 1998 and Kilbride 2000).

The Family

Families of street children are said to be more disaggregated than other families with more deteriorated family relationships. They are also said to be “less caring.” The families of working children, although poor and facing many problems, are said to be “more affectionate, more cooperative, and more actively involved in family life” (Alves 1991:72-73). Physical violence and substance abuse issues are said to be more common among the families of street children. Difficulties within the families of street children are overwhelmingly said to be between the child and the father, usually the stepfather (Alves 1991:72-73).

Rizzini and Butler argue that we need instead to talk about new family structures as opposed to family breakdown and dysfunction, as the latter feeds into the popular myth and policy of there being an ideal entity known as “the family,” which has been and continues to be a central concept and theme in discussions of childhood (Ennew & Swart-Kruger 2003:6). Throughout the literature, family forms and practices among people with fewer economic resources, less access and opportunity, and who differ from the Western ideal of the nuclear family, are viewed and treated as a social problem. This is clear as we can find throughout the literature that these young people are always the
products of poor single women who are portrayed as not being up to par or capable as
caretakers or parents. Such a view holds poor women responsible for the phenomenon of
street children, while the state is freed from any responsibility. Families that do not fit
this Western ideal of a nuclear family are viewed as abnormal, dangerous, deviant, and
social risks and are ultimately blamed for their children living and working on the street

Social Invisibility

There are two ways of producing social invisibility: one can be made
invisible because their presence is neglected and one can be made
invisible if we cast a stigma on them, replacing their personhood and
individuality with our prejudices. We only “see” what we project and not
really who they are. Society treats these invisible children not as human
beings. They are garbage and are cast into pigsties so that we can avoid
responsibility for them (Bus 174, 2002).

As with citizenship, humanness, or lack thereof, is produced and re-produced.

These children are not citizens, but even more, they are not persons and are best tolerated
when not “seen.” Because of the non-normative lives of these children, they are socially
invisible. They are often targets of violence by police and death squads, demonstrating a
violent disregard for these children. These kids do not exist in social reality. They are
not part of or recognized as part of the larger social body (Biehl 2005).

The street, at least for the children who live and work on it, is a zone of social
abandonment. Zones of social abandonment, according to Joao Biehl, are unwanted
zones where there is no intervention on behalf of legal authorities, welfare or medical
institutions. Within these zones are, “the socially dead, without a name, without origin,
without ties… the unknowables, with no human rights and with no one accountable for
their condition” (Biehl 2005:66 & 2-4). Zones of social abandonment are spaces for non-citizens, and even more, non-humans, or what Biehl calls ex-humans. These individuals are excluded from what society understands and experiences as reality. They experience social death before physical death (Biehl 2005:52). They have a physical reality, which is their only means of “visibility,” and therefore they have to be “hidden” in juvenile detention centers, orphanages, and other institutions, or killed. They are mere bodies without a soul, will, or personhood and therefore are not seen as children or human (Biehl 2005).

The social invisibility of street children is visible in their routine and unnoticed suffering. Their suffering has become normalized and therefore accepted by and acceptable to the larger social body. The violent inability of society to acknowledge the existence of these children has become all too common. The absence of governmental programs and policies, or lack of implementation of laws and policies concerning these children is another sign of their social invisibility. The state is not obligated to keep these children alive and therefore wants their elimination. As a result, the police and death squads have been made “responsible” for the physical visibility and presence of these children (Biehl 2005:183 and Kovats-Bernat, 2006:62).

**Structure vs. Agency**

Human rights violations are not accidents; they are not random in distribution or effect. [Human] Rights violations are, rather, symptoms of deeper pathologies of power and are linked intimately to the social conditions that so often determine who will suffer abuse and who will be shielded from harm (Farmer 2005:7).
Structural violence can be defined as social injustice or inequality (Galtung 1969:171). It refers to social processes, suffering and violence, as structured by social, economic, political, and historical forces that constrain agency (Farmer 2005:40). Paul Farmer in *Pathologies of Power: Health, Human Rights, and the New War on the Poor*, defines structural violence as:

Social factors including gender, ethnicity (‘race’), and socioeconomic status that play a role in rendering individuals and groups vulnerable to extreme human suffering... [These social factors are] historically given (and often economically driven) processes and forces that conspire to constrain agency. For many, choices both large and small are limited by racism, sexism, political violence, and grinding poverty (Farmer 2005:40-43).

Nancy Scheper-Hughes describes structural violence as violence that is permissible and even encouraged by society:

It refers to the invisible social machinery of inequality that reproduces social relations of exclusion and marginalization via ideologies, stigmas, and dangerous discourses (such as “youth violence” itself) attendant to race, class, sex, and other invidious distinctions... Structural violence “naturalizes” poverty, sickness, hunger, and premature death, erasing their social and political origins so that they are taken for granted and no one is held accountable except the poor themselves (Scheper-Hughes 2004:13).

The term structural violence is appropriate when discussing the particular situation of street children and child street laborers because it speaks to their particular circumstances as historically situated by social, economic, and political forces that affect their daily lives, shape their decisions, and constrain their agency (Farmer 2005). The situation of street children and child street laborers has been argued by some anthropologists to be a symptom of deeper social problems. Their particular
circumstances are symptoms and signs of structural violence (Hecht 1998 and Farmer 2005:255).

Using AIDS as an example, Farmer demonstrates how structural violence is an extremely localized phenomenon. In other words, it is not just randomly distributed. The same can be said for the particular circumstances of street children and child street laborers. Both groups of children are signs of structural violence or social processes that are embedded in the very unequal structure or system of inequality (Farmer 2005:230). Structural violence provides us with a framework that examines the larger structure in which the lives of people, including street children and child street laborers, takes shape (Biehl, Good and Kleinman 2007). Social, economic, political, and historical forces have structured risk for most forms of suffering, including poverty, hunger, displacement, violence, marginalization, and living and working on the street (Farmer 2005:6, 7 & 30).

The phenomenon of street children and child street laborers, as child abuse and neglect, has been linked to larger structural factors, such as poverty. However, as previously stated, not all poor families neglect and abuse their children nor are all poor children living and working on the street. Jill Korbin asserts that structural violence is differentially distributed in that not all families are affected and not all children in single parent homes have the same experiences (Korbin 2003:433). Not everything is the result of political economic structure, as such denies agency. These children, and none of us for that matter, are not free from nor are they determined by this structure (Biehl 2005:14).

Subjectivity

Our subjectivities certainly have a biology, but they also have, and perhaps more critically, an equally influential history, cultural specificity,
political location, and economic position. We are as responsive to biological blueprints as we are to alterations in political economy and social positioning (Biehl, Good and Kleinman 2007:28 & 53).

Subjectivity refers to individual experience and the larger social structure in which it is embedded. It refers to one’s social existence or social life as it is actually lived. Subjectivity is always social and it “has as much to do with collective realities as it does with individual translations and transformations of those realities. It is always simultaneously social and subjective, collective and individual” (Biehl 2005:127-137, 53). An examination of subjectivity requires looking at the individual while also outward at the larger social, political, and economic processes that affect and manage individuals (Biehl 2005:18 and Biehl, Good and Kleinman 2007:28). Such an examination allows us to understand how these processes shape lives, become embodied, and are acted out in everyday life (Farmer 2005:30).

Many anthropologists (Farmer 2005 and Biehl, Good and Kleinman 2007) argue that inner life processes and the body capture these larger structural processes. The core of subjectivity is, “the dynamic and unsolved tension between the bodily self, and social/political processes” (Biehl, Good, and Kleinman 2007:15). In other words, individuals are made and constantly remade through social experiences, interactions, and encounters while at the same time through political, social, economic, and historical processes (Biehl, Good, and Kleinman 2007 and Schepers-Hughes 1992).

An examination of the subjectivities of street children and child street laborers requires an examination of the multiple connections and interconnections between the social, political, and economic conditions in which their lives take shape. In
anthropology, and particularly in the anthropological literature on street children and child street laborers, there appears to be a tendency to make social structure the central focus while completely overlooking the children’s subjectivities. This may be the result of these children, and children in general, not being viewed as human subjects or being viewed as incomplete or unmade. When these children are discussed, they are transformed into objects of concern and not human subjects (Biehl, Good, and Kleinman 2007). There is a need in anthropology to develop more complex theories of the subject, particularly the child as subject.

**Deconstructing the Child and the Street**

Ethnographic fieldwork on street children and child street laborers is most often centered on their victimization and vulnerability. These children are portrayed as exploited and objectified victims. Although all children tend to be portrayed as vulnerable and helpless, street children and child street laborers are portrayed as especially void of empowerment and are completely victimized (Kovats-Bernat 2006:3).

It seems that what is most problematic in studies of children, childhood, and the street is a conceptual one. The way in which we have defined and talk about these children is a matter of concern and is in need of change. Street children and child street laborers do not make up a homogenous group. The realities and everyday lives of these children across the globe are not the same. The lack of research with this particular population of children is noticeably lacking in geographic diversity, therefore making any recognition of the tremendous cross-cultural variation in the lives of these children seem non-existent.
In order for these concerns and questions to be addressed, we need to rethink and reexamine children and childhood. We need to problematize the categories of child, childhood, home, family, and street. A deconstruction of these categories is necessary if we are to truly get to the meanings of the social and public spaces in which these children work and live. We need to redefine the street and reexamine the way in which we have situated the child that lives and works there (Kovats-Bernat 2006).

Although anthropologists have been doing research on childhood since the 1990’s, they have contributed an incredibly small amount to the research and literature on street children and child street laborers. There is a need in anthropology for more comprehensive and qualitative data concerning the lived experience of poverty, violence, marginalization, and displacement from the perspective of children who live and work on the street. These children have been completely overlooked as social, cultural, political, and economic actors and producers and have been consistently and persistently confined to the home and the mother. Childhood in the literature is referred to as a time of transition and growth. The focus of childhood then is concerned with the process of becoming an adult as opposed to the experience of being a child. We need to study children and childhood on their own terms (Kovats-Bernat 2006:3).
Chapter 3  To the Streets: The Process of Becoming a Street and Working Child

Nobody’s on the street because they want to be. They’re on the street because something happened to them in their lives, in their family.

This is what Jaqueline (22) told me on my second to last day in the field. However, interestingly, most of the children and adolescents that I spoke to insisted that they are on the street, whether to live or work, because they want to be there. Both competing statements will be examined throughout this dissertation.

I have chosen to start with this particular quote for many reasons. First of all, this statement moved me. More important, this quote is a good starting point when talking about street and working children in Guarulhos, Brazil, or anywhere for that matter. It makes us ask ourselves: “Well then what happened in their lives and to their family,” which opens a discussion about what it is that brings these children to the street.

Perhaps even more problematic than conceptual definitions and the difficulty in identifying and classifying street and working children, which I discussed in chapter 2, are the reasons for their going to the street. Children and adolescents go to the street and use the street for a variety of reasons – to eat, to play, to work, to sleep, to socialize, to fight, to escape their households, to love and romance (Vogel & Mello 1991 and Kovats-Bernat 2006:40). As my dear friend Everson would always say, “Each case is its own. Every case is its own case.” I cannot emphasize this enough. An understanding and acknowledgement of the individual and their particular self and circumstances is of utmost importance. An examination of the individual is necessary if we are to adequately and equally bring to light the views of children and adolescents and hear their multiple voices, perspectives, and experiences (Rizzini & Thapliyal 2007). However, as we will
see, there are common underlying factors throughout the stories of these children and adolescents in terms of what brought them to the street.

My work examines the individual in order to understand their internal experiences, reality, and subjectivity as well as to recognize their agency. However, while I look at the situation and circumstances of each individual “child” in a street situation, I also take into consideration the situations and circumstances of “children” in a street situation. When we look solely at the individual, our arguments become decontextualized, resulting in the tendency to want to find who is responsible (Bourgois 1996). Unfortunately, the family is usually the first place we point our fingers. Such a view only further stigmatizes poor families by placing the blame on them (Szanton Blanc 1994, Ennew & Swart-Kruger 2003:2 and Offit 2008). When we refer to the phenomenon of street children and child street labor as a problem of family dysfunction or breakdown, we fail to recognize larger structural inequalities that have marginalized these children and their families (Naverson 1989, Alves 1991 and Marquez 1999, Glasser & Bridgman 1999 and Farmer 2005). As Vannuzia Leal Peres (2001) reported:

…generally the crisis are associated with the broader social context, such as unemployment and lack of access to formal education which make the natural movement of the life-cycle difficult, bringing problems to the organization and functioning of daily life for these families (Peres 2001:69).

In other words, it is the structural violence of scarcity, poverty, and marginalization that is largely responsible for displacing these children from their families and homes, ultimately creating their street situation, which this chapter attempts to get at (Kovats-Bernat 2006).
The phenomenon of children and adolescents in a street situation is without a doubt a socio-economic one. Any examination of street and working children must make visible the sources of violence, exclusion, and invisibility in the lives of these children and adolescents, capturing the social, cultural, political, and economic structure while also at the same time the individual and their subjectivity (Biehl 2005). The stories of the children, adolescents, and young adults that I am about the present are a contribution to that end in that they provide us with an on the ground perspective on the causes and consequences of poverty and violence. I share the stories of multiple children, adolescents, and young adults who live and work, or once lived and worked, on the street in order to provide insight into the complexity of life for children and adolescents in a street situation. I also share various stories to capture the multiplicity of experiences that led to their street situation in order to shatter the myth of any homogenization of street and working children while also at the same time to demonstrate the commonality of their experiences (Kovats-Bernat 2006). More important, I share various stories in order to examine how the child integrates the street into their own subjectivity. This requires an understanding of why and how the street became a solution for each individual child, which is necessary if we are to identify the best needs and rights of the child, which I get at in chapter 7.

**Children of vs. Children on the Street**

It is important to mention that those on the street – child street laborers - are defined and distinguished from those of the street – street children - in terms of how they are identified and classified. This separation is mostly based on the ways in which they
use the street and the activities they are engaged in on the street – child street laborers work on it, street children live on it (Kovats-Bernat 2006). These children comprise very different groups, appropriate very different spaces, and do not come into contact or interact with one another, which is why I have decided to use the terms of and on the street, to maintain that separation. Although these terms work as an organizing principle, which again, is the only reason I have chosen to use them, they are also problematic and do not work, as they fail to provide us with any kind of understanding of who these children are. These categories reduce these children to a single trait or characteristic, which is the material space they occupy. They do not take account for the complexities of their lives, histories, and formation of their subjectivities while living and working on the street. Finally, these labels and categories are associated with negative stereotypes and therefore confine and imprison these children, as they are much of the cause of their criminalization, repression, violent reactions towards, and further marginalization.

However, both groups are viewed as “street children” by the larger social body and are therefore viewed as criminals and social ills (Rizzini et al. 2007). More important is that those of and those on the street come from similar conditions. They even come from the same comunidades. For some children there is what seems to be a very fine line between being on and being of the street. I met some children who had spent time being both on and of the street. Other children that I spoke to who were on the street had siblings who were of the street. These children were born and raised in the same household yet they took very different paths in their lives. This may be the result of different children responding to situations differently, having different experiences within
the home and relationships with family members, having different personalities, or a combination of these (Felsman 1989, Biehl 2005 and Hunte 2009).

The large majority of the children and adolescents with whom I spoke, both of and on the street, reported poverty, economic pressures, issues within the home including fighting, violence, abuse, alcoholism and drug addiction, migration, and economic shocks to the household or changes occurring within the home including mobility\(^1\) or instability of place, divorce, and illness or death of a parent or caregiver as the major reasons for their going to the street, whether to live or to work. Other factors reported include issues of unemployment or low-wage labor among parents and caregivers, the introduction of a stepfather to the home, a high number of children, which creates greater economic pressure, the influence of friends, siblings and other relatives, having nothing to do and nowhere to do it, and the desire for freedom and independence (Aptekar 1988a, 1988b, 1988c & 1988d, Connolly 1990, Dodge & Raundalen 1991, Wright et al. 1993a & 1993b, Szanton Blanc 1994, Marquez 1999, Kilbride et al. 2000, Duryea et al. 2003, Biehl 2005, Kovats-Bernat 2006, Offit 2008 and Hunte 2009). Throughout the literature and the

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\(^1\) Mobility, which has also been termed “instability,” refers to changes within the home and is one of the few constants in the lives of these children. Many of these children are constantly mobile, moving between their family homes, various aid and disciplinary institutions, and various places throughout the city. This mobility, which Claudia Fonseca (1994) calls “circulation,” consists of sending a child to live with a relative or neighbor. This practice has been labeled as a long time survival strategy among the poor in Brazil in order to meet basic and minimum immediate or short-term needs. However, this practice is also carried out for non-economic reasons, which include the death of a parent or caregiver, family discord, or problems within the home (Fonseca 1994, Gregori 2000 and Rizzini & Butler 2003). Mobility should not be confused with negligence, but instead should been viewed as alternate strategies of care or survival strategies that the poor have had to develop as a result of an unjust class system (Fonseca 1989 and Rizzini et al. 2007).
stories of the children and adolescents I spoke to, there also appears to be a connection between a child’s relationship to his or her mother and whether or not they go to the street, which I will discuss at the end of this chapter (Aptekar 1988a, Szanton Blanc 1994, Hecht 1998, Marquez 1999, Kilbride et al. 2000 and Panter-Brick 2000.

All of these children’s stories and lives, both of and on, are based around the family, but in very different ways, which this chapter attempts to get at. For those of the street, the street is viewed as a place to live in opposition to home. For them, the street is their main reference point, as it exists in conflict with home and the family. For those on the street, home is typically their main reference point. The street becomes a place that works with, complements, and benefits the family. The street and the economic opportunity that it provides can almost be seen as that which maintains and in some cases even strengthens the position of the child within the home and family.

Both groups view the street as a space of freedom and hope, however, they are looking for hope in different ways, different spaces, and from different people. All of these children and adolescents, both of and on the street, go to the street in search of something that the family and the home cannot, or is unable to offer. The street provides that which would otherwise be out of reach, whether it be food and other resources, freedom, independence, adventure, play, time with friends, money and economic opportunity, visibility, a sense of belonging and being somebody, or protection and escape from their homes and family life (Rizzini & Butler 2003). All of these children go to the street because the street, for them, is a solution, but again, it is a solution in different ways. Those of the street view the street as the solution to their way out of
family conflicts and difficulties. Those of the street also do not appear to have strong ties or links to the home or with family members in the home. Those on the street view the street as the solution to family conflicts and difficulties. These children appear to have some kind of existing ties within the home and with family members in the home that keeps them in the home.

Amanda (27) who currently works on the street guarding/parking cars, and previously lived and worked on the street as child, commented on the fine line between being of and being on the street, while also differentiating between the two.

Many adolescents today are in the street to meet friends and their friends influence them and they get to know crack and they like it and they don’t want to return home. And then there are cases where there are difficulties in the home. Kids who are begging, it’s due to the difficulties that the family is experiencing at home, with the mom and dad unemployed, hunger. There are homes where the dad drinks, the mom drinks, they use crack, and they leave the kids alone at home and hungry, so they go to the street to get food for themselves. So they’re not always going out to bring money back home, but in some cases they’re going out to look for food. They’re looking for something to eat. They know how to get around, they know how to take the bus, they know where the fairs are where they can get something to eat… Or there’s conflict and confusion between the mom and dad or the mom and the stepdad and the child can’t take it anymore and they leave to clear their head. When the mom has a lot of kids and no condition and the dad dies or the stepfather… It’s a lot of things. And on the street, they make friends, and with those friends, they get involved with different things that aren’t good, like I did. Just seeing them do it and then wanting to try it to see how it is. The world that they’re in of just looking for rice and beans to eat, they already enter in a different world.

The above statement captures the uncertainty of these children’s lives, choices, and actions at the particular moment when they “choose” to go to the street, whether to live or to work. The conditions, or complete lack thereof, within their homes are what lead to their search for a solution on the street. This search is usually motivated by the
need for food, resources, friendship, freedom, opportunity, or a better life. For some it begins as an escape from the violence and pain of their everyday lives and therefore a search for that which can make life more bearable. For others, the search is not for a better life, but instead is a search for something different than their present conditions, an out of whatever situation they are trying to find themselves out of. The uncertainty lies in their initial search that brings them to the street, as it is an action or a moment that is made up of the unknown, with unknown consequences. This search will be explored throughout this dissertation, as these children and adolescents engage with the world of the street, with their lives unfolding in each chapter, constructing and developing their subjectivities in the process.

**Children of the Street in Guarulhos, Brazil: 4 Case Studies**

Most participants reported family issues such as fighting, violence, abuse, neglect, abandonment, confinement, insufficient emotional and financial resources, death of a parent, introduction of a stepparent to the home, usually a stepfather, and drug and alcohol abuse and addiction either among the child or their parents and family members, or both, as the major reasons for leaving home to live on the street (Scharf et al. 1986, Smith 1987-1988, Richter 1988a, Swart 1988, Keen 1989 and Offit 2008). Again, children who go to the street to live view the street as a way out of family conflicts and difficulties. As will be seen in their stories, all of their lives are filled with painful and frequent ruptures, episodes of violence, extreme poverty, and complete loss or weakening of affective ties (Rizzini et al. 2007). However, the ruptures, instability, and insecurity
cannot be confused with dysfunction and disorder, but instead must be viewed as a result of the structural violence of the political economy that wreaks havoc on their lives.

Because many of their families are completely without any kind of necessary support services for themselves and their children, there comes a time when the home no longer meets the needs, both material and emotional, because it is no longer able to meet the needs of the child. As a result, these children go to the street with the hope that the street will meet those needs. Many of these children go to the street in search of freedom and autonomy of time, space, and body, with freedom being from the constraints of conventional life and the adult world that have in many ways failed them. In many cases, these children seek out the street for protection and escape. They go to the street to lose themselves in search of a new self, a sense of belonging, stable ties, and a place in the world as human beings, which are crucial for the formation of identity (Vogel & Mello 1991 and Rizzini et al. 2007). At this point the child distances themselves from the family and the home. After spending one or two days on the street, the child gets used to it and slowly begins to spend more and more time on it until, over time, they stay permanently (Moura 1991). In most cases, a weakening of family ties is what causes these children to turn to others and elsewhere: the street. When ties and solidarity in the home weaken, the influence and power of the street strengthens, which is when their search for different kinds of relationships begins (Hecht 1998 and Rizzini et al. 2007).

These children and adolescents come to view themselves as street children or of the street for reasons that go much deeper than a mere lack of a material shelter or home. Instead, it has much more to do with the amount of time spent on the street without
returning home, the causes that led to their street situation, their relationship to the street and with others of the street, and therefore the identities they develop while on the street. Their search on the street ultimately results in the development of a new identity in a space where their subjectivities are shaped and where they begin to view themselves in relation to or separate from the family, the home, and the rest of society (Hecht 1998 and Kovats-Bernat 2006:74).

Jaqueline (23)

Jaqueline has the longest history on the street, which is partly why I chose to start with her story. Her history on the street is the longest because it begins with her mother, who also lives on the street. Because of Jaqueline’s drug addiction, I was unable to carry out a full structured interview, or conversation for that matter, with her. For this reason, much of the information about Jaqueline’s life came from other sources, mostly her cousin, Amanda, who grew up with Jaqueline, her friends who previously lived on the street, and PMMR staff who have known and worked with Jaqueline since she first went to the street. Bits and pieces of information were gathered from the rare times I myself saw Jaqueline, which was usually at the project where she would stop by for food and a shower, usually drunk, high on crack, or both.

Jaqueline has been living on the street since she was 12 years old. That is 11 years. She was 22 years old when I first met her and she turned 23 while I was in the field. She has six children who are all in the care of either family members or adoptive families. She has also had multiple miscarriages and self-induced abortions, as abortion is illegal in Brazil. Most of her pregnancies are the result of her involvement in prostitution. Many of her children were born with various health problems.

According to Jaqueline’s cousin, Amanda: “Her incentive to go to the street was her mom because her mom was a moradora de rua (a person who lives on the street). And it was at that time that she [Jaqueline’s mother] came to know crack, liked crack,
and abandoned everything all at once." Jaqueline’s mother has four children. She had her first child, who she brought with her to the street and ended up dying of pneumonia, Jaqueline, and two sons, one of whom has been sentenced to 15 years in prison, which he is currently serving, and the other, who previously a crack addict, is now clean, working, and goes to church.

When her mom abandoned everything, Jaqueline was three years old, her oldest was ten, and her youngest child was two. So my uncle stayed and raised them… He worked in the fields, collected paper and did other odd jobs on the street… He was also a user. My uncle died. He was hit by a car. Jaqueline was six when he died. Before he died, he asked my aunt to take care of his three children.

As we can see, drug use and abuse was something that was very prevalent in Jaqueline’s family. Not only is her mother a crack addict, but her father was too. Shortly after being abandoned by her mother for the street and crack at the age of three, Jaqueline lost her father who was hit by a car and killed when she was six years old. The death of her father serves as an example of the tragedies that are all too common in the lives of these children and their families. These tragedies are one of the few constants in their lives. They also serve as an example of one of the many kinds of crisis and economic shocks that all too commonly affect poor households. Finally, Jaqueline’s father’s informal, undervalued street labor is demonstrative of his education level, social class, and his contact with the street. All of these serve as examples of the structural violence of scarcity and poverty that devastate the lives of these children and their families.

When Jaqueline was seven years old, her mom came back. Jaqueline went with her mom to know the street. Her mom brought Jaqueline back and that’s how Jaqueline got a taste of the street and she liked it. When we are children, everything is fun. So it was something she never had. For her it wasn’t like she was on the street. She was on a ride.
Many children and adolescents, both of and on the street, spoke about the novelty of the street and getting a taste of the street. Those who liked it wanted more and went back. Many also made reference to the street as the ultimate adventure and play center and even compared the street to an amusement park while others referred to the street as an addiction, which I will discuss more in chapter 5, as their addictions develop and strengthen the longer they are on the street. More than anything, the street was an attachment that Jaqueline developed with and through her mother, which over time became an addiction.

“Her mother was also prostituting herself. And her mom is still alive. She still lives on the street and she is still using. And so that’s how Jaqueline is in the life she is today. When she was eleven, she was already using.” Similar to her mother, Jaqueline also prostitutes herself, and has been doing so for years, in exchange for crack or for money to buy crack.

While talking about their early life and childhood, as they grew up together, Amada spoke about the poverty and mistreatment that Jaqueline experienced at home as a child:

We experienced a lot of difficulty with getting food to eat, even with studying and just going to school and getting enrolled. During that time we had to go out and beg for money on the street. This was during the time that she was staying with my aunt and she was having difficulties with my aunt and she had to go out and beg. My aunt hit her when she didn’t do things and when she returned home empty handed. When her father died he left a government benefit for his children. My aunt took the money and spent it all. She also started to have a relationship and that was when Jaqueline started going to the street. There are many things that I can’t say because they are personal, but everything, all of these things brought her to where she is today.
It always appears to be a gradual progression and series of events that bring these children and adolescents, especially those of the street, to the street (Felsman 1981, Glauser 1990, Aptekar 1988a, 1988b, 1988c & 1988d & 1994, Hecht 1988, Visano 1990, Marquez 1999, Kovats-Bernat 2006 and Rizzini & Butler 2003). It is rarely, if ever, one thing or something that happens over night, but is instead a combination and accumulation of things that occur over time. As we can see, there were a number of things that occurred in Jaqueline’s life that eventually brought her to the street. It was a progression of factors that occurred over time with her family, beginning with abject poverty, a mother who abandoned her at the age of three for the street and her addiction to crack, the death of her father at six years of age, her mother coming back when she was seven years old to introduce Jaqueline to the addictions of crack and the street, in addition to minimal to no education, unemployment or low-waged, undervalued informal street labor, alcoholism and drug addiction, ultimately placing her in the home of a family member, her aunt, who mistreated her.

**Washington (23)**

*“People are not on the street for just one reason. There are many reasons.”*

Washington was born in Guarulhos. He currently lives in a comunidade with his girlfriend, Alice, who I will introduce later, and their son, who is one year and a half. Alice and Washington met at PMMR when they were receiving services and have been together ever since.

Who raised me was, well I call her my grandmother, but she’s really my mom. She’s not my blood grandmother. She raised me from when I was four up until I was 12. And then I started getting involved with bad things when I was living with her when I was about 11 years old. I started getting involved with friends and started using drugs… And then I went to live with my real mom. I was 12 years old.
When Washington was seven years old his “grandmother” told him his life story.

The story that they told me was that I was abandoned. They told me that they abandoned me in a trash bag. It was my grandma’s daughter who found me and took me to her house. I lived in their house and they really mistreated me. And my grandma, the one that raised me, came and was like no, let me take him and raise him. And I went to live with her when I was four years old.

You could hear the pain in Washington’s laughter that followed him telling the story of his life. Washington was found in a trash bag as an infant shortly after his father died.

He [his father] had own his faults too. He robbed cattle and sold it. One day he robbed the wrong person and the guys came after him and killed my dad. The guys that killed my dad were also threatening to kill my mom, so she sold the house and gave each of her kids away, all of us. None of us were raised by her. Now she’s living in my brother’s house. He was given away and raised in an orphanage and he graduated and everything. He has a career, a wife, and a son too. At that time she had 14 children but only 11 lived and all 11 were spread out all over the place.

Similar to many others of the street, Washington already had experiences on and a taste of the street before actually going to the street to live. He already knew what it was like and already had friends from the street. As Washington himself said, he was already on his way.

When I lived with my grandma, I already had the habit of messing around in the center when they had a funk party or something and sometimes I stayed the whole night on the street. I was 10 or 11 and already on my way. I already knew how it was more or less… From my grandma’s I came back here [to Guarulhos] to my moms and I stayed in her house for about one or two months and we started to fight a lot. I’ve always been the kind of person who doesn’t like others telling me what to do. I’m the kind of person that likes to live for me, my way, have my opinions, do the things I want to do. So I came to live with her and she was wanting to boss me around, and I left her house because I wasn’t able to live with her.
Washington expressed a strong need for autonomy, or the need and desire to define his life on his own terms, which was another factor that brought him to the street (Tyler et al. 1987 & 1991 and Aptekar 1994). However, much of his need for autonomy was most likely a need for autonomy from the reality of his life and from his biological mother, who abandoned him in a trash bag as an infant.

What ultimately brought Washington to the street was the transition to his biological mother’s home with whom there was discord. This led Washington to go in search for something else, an out or escape from his situation at home and from the reality of his life. Washington’s older brother, who already had knowledge of, a connection to, and friends on the street, and with whom he got along well, served as another incentive to go to the street.

I came with my brother. He lived on the street too. He brought me to the center and introduced me to his friends and I stayed with him for a few days on the street and got used to it and started staying on the street and forgot about school. Before when I went to the street for the funk parties, it was more to be with my friends. It was for fun. But then when I came to Guarulhos to live with my mom, that’s when I started to go to the street because we didn’t get along at home. And when my brother got out of prison, we got along really well and that’s when I started leaving home. That’s when I started making friends and having a place to stay so I didn’t have to be at home listening to this and that and fighting with my mom.

Washington went to the street following the footsteps of his older brother. His brother, who seemed to be the only person with whom he had any connection or relationship in the home, introduced him to the street and to others of the street, making Washington feel close to the street, where he was accepted, protected, and part of something. This same brother was released from prison three years ago and shortly after getting out, he was shot and killed by a police officer. Again, there were many factors
that brought Washington to the street. As Washington himself stated: “People are not on the street for just one reason. There are many reasons.” However, more than anything, it was his situation at home and the reality of his life that ultimately led him to the street. Following the conclusions of Kovats-Bernat (2006), for Washington, the street held promises of freedom and autonomy. It was a space that existed in opposition to the household of his biological mother and to the reality of his life. For Washington, it seems that going to the street was an action in which he was trying to overcome the rejection and abandonment of his life, which started out in a trash bag.

**Vitor (18)**

Unfortunately, Vitor was not the one to tell me his story. Again, due to his drug use and abuse, an interview and conversation with him was not possible. I gathered pieces of his life story through his rare and very short visits to PMMR, where he would stop by for a quick shower or hot cup of coffee in the morning, conversations with PMMR staff, and conversations with his friends with whom he used to live on the street for many years. Because his story did not come from Vitor himself, I questioned whether or not I should even include it. I chose to include it because it serves as an important example of factors that can bring children and adolescents to the street. I also chose to include his story because much of it was told to me by his friends who love him, and I trust them. But finally, I had to include Vitor and whatever I could of his story because I saw him almost die and the memories of this greatly affect me today.

Vitor left home because he had psychological problems. His mom took him to a psychiatric clinic where he received shock treatment and injections. He went in and came out even crazier. Maybe he didn’t have a problem, but then he started taking medications, which ended up making his problems worse, so drugs were the solution.

Vitor is believed to have schizophrenia. However, the hallucinations and other things that he experiences may instead be the result of his drug abuse and the extreme lifestyle he has lived for so many years on the street. As his friends stated, maybe he did
and does have a psychological issue or mental illness of some kind that worsened as a result of the psychiatric treatments and medications he received, especially in his case, with his family not having the resources to access and receive adequate and humane treatment, ultimately subjecting him to the specific type of (mal)treatment that is reserved for the urban poor (Biehl 2005). It could also be a result of the psychiatric treatments he received and combined with illicit drugs. The case of Vitor is also unique in that, unlike Washington who followed his older brother to the street, Vitor, who is the youngest in his family, went to the street first and was followed by his older brother.

It was soon after he started getting treatment at seven or eight years old that he ended up running away from home. And Vitor had a sister who got involved with a lot of bad things. She taught him how to smoke a cigarette. She taught him a lot of things. And then she was killed by drug traffickers. He talked about her a lot. He was exposed to stuff at home and to things with his sister and he didn’t have anyone who could understand him at the time. He didn’t have adequate treatment. Vitor didn’t have support from his family. We didn’t either, but his family already had problems. His dad drank, he already had psychological problems, and he was hyperactive. His mom threw him in whatever place so he could get treated because he was a burden for her and because she already suffered because her husband drank a lot and beat her. He beat Vitor too. A child shouldn’t be treated the way he was.

The conditions in Vitor’s home appear to be the major contributing factor that led him to the street. Similar to Washington, the street for Vitor was a place to live in opposition to home (Kovats-Bernat 2006). In addition to his family and psychological history, which included the violent death of his sister, domestic violence, alcoholism, and being released from the “care” of his mother and placed into the “care” of various psychiatric clinics, it also seems that agency, or a lack thereof, played a role in Vitor going to the street. According to Everson: “Vitor was a unique case. But for Vitor, I
can’t say that it’s his fault, because of his life trajectory. I wouldn’t say he’s in the situation he’s in simply because of the decisions he made. I was always conscious but I don’t know about Vitor.” Based on Everson’s statement, Vitor’s “psychological problems,” as Everson referred to them, may have interfered with his awareness, thus minimizing his responsibility or ability to “choose” to go to the street. Everson on the other hand, who I will introduce next, takes full responsibility for his choices, which, according to him, were essentially what brought him to the street. Those with agency then appear to be viewed as being responsible for their lives and decisions, which in the case of these children and adolescents means being responsible for their destruction, suffering, and abandonment (Biehl 2005).

Another factor that is also important to consider, is the following:

For Vitor, everything was really good. Everyone on the street liked him and the more irresponsible he was, it was an incentive for him. It motivated him. So maybe if he hadn’t received that kind of treatment at home, he wasn’t noticed, with us he was the center of attention. So we could have made things more difficult for him. I know that I’m responsible for what I went through, but I also think we interfered in the lives of each other because you don’t do things alone and there were a lot of people involved with us. It was really good. And maybe the same goes for him. Because he was so well liked by everyone. For him it was great. But today it’s unfortunate.

Not only is Vitor the youngest in his family, he was also the youngest in their group, or street family. Although he was the youngest in age, he was looked upon, treated, respected, and followed as group leader because he was so crazy and fun. It appears then that along with his new identity as street child came social solidarity and a new recognition, visibility, subjectivity, and agency, which all serve as another incentive to go to the street and stay on the street (Hecht 1998 and Kovats-Bernat 2006). On the
street, Vitor experienced the acceptance of others, a sense of belonging, security, and stable ties, which were all absent in his home with his family. The street was a space where he was somebody to others. It seems that the street was the only space where Vitor was able to find a place for himself in the world as a human being (Rizzini et al. 2007).

**Everson (22)**

*I left because I wanted to leave… I left home exclusively because I wanted freedom.***

Everson was born in Guarulhos. He was raised by his mother and stepfather. He has a total of nine siblings. *Tia* (Auntie) Lourdes, who has been a street educator at PMMR for the last 25 years, who is also a dear friend of mine, introduced Everson and I. She loves Everson like a son and trusted me enough to ask him if he would meet and talk with me. Everson is enormous in size and is one of the most gentle people I have ever met. Unlike the other individuals I met who either live or previously lived on the street, there is not a hint or trace of the street or his past in his eyes. Everson was also the most articulate participant that I spoke with.

He wanted to talk about every detail of his life. He referred to our conversations, and we had many, as more of venting sessions than interviews, as the latter, according to Everson, are “mechanical,” while what we did was more “real.” My deepest thanks to *Tia* Lourdes who made it possible for Everson and I to sit and talk life.

When I came to the street I was nine years old. I’m going to be 23 in December. I spent 13 years on the street. 13 years. I was trying to think about how I could explain to you what brought me to the street and I wasn’t able to discover a reason. When I was a child we weren’t without anything at home. We lived in a *comunidade*, we were poor, but we had everything we needed. Not everything we wanted, but we had what we needed, a good upbringing. And so I was thinking, could it be that I left home because I was beaten? It wasn’t that either. My mom did hit me, but it was an old school disciplinary thing, so it wasn’t for that reason either. I never got along really well with my dad. I know who he is, I know where he lives, but we aren’t close. I had a stepfather, but I got along really well with him. So it wasn’t for that reason either because I had a paternal figure at home. So I was thinking, what was it that seduced me to go to the street? I think it was freedom. I felt a lack of freedom because my mom was the really protective type. Because of one case in
the family, my oldest brother, who’s still in prison, so I think she was trying to protect us so that we wouldn’t do the same. My mom locked me up in the house a lot and I wanted freedom to go out and make friends and I didn’t have that. So I went looking for that on the street… I left home exclusively because I wanted freedom.

Everson’s mother’s concern for him resulted in his being strictly confined to the home as a form of protection. Everson spoke a lot about feeling a lack of community relations because of his mother’s fear of his getting in trouble, ultimately not allowing him to develop social bonds beyond or outside of the home and family, which are important and necessary in the development process. This created a conflict in Everson, resulting in a desire to break away from the home or the private sphere and attempt to create and build bonds in the forbidden public sphere.

Similar to Washington, Everson also expressed a strong need and desire for autonomy, or the need to define his life on his own terms (Tyler et al. 1987 & 1991 and Aptekar 1994). Perhaps going to the street, at least in part, was an act of empowerment and an attempt to gain control over his life (Hickson & Gayden 1989 and Aptekar 1994). On the street, many experience a sense of freedom that they had not known previously in their homes. With this freedom comes a significant increase in agency (Kovats-Bernat 2006). For this reason, they end up spending more time on the street and less time in their homes and with their families. However, as Everson’s story continues to develop, we will see that it was not solely a desire for freedom, but instead, there were many factors that brought Everson to the street.

So our life was school and home. We were really locked up and we never had a lot of freedom to converse. We never had that, that relationship with your mom and dad that’s open and you can talk to them. I didn’t have that with my mom or my brothers…. So, a beautiful mistake, I was going to
school, I always went by bus, and I would pass my bus stop and come here to the center. Then I met people on the street, made friends, and instead of going to school, I would come straight here. I was nine years old. So I would stay on the street until school was done and then I would go home until one day, I never returned. So it was freedom. There’s not anyone controlling you and you’re living new things, having new experiences, making new friends. So it could have been that which brought me to the street. At the time everything was new.

Everson mentioned the absence of support, communication, and close relationships with his family members, which seem to be another factor that led him to leave home (Rizzini & Butler 2003). As for all of those who go to the street, particularly to live, Everson went to the street in search of that which was missing in his life, which was contact, communication, support, and closeness. His leaving home then had to do with developing a new identity through identification with the street and the promise of freedom that it held as well as through social solidarity with others. This allowed Everson to free himself from the constraints of his home life and poverty and access agency through his new identity, social networks, and relationships (Hecht 1998 and Kovats-Bernat 2006).

Throughout all of our conversations, Everson spoke a lot about the importance of having someone to look up to while growing up, a role model or living example of someone who is doing good things, someone to show you that you can do something different, and show you that there are opportunities and possibilities for growth and change. These examples provide these children with an opportunity to dream about doing something in life other than shining shoes, selling drugs, and stealing. However, as Everson said himself, he and his friends chose to follow the wrong examples, which were those that were closer to them and their situation and reality.
Everson’s older brother has been in and out of prison starting very early on in his life. The first time his brother went to FEBEM, which is a juvenile detention center, was when he seven years old. During his time in FEBEM, he killed at least two individuals, the first when he was only 12 years old. Although Everson mentioned that because his brother was always away in prison, he never had that role model of an older brother, he also spoke about how even with his being away from home, as he was on the street, he served as a role model for his younger brothers. “And my younger brothers, even though I wasn’t living with them, I was an example for them, because I was the only man. I wasn’t in prison.” Even in his absence, Everson himself states that he was an example and role model for his younger siblings, just as I believe Everson’s older brother served as an example for Everson while growing up. I am certain that his brother’s presence, even in his absence, influenced and affected him deeply.

Everson only told me his mother’s story during our second conversation. Interestingly, he started her story with “unfortunately.”

Unfortunately, my mom came from Bahia to here when she was only 13 years old. She did the first and second grades only. She knew how to read and write, the basics. She came here to survive because things weren’t working out in Bahia. She went to work as a domestic worker, got a boss, and went to live with her boss. She was assaulted and sexually abused by him. Because she was a minor, she was locked up in the home. So, she was living in that environment and then she met a man and got married really young. Soon after they married she discovered that he was a bank robber. He used a lot of drugs and beat her. So one day he robbed a bank and his companions wanted his portion of the money and killed him. So she found herself alone with three children to raise and no job. She never went after anything or specialized in anything. So my life story begins there, with the opportunities that my mom didn’t have, that my dad didn’t have. She didn’t give me the opportunity to grow in life too, you know. She didn’t have the stability to have one child, and she had three children. And then she met my father and had me and then in her third marriage she
had two more children. So she had a lot of responsibility ever since she was very young and she never had the opportunity to create and take care of her own future in order to maybe have a better future for her children. Everything happened unplanned. So, my story begins there. We didn’t get a lot of opportunities, which is what we deserved. All of that support, going to school, good courses when we were younger. We didn’t have a lot of opportunity and that’s what happens in Brazil.

Here Everson is referring to a history of structural violence when he states that his life story and lack of opportunity begins with his mother’s life story and her lack of opportunity. The histories of these children and adolescents and their families are shaped by the political, economic, social, and material context in which they live. They are a group of people who have been historically excluded, deprived, and as Everson would say, forgotten, and their lives continue as such (Berlant 2011).

Everson highlights another important point, which also happens to be one of many factors that is common among most children both of and on the street and their families: rural to urban or North to South migration, particularly to Sao Paulo. Sao Paulo is viewed as the land of opportunity for all Brazilians as it is the social, political, cultural, and economic heart of Brazil. Sao Paulo is the Brazilian dream. Although migration is common among the children, adolescents, and their families with whom I spoke to, (Munoz & Pachon 1980, de Galan 1981, Wright et al. 1993a & 1993b and Aptekar 1994) not all children living and working on the street are migrants or the children of migrants (Tellez 1976, Villota 1979 and Rosa et al. 1992,).

According to Everson, his mother’s life and lack of opportunity is where his life and lack of opportunity began. His mother was poor, black, uneducated, from the northeast, and was unprepared for life in Sao Paulo. Not only did Everson comment on
how he felt confined and restricted due to his mother locking him up inside the home in order to protect him, but he also spoke about being confined or limited by poverty and a lack of opportunity, which was essentially passed on to him and his siblings. Throughout all of our conversations, Everson spoke about inequality in Brazil. He talked about those to whom he referred as the favored and those who are forgotten. When speaking about the Brazilian government, he would say, “They have forgotten about us.” He clearly views himself and his family as part of the forgotten class. All of the lives and stories of these children and adolescents begin with the lack of opportunities of their parents and families who have also been forgotten. In this way, the violence of a history of structural violence is something that is done to and reserved for the forgotten.

**Children on the Street in Guarulhos, Brazil: 2 Case Studies**

In Guarulhos you’ll see a lot of children on the street, but it’s more because their parents put them there to sell candy, to beg for money.

This statement made by Everson is a good entry into a discussion about children and adolescents on the street, who in this particular study I refer to as child street laborers. However, and more important, this statement is representative of what the large majority of society, including many street educators at PMMR, thinks about child street laborers. Many believe, or would like to believe, that child street laborers are victims of exploitation and that their labor is forced onto them by their families (Offit 2008). Although this does in fact happen, and I did come across cases where this was the situation, this was not the case for the majority of the child street laborers that I spoke to. As Alice stated:
There are a lot of people that think it’s the parents that send the kids to work, that make them work. The majority thinks its exploitation of children. Some kids work on the street because they want to. They go either because they need to or because they want to make money. They want to go and make money and they want to play. Some go because they don’t have anything to do at home, so they go to the street.

The child street laborers I spoke to, starting very early in their lives, have known the street and have had some form of contact with the street. These children reported poverty, economic pressures and opportunity, issues within the home, including fighting, violence, abuse, alcoholism and drug addiction, changes occurring within the home and economic shocks to the household, such as divorce, family illness, death of a parent or caregiver, moving between the homes of family members, abandonment, unemployment or informal, undervalued, low-waged labor of a parent or caregiver, a high number of children, the influence of friends, siblings and other relatives, having nothing to do and nowhere to do it, and the desire for freedom and independence as the major reasons for their going to the street to work (Aptekar 1988a, 1988b, 1988c & 1988d, Connolly 1990, Dodge & Raundalen 1991, Wright et al. 1993a & 1993b, Szanton Blanc 1994, Marquez 1999, Kilbride et al. 2000, Duryea et al. 2003, Kovats-Bernat 2006 and Offit 2008).

Proximity and availability of labor, such as place of residence or with whom one lives, can also determine whether or not a child works. For example, I was informed that children in some areas of the interior of Sao Paulo state, unlike children in urban areas like Guarulhos and Sao Paulo capital, do not work. Also, children who live in comunidades that are located closer to the city center may also be more prone to work, as they have more access to economic opportunity. Again, regardless of what the reasons are, all of these children go to the street in search of something, whether it be food,
freedom, adventure, play, time with friends, money and economic opportunity, independence, visibility, or to escape from their homes and family life (Rizzini & Butler 2003).

Economic pressures or financial difficulty is often what initially brings a child to the street to work. On the street, children are able to easily access money and resources that are not available at home. In this way, they are able to help at home through their economic contributions to the household, which may even include their temporary absence from the home leaving one less mouth to feed, supporting themselves, or both. Whatever the reason, the child, by taking to the street to work is able to help at home. Unlike street children who seek out the street as a clear negation, separation, or break from the home, many working children appear to have almost the opposite relationship to the street and to the home, as it is through the street that they are able to maintain strong ties or some kind of tie to the home by helping the home through their economic contributions to the household and family income.

All of the children, adolescents, and young adults I spoke to reported four general reasons for children being on the street: 1) they work because they need to, to help their moms and the difficulties they are experiencing; 2) they work because their moms make them; 3) they want to work to buy what they want; and finally 4) some work to buy drugs.

Sandra (18)

Sandra was born in Lagoas, Maceio, in the Northeast of Brazil. She lives with her mother, her mother’s boyfriend, who she calls her stepfather, and her 12 brothers and sisters. She does not get along with her stepfather because he hits her mother in front of her. Besides making maca do amor
(candied apples) for her children to sell, Sandra’s mother does not work. Her stepfather works with *bicos*, which are informal under the table jobs. Her mother was receiving *Bolsa Familia* (Family Grants, which is a government stipend) at one point in time, but because so many of her children were missing so much school, she lost the benefit. All 12 of Sandra’s siblings have worked selling candy and sweets on the street.

Sandra started working on the street selling candy when she was 14 years old.

We helped our mom. We went to work to help her buy things for the house, like gas when we didn’t have it. I would cry to not have to sell candy on the street. I got home crying and I thought about leaving home because that life was not good for me, because, for example, if I didn’t sell and I arrived home with the candy, my mom would tell me off…. “Oh, you’re not making enough money. You need to work more.”

Sandra, unlike independent child street laborers, describes her labor and contributions to the household economy, mainly to her mother, as unfair and something that she had no control over. Her situation of labor was instead based on that of force or coercion, which was in the form of verbal threats and abuse, and possibly even physical threats and abuse, as her mother would yell at her when she would return home with unsold candy and no money (Lem 2002 and Offit 2008). Her case was not a case where she herself “chose” to work on the street. When asked who she was working for, she said, “My mom.” Sandra was the only participant that said that she worked for someone other than herself. Going to the street and working was not something Sandra wanted or liked. She was not able or allowed to enjoy the fruits of her labor, as her labor and the profits from her labor were under the control of her mother, with the whole of her salary going to her mother. Because of her situation of forced labor, Sandra thought many times about running away from home. Her older sister, Lucimara (20), with whom she is very
close and spent most of her days with working on the street, did leave home to live on the street, where she got involved with drugs.

Alice (22)

“Everything was already moving along. I went too.”

Alice and her family are from the State of Ceara, which is in the Northern part of Brazil, moved to Guarulhos when she was a baby because her family was experiencing a lot of difficulty. “They didn’t have a doctor. They didn’t have work. We experienced a lot of hunger and we only ate cornmeal because it was the cheapest thing. We didn’t even have beans so we ate cornmeal morning, noon, and night.” Neither of Alice’s parents studied. They both worked on the fields. Alice has three older sisters, all of whom live in Guarulhos. She is the youngest of the four.

I was five years old when my mom died and my dad was really sad and he returned to the North to live with his mom and they both died. When my dad died I was eight years old. He left when I was five. I stayed with my older sister. She was 18 at the time. She raised me and my two sisters. I was five, one was eight, the other was 12. She took care of us. Then she started working cleaning peoples homes to support us. She didn’t abandon us. She raised us all together experiencing difficulties and everything.

“Difficulty” usually refers to financial difficulty, which was exacerbated by the definitive rupture to the family unit, which included the death of her mother, which was followed by abandonment by her father, creating a particularly vulnerable situation for Sandra and her sisters. After losing both of their parents at the age of five, Alice and her sisters were left to fend for themselves. The four daughters have always had a very close bond. Their strong family ties are essential to understanding what brought them to the street in order to stay together. The oldest of the four took on the responsibility of raising, taking care of, and financially supporting her three younger sisters and the household. Alice’s oldest sister was not receiving any government benefits, like Bolsa Familia, because she was raising her sisters and not her children.
She [her oldest sister] started working first and we stayed home. When the second oldest got older, then she started working too. She also cleaned homes. And the third oldest, she met our neighbor and our neighbor brought her to the stoplight. She was 10 and she sold candy at the stoplight. And then I started going with my sister to sell candy. I was eight years old… Everything was already moving along. I went too… My sister was going and I wanted to go too. Why could she go and I couldn’t (laughs)? I wanted to go with her and I helped my sister too. We all worked. And my sister had her kids, and then I started bringing my older nieces and nephews to the stoplight to help us. One was 12 and the other was nine.

Alice started working when she was eight years old with one of her sisters selling candy at a stoplight. Similar to Alice, virtually all of the children and adolescents that I spoke to gained entry to street labor through an older family member, friend, or neighbor who was already working on the street and who taught them a certain skill or particular type of work. In the case of Alice, her older sister was brought to the street and taught the ins and outs of selling candy on the street through their neighbor and friend. Alice wanted to go with and accompany her sister. She wanted to know and do what her sister was doing. However, it was need more than anything that brought Alice to the street. Her oldest sister was experiencing difficulty supporting her three younger sisters and a household. Alice and her sisters were left with no other option but the street because of the death of their mother and abandonment by their father, which created an even more precarious economic situation at home. Therefore Alice and her sisters entered the work force and went to the street because they needed the money and because they wanted to stay together. In this way, going to the street to work was that which made it possible for Alice and her sisters to remain together, maintaining the household, home, and family unit.
Similar to most child street laborers, the work of Alice and her sister was not consistent.

I stopped working and then time would go by and then I would work again. When my sister had a good job I didn’t need to work and then if she lost her job and we experienced difficulty again, then we went again [to the stoplight]. When we didn’t have things at home, we came. There were days I didn’t go. There were times that I didn’t need to go. Sometimes we had money from the day before. That way we would go one day and not the next. It wasn’t everyday… If it was raining, we didn’t go because you can’t work at the stoplight in the rain. When it was really hot in the morning, we went a little later.

I did often see children working on hot days, cold days, and even in the rain. As we can see, Alice went to the stoplight usually during times of need, or when there were changes in the home or economic shocks to the household economy, like loss of a job.

**What Brings Children to the Street?**

While the forces that created the street situation of each individual child were unique to that child, they were also not unique in that there are commonalities and experiences that are shared among the children and adolescents I spoke to, whose stories are shared in this work. All of the children’s families live in conditions of material scarcity and economic misery. They are placed in and confined to zones of abandonment and are viewed and treated as valueless. In these zones, they are almost guaranteed to not succeed and their lives not improve. This serves as an example of the structural or imposed factors and constraints that condition their lives, choices, and activities (Biehl 2005:20-21).
Family

According to Tobias Hecht (1998), a child’s relationship with their mother plays a key role in whether or not they become a street child. According to Hecht, when a child is abandoned or abandons their mother, they become a street child (Hecht 1998:115). Similarly, children living on the streets of Caracas (Marquez 1999) and Colombia (Aptekar 1988a, 1988b, 1988c, & 1988d) are reported to go to the street when a mother dies, struggles with drug and alcohol addiction, or is unable to care for her children because she has to work. The absence of a father and the presence or introduction of a stepfather also seem to be other common factors throughout the literature that push these children to the street (Aptekar 1988a, Connolly 1990, Dodge & Raundalen 1991, Wright et al. 1993a & 1993b, Szanton Blanc 1994, Le Roux 1996, Hecht 1998, Marquez 1999 and Kilbride et al. 2000). The typical street child then throughout the literature is portrayed as coming from large families headed by a single female facing serious economic deprivation and struggle.

I present the above to problematize assertions that ultimately attempt to create typologies of poor families and suggest that home is completely bound up in maternity, as it is demonstrative of a child’s relationship to their mother while street is demonstrative of a negation and abandonment of home, and therefore of the mother. The situation is much more complicated. Hecht’s and other similar arguments (Scheper-Hughes 1987) are also problematic in that they create a particular characterization of women as naturally maternal, as they naturalize women’s childcare abilities and their role
as mothers. In this way, childhood is confined to motherhood, making children the prisoners of mothers and women the prisoners of motherhood (Scheper-Hughes 1987).

Based on the children’s and adolescent’s narratives in my own work, the family does typically appear to be dominated by the maternal figure, as the mother in almost all cases was idealized and had a central role (Rizzini & Butler 2003). Virtually all participants placed a tremendous emphasis and importance on the mother. While the family does appear to be centered on a maternal figure, there is no single type of family. The idealized notion of mother was also often times in conflict with the actual stories of these children. Women without a doubt have a central place in the socialization of children and family, even when they are not present. Centrality of the mother is not unique or particular to children living and working on the street. This ideal continues to exist probably because the mother is the symbol and is representative of the family.

Ruptures or breaks in the family as a result of conflict with a parent, loss of a parent by death, abandonment, or separation, and introduction of a stepparent, usually a stepfather, were common themes in the stories of these children and adolescents in terms of what brought them to the street. Ruptures, breaks, and conflict with the mother seem to put children and adolescents in a particularly vulnerable situation. While roles are not as rigid as they once were, especially with the increase of women in the labor market, parenting continues to be the major responsibility of females, particularly among the working class where there is reported to be more of a reproduction of the hierarchical model of the family. In general, women continue to carry a disproportionate responsibility in terms of childcare, resulting in their bearing a disproportionate burden of
economic struggle and poverty (Chant 2003). The Brazilian Institute for Geography and Statistics has reported there to be a rise in the number of poor female-headed households. Men on the other hand are reported to be less active and less involved in daily family life and are more likely to break off from the family unit (Fonseca 1986). Due to a lack of stable ties, families, usually made up of mothers or other female caregivers like grandmothers or aunts, are without the minimum or basic conditions or family and community support necessary to care for their children, resulting in a particular vulnerability and sometimes break down of the family unit. Poverty and family breakdown then appear to mainly affect mothers and therefore their children. However, it is not possible to conclude that children living and working on the street are more likely to come from broken or single-parent households, as other children from the same or similar households are not living or working on the street (Ennew & Swart-Kruger 2003).

However, another issue is that we have yet to look at men in the domestic or private sphere and men in the paternal role. Methodologies and participant selection in research are problematic, as they do not look at or for fathers. Research typically focuses exclusively on the mother, at the exclusion of the father. Similarly, I observed that the visits PMMR staff made to the homes of the children, even when there was a father present in the home, were made with and focused on and around the mother only. There is much to be investigated in terms of fathers. Our sole focus on the mother feeds into this notion of the absent father and the omnipresent mother. It is also important to look beyond the mother and father and look at other family members or people present in the home and in the lives of these children who may also play role as caregiver by ensuring
stability and security and creating a sense of belonging in their lives (Rizzini et al. 2007).

There are other key and central people in the lives of these children beyond the mother.

I hope that I have not further imprisoned mothers to the realm of parenting nor do I hope to have fallen into a feminization of poverty type argument (Moghadam 1997). I simply hope to highlight the common theme of the mother throughout the stories of the children, adolescents, and young, adults I worked with, to complicate Hecht’s assertions on home and the mother, and to point out that women continue to experience a particular disadvantage in terms of employment and earnings, with minimal to no opportunity for growth and no space to exercise their citizenship. Women also have relatively more dependants to support. In this way, poor female-headed households may be more vulnerable to poverty (Rizzini et al. 2007). Any examination of the impact of the political economy and structural violence on the lives of these children and adolescents must include an examination of the impact of the political economy and structural violence on the lives of their families.

*Poverty*

Poverty is often reported as the main reason for children being on the street. All of the children, adolescents, and young adults with whom I spoke to, interviewed, and carried out life histories were from *comunidades*. This supports the argument that there is an association between poverty and children being in a street situation (Rizzini 1986, Fausto & Cervini 1991, Rizzini et al. 1999, Kilbride et al. 2000, Basu & Tzannatos 2003, Kovats-Bernat 2006 and Offit 2008).
When participants were asked which children work, they all responded in very similar ways: “The poor ones. Those who are rich don’t need to.” According to Alice, “Only those who need to. Only if the family is poor and doesn’t have money to buy anything and families who don’t work.”

Markinhus spoke about economic poverty as a key factor that brings children to the street, when he said:

You’re never going to find a child from a private school that goes to the street. You’re not going to find a rich kid from the elite class that goes to the street. You won’t find them sleeping in abrigos (shelters). You’re not going to find them in Fundacao Casa, (previously FEBEM). You won’t find them in the penitentiary.

If children and adolescents from middle, upper, and elite classes do not go to the street, then where do they go?

They’re going to go to their uncle’s house when there’s a crisis. They’re going to go to Europe or the United States to get away for a while.

Markinhus refers to these options or places beyond the street as a rede de protecao or safety net, which are essentially family and community supports. The families of these children lack any kind of support for raising their children, which include space, after school programs, educational and extracurricular activities, services and programs offered by the state, making them and their children even more socially vulnerable and the street an attractive space. In this way, sometimes the street is the only space where their material, social, and emotional needs can be met (Mikulak 2007 and Rizzini et al. 2007). Economic factors, according to Markinhus, and I agree, are the primary reasons for their going to the street. Their reasons for going to the street begin with the poverty that they and their families were born into.
Everson also commented on *redes de proteção* (safety nets) that are not available to poor children when he said:

It’s difficult for someone from a better social class to get involved in that kind of stuff. People from a *comunidade* who live in the middle of poverty, running around the *favela* barefoot and dirty and many times their moms are dispersed and aren’t paying attention to their children who are on the street playing. People from upper and middle classes already have that thing with their children inside the home, studying, having things planned out. They are more monitored. And those who live in a *comunidade* don’t have that. If they had resources and other options, they would not be out on the street. They would not be seeking the street.

Here Everson is referring to these children’s context of scarcity and deprivation. Both Markinhus and Everson are speaking to the fact that the street is the only viable or available option for poor children (Hecht 1998, Kovats-Bernat 2006 and Offit 2008). Because of a lack of economic conditions, which results in a lack of family and community support, poor children are always on the street, which is why Kovats-Bernat (2006) refers to the street as poor people’s “living room.” These children do not have space, they have no living room, they have no yard, and a large number of people are often living in a very small space (Shaw 2002). In other words, due to a lack of space, the street for many of these children is an end in itself. It is in many ways the only space where they can eat, socialize, work, and play.

*Beyond Explanations of Economic Poverty*

You have to change things. We need to change the structure and improve the quality of life *do povo*, not just economically though,“ (*do povo* translates to “of the people,” and usually refers to people from lower social classes, the masses). We’re not just hungry for food. We’re hungry for culture. We’re hungry for knowledge. We’re hungry for freedom. We’re hungry for education… One might say, well the kid is coming to
the street because they’re being beaten at home. But the family is
Evangelical and they have a decent salary. The issue is not their salary.
It’s not economic misery in the home that brings kids to the street. It’s
because the child is hungry, but not just for money. We’re not just hungry
for food. The food that we want is not just rice and beans. The child has
needs for other things and these things have to do with the economic level
of the family. So the issue is an economic one but it cannot be solved by
merely providing a higher salary and that is where the other issues that are
not economic come into play. If you think the problem is one of
 economics, then just give the family that is beating their child 1,000 reais.
It’s not the way it works. The source of the issue is an economic one.
You have to have a strong economic base, but you also have to have other
opportunities… Rich children are also beaten. Rich children are also
raised in violent ways, but they do not go to the street. Do they suffer?
Yes. But they go to other places.

While poverty is a major contributing factor for why children live and work on
the street, poverty alone cannot account for their street situation (Shaw 2002). There are
many children faced with and living in similar economic conditions that do not go to the
street to live or work (Alves 1991:72-73 and Offit 2008). There is no typical street child.
We must always keep in mind each individual child and their unique personal, social, and
economic circumstances (Hecht 1998 and Kilbride 2000). The issue instead is need or
lack. For these children, home does not, because it often cannot, provide the necessary
emotional or material resources to these children. For children that go to the street, they
do so because the street is, or initially appears to be, better than home (Shaw 2002).

A major reason for their going to the street is the fact that many of these children
live in homes and communities, which are often referred to as “situations of risk,” where
they do not have space (Moura 1991). Space in addition to economic opportunity is a
major factor that brings them to the street (Shaw 2002). The street provides these
children with the space and the freedom to play that they do not always have in their
homes and communities. For many children, play is an important part of and reason for their going to the street, whether to live or to work (Thorne 1987 and Levison 2000). For example, both Maria (10) and her sister, Leticia (12), like to play, and they usually do so on the street. They prefer the street and playing on the street over home because at home they are alone. They also prefer the street over home because on the street, “There’s more space. You can play, you can do what you want, you can play a bunch of games, you can play house, you can do a bunch of things. You can use all the space.”

The street is a space of freedom and play, which is a major motivation to go. It is a free and fun space, at least for children who live in situations of poverty, confinement, and violence. The street is also a space where resources are easy to access. The street is a space of freedom where the child is not repressed or under adult control and the child is not judged (Rizzini et al. 2007).

Not only do these children not have space in their homes and communities, many do not have basic sanitation or running water, leaving these children and their families with the only option of pooping in a plastic bag. For those that do, their water is often contaminated with rat urine and feces along with other contaminants. Some of these children live in communities that have open sewage and rats running through their homes (Gay 1988). Others live in the middle of heaping piles of trash, which essentially are wastelands or garbage lands, as these communities live off of and survive largely through recycling and collecting trash, or recyclable materials, on a daily basis. The accumulation of trash that is brought back to their communities to be sorted through is a major cause for the rats and cockroaches that live in their homes. The rats and
cockroaches are the cause of serious damage as they gnaw their way through their wooden shacks, clothing, food, and make their way into baby cribs and children’s beds at night. It was all too often that I saw working children with rat scratches and bites on their faces and bodies. The heaping piles of garbage and open sewage running through their communities and homes have become the children’s playground. It is in this way that many children “choose” the street over the heaping piles of garbage, open sewage, and rats that have taken over their communities and homes.

These children and their families, and all residents of their communities, experience a profound marginalization from the rest of society. These families do not have access to or the right to a decent and dignified life. Instead, they are marginalized, mistreated, excluded, abandoned, and forgotten. These children experience daily discrimination and therefore shame for merely living where they live. The street provides these children with a different space as well as a new notion of space and visibility that is removed, at least temporarily, from the painful and shameful visibility of their misery, suffering, and existence. In this way, their going to the street is a direct result of the extremely unequal social, political, and economic system in which they live.
Figure 4.1, Comunidade Hatsuta, vivaguarulhos.blogspot.com, 2/27/2009

Figure 4.2, Comunidade Hatsuta, vivaguarulhos.blogspot.com, 2/27/2009
Also important to mention, in terms of space and the need for space, is that public space in Brazil is not public for everyone. These children are often not welcome in public spaces. They are socially and spatially marginalized, excluded, and confined to their comunidades. This is yet another way in which the street is their only option outside of their homes and communities.

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2 During my previous stay in Brazil in 2002, I spent time working in favelas in Sao Paulo. Nothing had prepared me for the living conditions, or complete lack there of, in comunidade Hatsuta.
Scheper-Hughes and Hoffman (1998) in “Brazilian Apartheid: Street Kids and the Struggle for Urban Space” talk about Sao Paulo as the modern and post-modern hyper-segregated city:

The term “street child” reflects the preoccupations of one class and segment of Brazilian society with the proper place of another. The term represents a symbolic apartheid. Urban space has become increasingly privatized, inverting an earlier, late-nineteenth century conception of the city as providing an open and heterogeneous public space. Today one notes two tendencies in urban spaces: an abandonment of city streets by the urban elite, who increasingly live their lives in gated communities (Caldeira 1992) [and shopping malls] and attempts to privatize beaches and certain urban neighborhoods, which come to be seen as the privileged reserve of the middle-class people, people of “substance” and “quality” [and “beauty”] (Scheper-Hughes & Hoffman 1998:358).

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3 The sign and camera were put up a few days after a group of working children and myself were hanging out outside talking and were asked to leave by a security guard because we were disturbing the people inside who were seated and eating at the food court, which is demonstrative of how these children are best tolerated when not seen.
Many children want to escape their homes and neighborhoods, which are spaces of physical and social exclusion, and go in search of visibility, or a different kind of visibility, that does not exist in their neighborhoods and is not attached to where they live. Their visibility in their homes and communities, where they are discriminated and ridiculed, is often filled with anguish and shame. In this way the street is an escape for them. But not only is the street an escape, it is also their adventure, their play center, playground, and amusement park, with clean restrooms, running water, lights, food, and other resources. For them, the street has everything.

As a result of their social, political, and economic marginalization and victimization, these children and adolescents taking to the street, in part, is a desperate search for a place in the world. On the street, they establish networks of social support and are united through their identification as excluded young people or what Hecht refers to as, “solidarity with other deeply rejected young people” (Hecht 1998:183). This network of social support and solidarity is what essentially gives them the space and ability, which they would not have otherwise, to act in the world (Kovats-Bernat 2006). These children maintain agency through their relationships and economic tactics, which is what allows them access to freedom and resources. In other words, it is through their new found status or identity as street and working child that they become visible and gain the ability to act as agents in the world, or gain access to agency, both individual and collective.

It is the political economy that severs their ties or displaces these children from their homes and families. Their situations of extreme poverty and the economic crisis
that makes up the everyday violence of their lives are what ultimately creates the push for these children to seek out the street for resources and to establish new ties, social networks, and identities. Going to the street is their way of adapting to their extremely difficult situations of scarcity, which Kovats-Bernat (2006) refers to as their way of “negotiating their suffering.” The street holds the promise of resources, freedom, space, friendship, escape and protection, which many of their homes are unable to provide. However, as we will see in the chapters to come, their initial perceptions of and experiences on the street, which are positive and their views of the street as a solution to or a way out of conflicts with the family and difficulties in the home, is only in the beginning. Once the novelty of their initial search ends, these children discover that the street is not as they imagined it.
Chapter 4 Experiences On the Street: The Experience of Being a Child Street Laborer and the Socio-Economics of Child Street Labor

Child Street Labor in Guarulhos, Brazil

The term “child labor” is used to refer to children’s work activities. Work in this sense refers to a variety of paid activities undertaken outside of the household, in this case on the streets, plazas, and stoplights, on a part or full-time basis. This work may be done in combination with schooling or not. Unfortunately the latter seems to be the more common of the two (Offit 2008 and Hunte 2009). For the purpose of this research, I define child street laborers as children and adolescents under the age of 18. Although Brazil’s 1988 Constitution established 14 as the basic minimum age for work, PMMR, Brazil’s Child and Adolescent Statute (ECA), and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child define children as a person under the age of 18.

Despite growing concerns about child labor, particularly with the increased interest in human and children’s rights, there have been few anthropological studies on the issue. Most studies come from the field of economics, are quantitative in nature, therefore telling us nothing about the children nor do they treat children as agents or actors in their own rights (Levison 2000). Fewer have carried out research with the children themselves. For those who have, their work is often focused on child laborers who work for adults, under the control of adults, as opposed to independent child laborers who work for themselves on their own terms. The former is problematic as it feeds into the all too common and often erroneous assumption that children, particularly working children, are under adult control, including under the control of their parents, and are therefore exploited (Woodhead 1990). Virtually all of the children that I worked with
were working for themselves. All child participants, with the exception of one child, were not being supervised by an adult while working on the street. However, there were some children, particularly younger children, who were often accompanied by an older sibling or cousin who was also a child street laborer. Finally, those who have studied the issue tend to work with fixed child street laborers, as opposed to nomadic workers, which is much more difficult (see for example Alves 1991 and Offit 2008).

As already mentioned in chapter 3, the large majority of child street laborers in Guarulhos, Brazil go to the street to work because of a lack of resources in the home (O’Haire 2011). In this way, the street attracts these children and adolescents in large part because of the possibility, economic opportunity, and independence it offers (Rizzini & Butler 2003). On the street, these children have access to money and other resources that are not available or accessible in their homes and communities. A lack of family and community support, as they are not able to support these children and provide them with what they need, in addition to a lack of space, educational, and extracurricular activities are what make the street an attractive space where the material, social, and emotional needs of these children can be met (Rizzini, Barker & Cassaniga 1999 and Mikulak 2007). The street is an attractive option for these children, because in many ways it is their only option and means of gaining any income for themselves and their families. However, their work is not about economic advancement or upward mobility. They are simply doing their best with that they have available to them.

The economic contributions of child street laborers to their households are not always essential for family survival. Without their labor, many of these children and
their families would still be able to eat, although there are cases where their income is crucial for the survival of their family. Instead, their labor has more to do with the fact that their parents would rarely, if ever, be able to provide their children with anything beyond their basic needs, if even that (Lieten 2010). While immediate needs and family survival may very well be necessary or a major reason for children working in the northeast of Brazil as Hecht (1998) and others have reported, as some families are economically dependent on children’s labor, this is not necessarily the case for all child laborers everywhere in Brazil, or elsewhere for that matter (Pigou 1920 and Kassouf 2002).

A lot of research treats and talks about child labor as homogenous. However, there is tremendous variation in child labor in terms of gender, activities, and location (Kassouf 2002). It is of utmost importance to acknowledge and recognize that there are significant differences from place to place. In Guarulhos, the conditions, realities, and circumstances are very different from those of the North, or even rural and coastal areas of Brazil. Child labor and the reasons for their labor vary tremendously over time, from place to place, and even from family to family. For these reasons, we cannot make generalizations about child labor.

Similar to Offit (2008), virtually all of the children and adolescents I spoke with were introduced to the street and street labor through a family member, neighbor, or friend who has previous experience, knowledge, and materials for a particular type of street labor. Few of the children were introduced to street labor by their parents and instead gained entry through siblings, cousins, or friends. However, some parents do
encourage their children to go to the street to work because they need help and because their free time, which is often viewed with fear and suspicion, is occupied with structured and productive activities. These children are also often fed on the street, resulting in one less mouth to feed in the home, and they are able to easily access needed resources for themselves and the home.

Common assumptions and attitudes about child labor is that it is exploitation and marginalization. Therefore a major goal is to eradicate it completely. However, such a view is linked to the theory of the culture of poverty, which reduces poverty, and symptoms of poverty, such as child labor, to individual, familial, and cultural pathology as opposed to larger structural and political-economic forces and constraints (Scharf et al. 1986, Cockburn 1988, Richter 1998b, Rizzini & Borges 1998, Peacock 1990, Young & Barrett 2001, Beazley 2003 and Ennew & Swart-Kruger 2003). Unfortunately, Oscar Lewis’ theory of the “culture of poverty” (1966) still strongly exists and persists today, as the poor continue to be blamed while overlooking the failure of the state to provide basic and necessary resources. These children and their families are marginalized and exploited by both national and international political economic structures as well as by a cruel, unjust, and extremely unequal distribution of wealth that leaves them with minimal options (Offit 2008 and Huggins & Rodrigues 2004). However, I want to be clear in that I am not arguing any extreme, whether it be the culture of poverty and blaming the poor and therefore the families of these children, nor am I stating that these children and their families are completely victims of political-economic forces and structural poverty and
violence (Bourgois 1996). Both views are problematic, as the former fails to acknowledge the latter and the latter fails to acknowledge agency.

These children are taking advantage of the opportunities available to them. The street and their work on the street provide these children with a chance to access and possess goods that they would otherwise not have access to. Their work on the street allows these children to make contributions to the home, which can result in the child being more valued at home, therefore securing their position in the home and with the family, which is exactly what the international community, laws, policies, and the discourse on children’s rights are pushing for. Their work on the street also provides these children and adolescents with the opportunity to act as consumers and gain status and social access through those goods (Zaluar 1994). By going to the street and through their work on the street these children are simply trying to make it in the world. They are trying to find a place for themselves in the world. However, their strategies and attempts to make it in the world elicit conflicting responses and perspectives from the larger social body and the international community about what is appropriate and what is best for the child, which will be addressed in this chapter, but further discussed in detail in chapter 7.

Not only does the street hold the promise of resources, but it also allows for visibility. These children are invisible in their comunidades and through their work on the street they receive recognition (Shaw 2002). Their economic existence as child street laborers brings with it new recognition, both inside and outside of the home, that is fundamental to the development of a new identity and subjectivity. “It is within this domain of economic survival that we most clearly see the agency” of these children
(Kovats-Bernat 2006:111). Their work allows them access to the rights that we assert they should have, but fail to ensure (Bourgois 1996 and Offit 2008). While the International Labor Organization (ILO) and much of the national and international human rights organizations, discourses, and literature refers to these children’s labor as robbing and depriving them of childhood and rights, with their labor often referred to as the most extreme violation of basic human rights, I argue that by taking to the street and through their work, these children are taking the childhood and rights assigned to them into their own hands (Boyden 1997 and Filho & Neder 2001).

**Jobs of Child Street Laborers in Guarulhos, Brazil**

Below is a list of all the different street occupations in which the children with whom I worked are engaged.

1) *Engraxate* - Shoe shining  
2) *Vendendo Bala* - Selling candy, gum, and other small goods  
3) *Malabares* – Juggling  
4) *Guardando carro* - Guarding/Parking Cars  
5) *Carreto* - Carrying goods, usually from a street fair or market to a client’s car

The type of work children are engaged in is largely determined by what is made available to them. In other words, their social relations and what is available and occurring in their social networks determines what type of work they carry out. These children receive an introduction and education to the street and to street labor through their connections to people, materials, and capital. For example, Sandra (18), who I introduced in chapter 3, and all 12 of her siblings sold *maca do amor* (candied apples) because this is what their mother made at home for her children to sell. They also sold candy on occasion, for which their mother gave them the money to purchase in order to
sell, because it was less costly than making candied apples. Some children are taught a skill by a parent. For example, Rodrigo (14), started shining shoes at the age of 10 because he wanted to help at home. He learned how to shine shoes from his father who also worked as a shoe shiner when he was a child. Rodrigo’s father gave him his first shoeshine box on his 10th birthday. Other children gain entry to particular types of street labor through friends. For example, I heard of many adolescent males who gained entry to shoe shining through a neighbor or friend who provided them with the necessary materials for that particular type of labor. Other children begin a particular type of street labor, for example selling candy or malabares (juggling), because this is what their siblings, cousins, friends, and other children in their communities are doing, making them most easily available and accessible to them. This mutual support of sharing and reproduction or passing on of skills, knowledge, and experiences of how to make it in the world are demonstrative of these children following common employment patterns of the working urban poor (Susser 1996, Aptekar 1988d:6, Kilbride et al. 2000 and Offit 2008).

The type of work children are engaged in is also largely segregated by sex. Many of their work activities are influenced by gender roles and expectations (Gustafsson-Wright and & 2002). Males are engaged in all types of work and dominate all types of work, with the exception of malabares (juggling), which is largely dominated by females. The types of work that are available or carried out by females are limited to selling candy, gum and other goods, and malabares. However, I never heard of females doing malabares with fire. Juggling with fire was something that was done exclusively by males. I also never heard of or saw females engaged with carreto (carrying goods) or
guarding/parking cars. Shoe shiners are also exclusively male. I never saw or heard of females shining shoes.

Selling candy, gum, and other small goods is carried out by both males and females (the only other goods that I saw being sold were nail clippers and nail files). This particular type of work is carried out at various stoplights and on the big sidewalk. The big sidewalk is only open to pedestrian traffic and is the major commercial area in the center of Guarulhos.

The children who work with malabares (juggling) are essentially urban artists and entertainers. Malabares is a skill that is learned and requires time and practice. These children take pride in their juggling abilities, particularly the tricks they perform, which, unlike manual labor, requires training, talent, and skill. In the center of Guarulhos, females dominated in this particular type of work.

Figure 6, Females and malabares, Photograph by Alicia Bolton, 10/21/11
Females typically work in all female groups of two or more, while older adolescent males usually work alone. However, younger males are commonly present in female groups at stoplights, as an older sister or cousin is in the group. These young males either sell candy or also work with *malabares*. There were also occasions, although much more rare, where a younger male accompanied an older male, who was an older brother or relative. The presence of older siblings and peers is often an advantage for younger children, as the older ones can serve as a form of protection against the daily dangers of the street. Older siblings and peers can also serve as a form of control over the labor of younger children by keeping the child in close proximity and in sight in order to keep a close watch over their activities, making sure they are always working.

Guarding/Parking Cars, which consists of aiding drivers in finding a parking spot on a crowded street and assisting them in parking their vehicles in addition to watching over or guarding their vehicle while it is parked and the driver is away, is a way of ensuring that the vehicle will not be harmed or stolen. It is common that the vehicle owners are also paying for this service to protect their vehicle from the children themselves, who are often feared and mistrusted (Aptekar 1994 and Offit 2008). However, as vehicle theft and crime is ever so common in many Brazilian cities, these children, while feared and mistrusted, are also at the same time providing a necessary service (Offit 2008).

*Carreto* (carrying goods) was something I observed on only one occasion. However, they were children that told me that they had done this particular type of work. Similar to shoe shining, *carreto* is also practiced exclusively by males.
The vast majority of child street laborers in Guarulhos work with shoe shining, juggling, and selling candy or gum (see Figures 7, 8.1, 8.2, and 9). Those involved with juggling and selling candy were the most diverse groups and consisted of both males and females as well as small children as young as five years old to older adolescents. Adolescent males carry out shoe shining most likely due to their being more physically developed and therefore able to carry around a large and heavy shoeshine box (Visano 1990). Most of the children and adolescents with whom I spoke have had more than one street career, typically starting with begging or selling candy and moving on to other jobs like shoe shining or *malabares* as they get older and more experienced with street labor.

![Figure 7, Engraxate (Shoe shiner on the big sidewalk), Photograph by Alicia Bolton, 7/29/2011](image)
Figure 8.1, *Malabares* (Juggling), Photograph by Alicia Bolton, 6/17/2011

Figure 8.2, *Malabares* (Juggling), Photograph by Alicia Bolton, 6/17/2011
Pedindo (begging) is not included in my definition of child labor, although some child street laborers combine work and begging. However, begging was never practiced on a full-time or even part-time basis. Begging is also more commonly practiced by younger children. Domestic work and household chores are also not included, as the focus of this research is child street labor (Levison, Moe & Knaul 2001 and Assaad, Levison & Zibani 2003). As already discussed in chapter 1, due to time constraints and for safety reasons, I was unable to include children and adolescents who participate in illicit activities such as prostitution and drug trafficking.

**Jobs of Child Street Laborers in Each Locality**

This section includes an examination of the jobs of child street laborers in each locality, as there is considerable variation in specific types of work according to location.
The work spaces of child street laborers are also in many ways segregated by sex. All of their work activities are carried out on the street, stoplights, and plazas in the center of Guarulhos. The large majority of the children and adolescents I worked with were nomadic in their work spaces, with the exception of those who juggle, who are the most fixed child street laborers, as they work at stoplights only (Goncalves 1979 and Rizzini 1986). There are some children and adolescents who typically work at the same stoplight, where they spend the whole of their day and all of their working days, while others switch between a couple or few select stoplights each day and sometimes even in the same day. Given their more fixed place of business, children and adolescents who juggle tend to be more territorial with their work spaces. Physical fights with other working children often occur over stoplights that are considered “good,” as they have high car traffic and are therefore more lucrative.

Rosa Maria Fischer Ferreira (1980), in her examination of life on the street, examines what she refers to as a ponto, which is a point or place on the street that is a child’s or group’s turf that they take charge of becoming dono/a do ponto (head/owner of the location) (Huggins & Rodrigues 2004). In this way, child street laborers are appropriating public spaces, usually stoplights, and turning them into private spaces. These spaces provide these children and adolescents with a particular social space and location. In these spaces, they are exercising social existence and visibility (Berlant 2011:179). In many ways, these children become the donos/as do ponto, or owners of these spaces, while also generating income (Ferreira 1980 and Rizzini & Butler 2003). These children through their street labor are trying to overcome their situations of
scarcity, poverty, and exclusion by trying to access new spaces, identities, and social networks on the street making it “their” street (Rizzini et al. 2007).

Children who sell candy spend their working hours either walking up and down the big sidewalk or at stoplights. Those who work at stoplights tend to have more fixed work spaces, as they typically work at the same stoplight, or ponto. Those working on the big sidewalk are nomadic and can be quite difficult to follow and keep track of. The big sidewalk is made up of a few long blocks and has high pedestrian traffic and many side streets and alleyways. There were multiple occasions where I was following a child street laborer for observational purposes and would lose sight of them completely.

None of the children that sell candy were fixed vendors, with the exception of Adriane (8), who always sells candy sitting on the steps of a Banco do Brasil (Bank of Brazil) in the center of the city. Her family members are also street laborers. Adriane’s mother works across the street from her. She sits on the sidewalk holding her infant son in her arms while begging. Adriane’s father, who is disabled, sits on a blanket on the big sidewalk and begs. There were a number of occasions that I saw Adriane selling candy wearing a PETI shirt (Programa de Erradicacao do Trabalho Infantil – Program for the Eradication of Child Labor). Most likely due to the presence of her mother, who was always in clear sight of Adriane and Adriane in clear sight of her, Adriane would hardly talk to me or do anything beyond giving me a faint smile or small gesture of recognition.

Shoe shiners are the most mobile and nomadic in their work spaces, and therefore are the most difficult to follow and keep track of, as they visit various locations throughout the city center. However, some tend to spend the majority of their working
time on the big sidewalk, where they walk up and down in search of clients as well as in a popular plaza in the center. Some of those who work as shoe shiners have developed fixed customers with whom they schedule appointments (Ferreira 1980). There was also a group of five males ages 13, 14, and 15, who would often take their shoeshine boxes to Sao Paulo capital, where they said it was more lucrative.

Figure 10, Shoe shiner walking on the big sidewalk with shoeshine box over shoulder, Photograph by Alicia Bolton, 6/29/2011

Finally, children who work with guarding/parking cars and carreto (carrying goods) are typically found at street fairs and markets that occur on a daily basis at various locations throughout the city.
Materials and Initial Costs Required for Street Labor

As already mentioned, these children receive an introduction to and education in street labor through their connections to people, materials, and capital. Their labor and the type of labor they engage in is largely determined by who is available to teach them a particular skill or type of labor and provide them with the material or capital to carry out that labor. Some occupations require minimal initial costs. Entry into guarding/parking cars and carreto (carrying goods) are the easiest, most accessible, and least costly types of work. These jobs require no materials and therefore no monetary investment whatsoever. Selling gum and candy is the next cheapest and most accessible type of work, as a box of candy or gum can be purchased anywhere for only a few reais (Huggins & Rodrigues 2004). As Alice said, “Candy was the cheapest thing to buy.” Selling candy also can also be carried out by anyone, regardless of age, as it requires minimal to no training or skill.

Other types of work require money or materials to start up. For example, the work of shoe shiners requires a caixa, or box, which is made of wood and includes both a foot stand for the client and a seat for the child, brushes to put the polish on the shoe, rags to make the shoe shine, and shoe polish. Shoe shiners usually have a different brush, rag, and polish for black and brown shoes (see Figure 11). Many children borrow boxes or are taught how to make a box from friends and neighbors. The lifespan of a box depends on how it is treated. If it is dropped on the floor a lot, it will not last long.
While the materials for *malabares* (see Figure 12) cost only a few *reais*, this particular type of labor does require an investment of one’s time. Time and practice are required to learn and develop the ability and skill to juggle and perform tricks, and it is extremely difficult. Most children said that they were able to learn *malabares* in approximately two months. Not only is *malabares* a type of labor that brings in money and resources, but it is also a very social activity. Children and adolescents pick up and learn about *malabares* and how to do it from other children, usually their friends, siblings, cousins, neighbors, or other children and adolescents in their communities. *Malabares* is also a structured and productive activity in that it requires learning from and with someone else. In this way, it is an activity that fills up their free time and requires the presence of and interaction with other children and adolescents, therefore making it an activity that is shared by and among friends.
It is important to mention that the materials required for their labor, whether a box of candy, gum, or other goods, a shoeshine box, or juggling materials, are what distinguish or separate child street laborers from street children, who walk around empty-handed. Distinguishing oneself as child street laborer is necessary because these children would otherwise be confused with and viewed as street children, as they are poor, unsupervised by a parent or adult, and they are on the street. Street children are particularly feared, as they are viewed as criminals and threats to society and are therefore more at risk of being victims of violence on the street. The work materials of child street laborers distinguish them from street children in that they convey to the larger social body what their purpose on the street is: work. Their work materials serve as signs of their right to be on the street, unlike street children whose reasons for being on the street are much less accepted by society. As a result, they are perceived as less harmless
and are less feared, as these materials mark or identify them as members of the working poor, or as children who work and live in a home as opposed to children who live on the street and are completely outside of the bounds of childhood.

**Tactics Used to be a Successful Child Street Laborer**

Rodrigo (14) has all types of clients. He spoke about how you have to pay attention to the type of shoes people are wearing, and then you approach them and ask if they want their shoes shined. When asked what you have to do or be to be a good shoe shiner, he said: “You have to shine the clients shoe good.” You know if you did a good job when, “You see the shoe shine.”

Towards the end of my time in the field, I saw Rodrigo wearing a full suit including slacks, dress shirt, coat, and tie while working. I am certain that it was a business tactic to differentiate himself from other shoes shiners in order to attract more clients and bring in more money. It was a tactic, or what Erving Goffman (1959) would call a “performance,” as Rodrigo was manipulating his presentation of self in order to influence the way he was perceived by others. Rodrigo’s manipulation of self, or performance, was an attempt to guide the impressions others have of him by changing his appearance into a self that he perceives as socially acceptable. His performance was essentially a statement of who he is and who he is not. Through his suit, Rodrigo was highlighting a particular social, cultural, conventional, and institutional ideal or self that is well respected, accepted, and viewed positively by society, which conflicts with the actual status and identity of Rodrigo, which is that of poor *favelado* (a person from the *favela*). His “performance” was essentially masking or covering his identity as
subordinate, feared, criminal child on the street, which is a self that might interfere with his economic opportunity and success on the street.

By wearing a suit, Rodrigo was also manipulating his identity as child through his performance as an adult. This manipulation of self or performance as an adult makes his presence on the street and his labor more socially acceptable. By masking his identity and status as child, he also frees the larger social body, particularly his clients who are adults, of being and feeling like exploiters, as child labor is illegal in Brazil. Rodrigo’s performance then was of a particular self that is not in conflict with what the larger social body and international community wants and is willing to see. While these rules are those of society, the child is the one that has to resolve and play with them through their performances in order to meet their expectations, desired impressions, and accepted norms so that they can meet their own economic interests and needs, thus bridging structure and agency (Goffman 1959 and Offit 2008).

When asked what you have to do or be in order to be a successful worker and successful with malabares, Samantha (13) said, “You have to know how to do it. If you let it fall once it’s normal, but if you let it fall a lot... You have to know how to do it. Sometimes there are people that just don’t know how to do it.” According to Leticia (12), who also worked with malabares: “You have to be able to hold the things [the sticks]. And you have to be strong.”

Sandra (18) spoke about the strategies she used as a child street laborer in order to sell candy. "When I went to the street, I would go all dressed up to call attention to sell
I was unable to get her to explain or describe exactly what she meant by “dressed up.”

Another tactic used by child street laborers, although less common, was having a young child around, who may or may not be working, and placing them in the most visible location to call attention and pity and therefore to lure customers in order to bring in more money. However, according to Alice, the only thing that you need to be a good and successful worker on the street is to just be working. “Whatever you’re doing, you’re working. At the stoplight, whatever you take to sell or whatever you’re doing, you’ll make money.” Based on my own observations, with the exception of Rodrigo, there was generally no great performance or manipulation of social identity. The strategies used by child street laborers usually consisted of simply approaching a person or vehicle, regardless of type of work, to make a sale (Huggins & Rodrigues 2004). Being identified as a poor child on the street also has its advantages. These children are very aware of their position of marginality in society and they learn to play with their status as poor child on the street (Veloso 2008). These children are viewed as both risks and at risk, as they are feared and viewed as criminals and therefore threats to the larger social body while also at the same victims of poverty, violence, abuse, and parental exploitation (Shaw 2002). It is this very combination of fear and pity that works to their advantage and makes their labor on the street so lucrative.

The larger social body buys into the ideal of childhood and therefore into the discourse on rights, therefore condemning their labor, their lack of adult supervision, and their presence on the street, which are all viewed as a violation of children’s rights, while
also at the same time a violation of the public’s rights, as these children are viewed as criminals, threats, and social ills in society. However, society also buys into the idea that they are the children’s generous supporters by providing for the children’s survival through consumption of their goods and services. This ultimately maintains their labor, their marginal position on the marginal street, and their status as child street laborer (Offit 2008). In this way, society is also confronted with and stuck in various contradictions, as they are supporting a reality that is contrary to the law and to the ideal of childhood and rights, but they do so out of fear and as a means of protecting themselves while also at the same time out of pity and compassion, as these children are viewed as victims of poverty and parental exploitation. These children are very aware of the contradictory perceptions the larger social body has of them, and this in turn is what they play with in terms of their performances, presentations, and manipulations of self. Through their various performances, these children are creating possibility and opportunity for themselves. This is yet another one of the many ways they go about making it in the world.

**Children’s Preferred Type of Street Labor**

Sandra said that she does not consider selling candy on the street as a good job. However, she thinks differently about shoe shining and *malabares*. “I think it’s cool when girls do malabares on the street at stoplights. And shoe shining, I also think it’s a cool profession, boys shining shoes in the street.”

Some jobs are more respected and well liked than others. *Malabares* seems to be the most popular and well liked among child street laborers, as the children both work and play while doing it. Maria (10) spoke about her preference for *malabares*. 
According to Maria, this particular type of work allows you to play while you work. “I like to do malabares. I like to be here playing.” Samantha (13) also said that she likes working with malabares the most. She started working when she was 9 years old, first begging for money, then selling candy, and then she moved on to malabares, which she still does. She said that she makes more money doing malabares. According to Samantha, “It’s good. We come to the stoplight and we have fun doing it too. We play and everything. It’s good to do malabares. We play, we have fun, each of us go to our own car.” Malabares, more so than any other type of street occupation, is something the children especially enjoy working with as it combines work and play.

This notion of play and its link to malabares is important, especially as children under the age of fourteen, according to Brazilian law and the international discourse on children’s rights, are not permitted to work. They are not supposed to be working. Beyond legal reasons, their presence on the street and their labor are also viewed as a problem, as they conflict with views of the proper place and appropriate activity of children, which is play. Malabares is a manipulation of performance in various ways. First, it gives clues to the larger social body about who they are: children. Secondly, these children have manipulated their labor into a performance that does not appear to be work. This is particularly important, as they are not entitled to work. Instead their street labor is presented and performed as play. Such a manipulation of their labor not only makes their presence and activities on the street more socially acceptable and appropriate, but more important, it allows them to freely carry out their economic activities despite legal restrictions. In this way, these children are “playing” with their structural
constraints of child labor laws and children’s rights, making their informal, illegal street labor possible. Veloso (2008) argues that these children are very well aware of their position of marginality in society and learn to play with this notion of “rights,” which is most often directed at them. She argues that they have learned to maneuver their rights and the domain of children’s rights to their advantage.

Their street labor is manipulated and performed as play, making its visibility more acceptable and bearable for the larger social body, as these children are perceived as being more in line with ideal notions and expectations of children. This also may be why many children reported making more money with this particular type of labor. Finally, I also think their preference for malabares is because the children themselves enjoy this experience of being able to play and be children.

Leticia (12) first went to work when she was eight years old. She first started begging, moved on to selling candy, and then started working with malabares with her sister, Maria (10), her cousin, Susana (13), and her friends. Her favorite type of work is malabares because, “It’s something that when you grow up, you know how to do things... It’s because it’s something that you learn, you do, and you never want to let go of. Malabares is the best because the others say, ‘Wow! She knows how to do that!’ And they give 2, 3, 10 reais to us” ($1.30, $1.95, $6.50).

As we can see in Leticia’s comment, malabares is a skill and these children feel proud of this skill that they learn and develop through practice. Unlike manual labor, selling candy, or begging, malabares requires talent and skill. However, these children also want to be seen, noticed, and respected. Malabares more than any other type of
street labor provides these children with visibility, as it is the child and their abilities, skills, talent, and performance that brings in the money as opposed to an item being sold. The larger social body that expects nothing more from these children beyond crime, violence, and death, is shown that these children are capable of something.

How Child Street Laborers Organize Their Work

Who Child Street Laborers Work With

During their working hours on the street, child street laborers spend a lot of their time with others. In this way, work for many child street laborers is an extremely social activity and the street is an incredibly social environment (Offit 2008). The street is more than just a place of work for these children.

Samantha (13) usually works with someone at the stoplight. She prefers working with someone else.

It's better because sometimes we come by bus and sometimes you are ashamed because if we see someone, someone from our school, if someone shows up, we are ashamed. So it's good to have a bunch of people cause then you're not going to be ashamed because you won't be alone. Sometimes I've already been ashamed and everything when someone from my school passed by the stoplight. If I saw my teacher or classmates, I would be ashamed because they would start talking. Because the majority of the people from the favela come to the stoplight and the others [at school] are all little rich kids and they don't go to the stoplight. When they arrive [to school] they'll be talking. Someone in my class already saw a boy from the favela at the stoplight. The Portuguese teacher saw him and they were all talking in the classroom and that sucks and so I was ashamed. One day there was a field trip and I didn't go and I was at the stoplight and a bus passed with all the students from my school on the field trip and I died of shame. And then having to go back to school, I almost died. I was so ashamed.

The reason Samantha did not go on the field trip was because she was not able to go. Many public school field trips are not free of charge and therefore not accessible to
all students. Some field trips cost as much as 62 reais ($40.26), making it impossible for children from comunidades to participate. More important is Samantha’s shame. She is ashamed of her life and essentially ashamed of herself. Most of these children and adolescents and their families are. These children are very aware of and sensitive to the prejudice of others and what others think about them and they internalize the views of the larger society. Their shame then is a result of their marginality, which has been forced upon them by society.

Samantha spoke about her experience of exclusion and being discriminated against for simply being poor. Samantha and all of these children are viewed and treated as different and they are shamed for being different. In this way, they group together developing solidarity with other excluded and deeply rejected young people in order to protect themselves and one another, trying to maintain some sense of self-esteem and dignity. However, on the street and through their identities as child street laborers, these children have taken on identities that are even more feared, hated, and rejected by society than their status as poor, as they are living outside of that which is socially appropriate, proper, and acceptable. These children are carrying out activities outside of the norm of what children should be doing in a space that is considered marginal, therefore making them even more out of place. This results in an increased and deepened rejection by society and therefore heightened sense of shame for simply attempting to create possibility, opportunity, and a place for themselves in a world where they have no possibility, opportunity, or place.
While their new identity as child street laborer brings with it resources, recognition, and increased access to agency, it also at the same time further marginalizes them. Although they are learning and developing skills through their informal street education, these skills are not desirable or respected by society and will not allow them to grow in ways that will actually improve their lives. Their identification with the street and their identity as child street laborer results in their increased identification with crime, violence, and disorder and therefore to their being viewed as threats, social ills, and non-citizens, as they are living outside of the law, resulting in a social denial of any and all rights. In this way, the opportunity and visibility they gain on the street is also much of what is harmful to them and further marginalizes them.

Maria (10) who reported men as the greatest danger on the street always goes to the stoplight with her cousins or sister. She never goes alone. “If I don’t have anyone to go with to the stoplight, I don’t go. I’ll stay at home.” Her mother is also afraid of her working alone. She is afraid that a man will take her. Females typically work together in groups for safety reasons. Grouping together with other females serves as a form of protection from the various dangers of the street, which will be discussed below in more detail.

Rodrigo (14) always works alone. I never saw him working with anyone. This is more common among adolescent males, as they are said to be more successful in terms of making money when working alone. This increased chance of success is most likely due to their being perceived as less of a potential threat, as groups of poor males on the street
would be viewed with fear by the larger social body. However, there were a few shoe
shiners that always worked together in pairs most likely for reasons of having company.

Work Schedules of Child Street Laborers

The large majority of child street laborers are not consistent with their work. The
work schedules of many are extremely sporadic. For those who are more consistent with
their work, there were times that they too either disappeared completely never to be seen
again or disappeared for a couple to a few weeks or months. These children are not
consistent with their work because their work is often based on need, and the needs of
these children and their families vary. Their work is also inconsistent because their lives
are largely inconsistent. One of the few constants and guarantees in the lives of these
children is inconsistency and instability, as their lives and situations are constantly
changing (Gregori 2000).

Saturday is the most popular working day for child street laborers because they do
not have school. Holidays and others days off of school either because of teacher
meetings, strikes, or field trips, are also popular workdays. Very few children and
adolescents work on Sunday. Most stated that Sunday is their day off. Rodrigo (14) was
the only participant that works every single day, including Sunday. He shines shoes at
the Sunday fair close to where he lives.

Those who work on weekdays usually do so during non-school hours. Brazilian
children and adolescents go to school for four hours a day. Their school hours are
divided into three different sessions: morning, afternoon, and night. Those who have
school in the morning often work in the afternoon, and those who have school in the
afternoon, usually work either in the morning or at night. However, I saw many children working during school hours. Many choose work over school because school is yet another space where they are humiliated, shamed, and rejected and they therefore view and experience school as oppressive, which I will discuss more in chapter 7. Those who are not in school due to either having been expelled, not having access to school, as there are no spaces for enrollment, or dropping out completely because school has failed them, typically work every single day.

**Income Earned**

![Figure 13, Child street laborer counting their earnings, Photograph by Alicia Bolton, 6/17/2011](image)

Of primary importance is the income that child street laborers bring in. It is typically assumed that these children earn only a very small portion of the wages of any adult. As Nancy Schepet-Hughes stated: “*It is striking to see in any Brazilian city the lines of poor children and adolescents… hoping to sell a few small items, perhaps amounting, if they are lucky, to a couple of dollars a day*” (Schepet-Hughes & Hoffman
These children are also often reported to work 12 to 14 hour days, again, making only pennies.

The income of many child street laborers is much more substantial than research and popular opinion suggests. Although children earn more than believed and reported, not all children earn equal amounts (Offit 2008). There is no typical child street laborer in terms of average income earned, hours worked per day, and days worked per week. It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to calculate how much child street laborers make in a given month as their work, and therefore their earnings, are so sporadic and inconsistent (Huggins & Rodrigues 2004 and Kovats-Bernat 2006).

According to the literature, younger children are said to earn less than their older peers because of their relative inexperience with street labor, which is mostly due to their age (Offit 2008). However, young children often proved to be moneymakers and quite lucrative. In some cases, they may actually have more luck than their older counterparts in terms of earning money. A 13 year old male once told me that he stopped selling candy because no one was buying from him anymore because he was “muito grante,” which translates as too big, meaning he was too old (Ennew & Swart-Kruger 2003).

Society is sympathetic towards cute young children on the street, but is much less so with older children, who are often viewed with fear and as threats. Younger children often feed on the pity of others, which is why they are brought out to the street in the first place.

Some child street laborers have set prices for their services or goods. For example, those who sell candy and gum typically do so for one real ($0.65) while a
shoeshine usually costs between two and three reais ($1.30 and $1.95). Malabares however is much more flexible. There is no set amount of money that the child is requesting for their service. Instead, these children take whatever they are given and can make anything from small change to a few reais.

Child street laborers seem to typically bring in anywhere between 30 and 50 reais ($19.50 and $32.50) for a day’s work. However, they can also make as little as five reais ($3.25) and as much as 70 or even 100 reias ($45.50 or $65.00) through their informal, independent street labor. This is demonstrative of why many of these children and adolescents work. For the child that works, this child both frees up household resources and strain by spending their days on the street, where they are usually provided with food, therefore resulting in one less mouth to feed in the home, while also economically providing for themselves and their family.

According to Samantha (13), who works with malabares, the amount of money that one makes in a day depends. “It depends on the person. If they’re interested in making money and if the stoplight is good too. It depends. I make 10, 20, 30 or 50 reais” ($6.50, $13.00, $19.50 or $32.50). A stoplight is considered “good” when there is high car traffic, which tends to be more lucrative. The amount of money that children make in a day also depends on how much time they spend playing while working. According to Samantha, playing can interfere with their work and making money. Playing while working is usually more of a problem for younger children.
These children not only make money while working on the street, but they also earn food, clothing, and toys. Alice spoke about some of the things she received while selling candy at the stoplight:

We got things at the stoplight. At Christmas we would get presents. Cars would pass with toys. They knew that we were there and they would come with toys. On Easter they would bring us Easter eggs, at Christmas, Panettone. They would give that to us. They gave us clothes. A lot of the people were from the church too. Donations that they receive they would give to us. That’s why it was cool to be at the stoplight. If I were there at Christmas, I would get a bunch of toys and things. On Children’s Day they give things.

On more than one occasion while sitting at a stoplight with working children and adolescents, drivers, when stopped at a red light, would give them food and candy. On one occasion an adult male gave Carla (17) and her female friends a plastic bag filled with two pairs of jeans, two pairs of tennis shoes, and a pair of sandals. This is one of the benefits of and reasons for having a fixed work space or ponto and of being a dono/a do ponto or owner/leader of that space (Ferreira 1980).

Children do not always keep their money hidden or completely out of sight. While some do keep their money out of sight and tucked away in their pockets for security reasons or because they do not want potential customers to see that they have a lot of money, as this may very well interfere with their ability to make money, others, particularly those working with malabares at stoplights hold their earnings in a plastic soda bottle (see Figure 14). Similar to their work materials, their money is yet another way that child street laborers distinguish themselves from street children.
What Child Street Laborers Do With the Money They Earn

These children go to the street to work either because they have to, which is the case for those in situations of forced labor, they need to, as it is necessary for family survival, or because they want to, to make money and fill up their free time. I argue that the large majority of the children and adolescents I spoke to are working on the street because they want to, because it is the best opportunity, and maybe even only opportunity, available to them given their situations. Again, as mentioned in chapter 1, I refer to their working on the street as a “choice” only in that the street is the only available option to them. Their “choosing” to work on the street is an act of agency while also at the same time a “choice” that is contingent upon their lack of agency (Biehl 2005).
Most child street laborers are both contributors and participants of their household economies while also at the same time active individual agents pursuing their own present needs and interests (Levison 2000 and Offit 2008). Most children, while contributing to their households and helping their families, also enjoy making, having, and spending their own money (Rizzini, Barker & Cassaniga 1999). A major reason reported by children and adolescents for their working was to earn their own money so they can purchase their own things, fulfilling their own wants and needs, gaining more autonomy. As Rodrigo (14) said, “Sometimes their mom and dad don’t give them money,” because they are not able to give them money. Therefore, these children go out and get it themselves elsewhere: on the street. These children, with the exception of dependent child street laborers, have control over their income, at least a percentage of it, as they do not turn the whole of their earnings over to their families, nor are they obligated to do so. This allows them to act in and pursue, at least to some degree, their own interests, thus gaining more autonomy (Offit 2008). They often spend their money on food, clothing, school supplies, braces, electronics, hair and beauty products, bicycle parts, and entertainment. In this way, these children benefit from their labor, as they are able to enjoy the rewards of their labor.

In their quest for resources, freedom, recognition, and a new sense of self and place in the world, these children are also experiencing new pressures of consumption and consumer culture. The street and the money they make from their work on the street allows them to participate as consumers in Brazil’s, particularly Sao Paulo’s, increasingly capitalistic society. This provides them with the opportunity to access particular goods,
ultimately giving them a sense of status and social belonging (Moura 1991, Mills 1999, Shaw 2002, Rizzini & Butler 2003, Rizzini & Thapliyal 2007 and Offit 2008). Some children purchase brand name items and fashionable clothing, and their work has in some cases as much or more to do with aesthetics and access to goods as it does with survival. For example, I knew an adolescent who paid 90 reais ($58.50) for a pair of brand name flip-flops. This particular type of consumption is ultimately linked to ways in which one claims identity as citizen, member, and participant in a capitalistic consumer society, from which these children are largely excluded. In this way, their work is about developing and maintaining a sense of inclusion, visibility, self worth, and control over one’s life (Rizzini & Butler 2003).

Most child street laborers spend a small portion of their money and a lot of their time eating. Some would use their earnings to buy ice cream, candy, chips, fruit, a soft drink or coffee. They almost always had food on them and were often seen purchasing food while working. In this way, their earnings, or a portion of their earnings, are kept for themselves and quickly spent on the street (Hecht 1998). However, there were some children, like Josue (10), who often resisted the temptation of buying an ice cream in order to save his money for larger purchases like a cellular phone or tennis shoes.

There was one case, at least that I was aware of, where Leandro (14) used the money he earned from shining shoes to help his mother, while keeping the rest to purchase crack for himself. He goes to school in the morning and at noon goes to the street to shine shoes. In addition to helping his mother and supporting his crack habit, Leandro also works because he usually has nothing to do once he is done with school.
On the day of our interview Josue (10) told me that he gives his mother half of what he earns. However, I saw Josue almost every single day and we had many conversations during which he would tell me that he would often return home from the street and tell his mother that he did not have any money when he really had fifty reais ($32.47) or more in his pocket. There were times that he did not tell his mother he had money because he wanted to use it to purchase a cellular phone or a new pair of tennis shoes. Whenever I reminded him of this, he would just laugh. Josue likes working because he likes making money. He likes buying things for himself to show off, as they provide him with an opportunity to gain recognition and therefore access to a particular social status that he would not have otherwise. He also likes buying and re-selling things, with the hope of gaining a profit. He dreams of buying an X-Box 360, which costs approximately 1,200 reais ($780.00). Josue said that he can make as much as 100 reais ($65.00) in a day, which is more than what any of the child street laborers that I spoke with make.

**Examination of the Roles Child Street Laborers Play in the Economies of Their Households**

What the children do with the money they earn includes an examination of the roles that they play in the economies of their households. According to Offit (2008), the work of child street laborers “is in many ways essential to maintaining strong relationships between children and their families” (Offit 2008:100). This has been referred to as a “moral economy,” as these children are behaving in ways that are accepted and viewed as “good” by assisting their families through their economic
contributions because in many ways they feel responsible for the well-being of their families (Offit 2008 and Hunte 2009).

Those who are independent, or self-employed, child street laborers have not abandoned or been abandoned by their families nor have their family ties weakened or broken down with an increase in their delinquency as some have reported (Lusk 1992, Aptekar 1994, Huggins & Mesquita 1999, Alves-Mazzoti & Alda 1996 and Mickelson 2000). Instead, the large majority of the independent child street laborers I spoke to made contributions to the household economy while also at the same maintaining “economic self-interest and self-determination” (Offit 2008:110). These children contributed a portion of their earnings, usually half or a bit more than half, to their households (Offit 2008). Dependent child street laborers on the other hand do not see the direct fruits of their labor, as they are forced to contribute all of their earnings to their households.

In some cases, the cash contributions that child street laborers make to their families are significant and substantial, but not always. Some of these children are integral contributors to their households. Some are even the sole breadwinners in their households. However, important to mention is that their contributions are not always necessary for survival nor do they provide any kind of economic advancement or upward mobility for themselves or their family (Offit 2008 and Lieten 2010).

The large majority of the independent child street laborers I worked with reported that they contribute half or more of their earnings to their households. However, the contributions these children make to their households can vary depending on the need of
the household or the child at particular points in time. For example, Leticia (12) gave almost all of her income to her grandmother, with whom she was living. What initially brought her to the street was her grandmother getting sick, being hospitalized, and therefore not being able to work and bring in any income to the household. Leticia said she noticed that help was needed and decided to work. In this way, these children and adolescents can and often do serve as valuable assets to their families, particularly during times of crisis that result in economic shocks to the household.

Leticia’s sister, Maria (10), on the other hand, typically makes about 30 reais ($19.50) a day or less, but never more than 30. She usually uses her money to buy things for herself, but there are also times when her grandmother needs help to buy clothes for her and her sisters or milk for her baby sister. “There are times that I keep more and sometimes I give more to my grandma.” The greater the need at home often results in larger contributions to the household, while times of less need can result in the child keeping a larger portion of their earnings for themselves.

The Brazilian minimum wage is 545 reais ($354.00) a month. Rodrigo (14) said that he usually makes between 400 and 500 reais ($260.00 and $325.00) a month, which raises an important point. Some of these children make significantly more than what their families make working or from government benefits. While government benefits, such as Bolsa Familia, may be significant and helpful for families living in the north of Brazil, which is extremely impoverished and has a significantly lower cost of living than the rest of the country, this is not the case for Sao Paulo, which was rated the 10th most
expensive city in the world in 2011. For many children and adolescents, living in a city with such a high cost of living leaves them with no other option but to work.

Place of residence or with whom one lives can also determine whether or not a child works and how much they contribute to their household or keep for themselves. According to Samantha (13):

When I lived with my mom, I gave her money. I made five reais and I gave it to her. But when I went to live with my sister, my sister doesn’t ask me for money because my brother-in-law, even though they’re separated, he helps her and everything. Only sometimes when she doesn’t want to ask him for money, sometimes I give her money. But she doesn’t ask for all of my money.

What first brought Samantha to the street was her mother, to whom she would have to turn over all of her earnings. At the time of the interview Samantha had been living with her sister for two months. Living with her sister provides Samantha with more freedom and independence. Similar to many of the child street laborers I spoke with, Samantha works to provide for her own economic wants and needs (Offit 2008). Many of these children and adolescents work because, “You have money in your pocket every month.” Independent child street laborers, through their work on the street, are not only and always contributing to and providing for their household economies, but they are also contributing to their own wants and needs.

Non-Economic Reasons for Their Street Labor

Child labor is viewed as an activity that results in immediate benefits in terms of income while also at the same time a costly activity in terms of interfering with the education, leisure time, and play of children (Becker 1963 and Kassouf 2002). However, many of these children are excluded, marginalized, ridiculed, rejected, and humiliated at
school by their classmates and teachers. They also lack basic and necessary resources in their homes and communities that leave them with no space to play and no place to poop. Factors beyond monetary gain, material resources, and survival play a role in their working. Beyond enjoying making their own money and being able to help their families, these children also enjoy having something to do and somewhere to do it (Rizzini, Barker & Cassaniga 1999). Their work on the street provides these children with a place to go, especially as they do not have space in their homes and communities and are not allowed access to other spaces outside of their homes and communities.

This space is also removed, at least while they are on the street, from the shame and marginalization that is associated with their communities. The street provides this space to these children, and even more, it provides them with a new notion of space where the rules and the norms are not of the drug traffickers that run their neighborhoods, nor are they of the police, but instead, they are of the group. They learn to create their own spaces and activities in the middle of the street, at stoplights and various pontos, and they become the donos/as or owners of those spaces and activities (Ferreira 1980).

Their work on the street in many ways is a constructive activity that they do not find elsewhere and would not have access to otherwise. Many children value their work on the street, and ultimately learn to value themselves through their new identity as child street laborer, because it provides them with visibility, recognition, skills, and income. These children enjoy the independence, power, and control that they experience through their work, especially as they are working for themselves and not for someone else. They also often feel proud of being able to help their families through the contributions they
make to their households (Boyden et al. 1998). Many experience a sense of recognition, and visibility while on the street that they never felt previously. They also have access to food, public restrooms, and other resources that they may not have at home or in their communities. In this way, their work on the street is a strategy that poor children have had to develop in order to survive and make it in an extremely unjust class system and world (Fonseca 1989 and Rizzini et al. 2007).

While many argue that work deprives children of their time to play, the opposite is actually true (Filho & Neder 2001). Virtually all of the child street laborers I spoke to "do not experience a work/play dichotomy; they work while playing and play while working" (Thorne 1987:100). On the street, these children have space and experience a sense of freedom and adventure and they can play, laugh, make jokes, develop friendships, experience a sense of belonging, and learn how to make it in the world. According to Alice: “On the street we play, we go out, we sell candy and get money. There’s more freedom.”

**The Decision to Work: Who makes the Child Labor Decisions?**

Many have made the argument that the children’s parents are usually the main decision makers in terms of whether or not their children will work (Hunte 2009). A common misconception is that children are “inserted” into the labor market and “put to work” by their parents, as poor families are forced to send their children to work because they are economically dependent on their children’s labor (Gustafsson-Wright & Pyne 2002). While some families may be dependent on children’s labor, such a view continues to place children and their labor under adult-control, ultimately portraying them as
powerless and without agency, thus failing to recognize the decisions that children do make. Such a view fails to acknowledge children as active agents in their own lives (Myers 1988, Levison 2000 and Kassouf 2002).

These children like being able to help their families while also being able to buy their own things they may want or need. Street labor provides these children with an opportunity, as they do not have many available to them, to participate and be involved in the production of value while also at the same time maintain a sense of agency and control over themselves and their lives. In this way, these children are social, cultural, political, and economic actors and producers (Levison 2000).

The large majority of the child street laborers I spoke to said that they were on the street and working because they chose to. They insisted that they wanted to be there and that they liked being there. Although these children are living in incredibly difficult circumstances with a number of structural constraints, they are struggling to improve their lives and situations and in some cases the lives and situations of their families (Montgomery 2001:124). Many of these children are making decisions about their lives and their work that go far beyond that of socialization, marginalization, and exploitation, as is all too often assumed (Offit 2008). However, their choices are seriously constrained and limited by larger structural factors, which ultimately condition their choices and therefore their lives and activities. Given the scarcity of options and opportunities open and available to these children and their families, it is in this way and under these very particular and constrained circumstances that these children have “chosen” to work on the street and like their work on the street, as the street and their work is in many ways their
only option (Montgomery 2001:90). They are simply utilizing the resources that are available to them. These children are making active and informed choices among incredibly limited options (Montgomery 2001).

While these children and adolescents like working because they like making their own money and they like being able to depend on themselves, they are also working because of their families. Virtually all child and adolescent participants said that children are working because of their family, as they are well aware of the help that is needed in their homes. It is especially important to remember, particularly in Brazil, and even more so among the poor, that the social or the collective usually outweighs the individual. The collective or the community is at the core of their survival in many ways (Kovats-Bernat 2006). The emphasis on the collective was also evident in the fact that children rarely spoke in the singular Eu or I, but instead, almost always told their stories from the collective Nos or We. Therefore, their work, just as their lives, cannot be completely split or separated from others, especially their families. While their work and their decisions to work are often the result of their own choices, their choices usually include and take into consideration their families to whom they contribute their earnings and their friends with whom they work and play. However, their work on the street, even if motivated by family need, still allows the child to be independent and feel good about being able to support themselves while also helping at home.

The choices that these children are making, whether to go out and work for themselves or their families or both, are often, if not always, based on economic need. If that need were never present and these children had access to basic resources, education,
and other spaces, if they had other options, they would not be seeking and choosing the street. When I asked working children if they would rather be doing something else, virtually all of them stated that they would rather be riding their bike, playing soccer, studying, or playing. However, these children are very well aware of the options and opportunities, or lack there of, that are available to them and their families.

Children’s Experiences While Working: The Brutality of the Informal Street Economy

One of the most reported dangers to the safety of children when working on the street was being hit by a vehicle. Many of these children work at stoplights and on islands that are in the middle of busy streets with fast passing cars (Hunte 2009). Many child and adolescent participants reported either having friends who were hit by cars or having seen working children get hit by a car. Marcelo (15) himself was hit by a truck and was in a coma and hospitalized for one month. Samantha (13) commented on how being hit by a car is particularly dangerous for younger children. “Younger children who are ornery, it’s better not to bring them because here, a lot of cars pass and it’s dangerous and if they’re running around, they could get hit by a car and everything.”

Another danger that many children reported was the Conselho Tutelar (Tutelary Council, which is responsible for the wellbeing and safety of children and adolescents and is essentially Brazil’s child protective services). All children said that they take off running when they see the Tutelary Council while working because they are afraid that they will be taken away from their families and never see them again. Alice was caught by the Tutelary Council once and was taken back home. She said that she was back at
the stoplight the very next day. “We were needing money. We went to the stoplight again.”

The Tutelary Council is representative of the perspective of the larger social body and the international community about the survival strategies of these children. Child labor is viewed as a social pathology of the poor, ultimately resulting in the criminalization, repression, and attempts at correction of these children and the ways in which they go about surviving and making it in the world. Such an approach only further marginalizes these children, maintaining their need to go to the street and their marginal position on the marginal street.

Children and adolescents, both male and female, are often solicited for sex while working on the street (Hunte 2009). However, the street is not the only place where this occurs. Some children are also solicited for sex in their communities. For example, there is a man that rides by comunidade Hatsuta on his bicycle every single day, offering the children, mostly boys, 10 reais to go with him. Because of their status as poor, their situations of need are preyed upon.

Leticia (12) also mentioned sexual dangers while working on the street when she said, “If you’re working on the street, rapists come and get us.” I asked her if that had ever happened to her, to which she responded, “Yeah. A man already tried to get us and we ran. The man had a knife and me and my friends went running and he ran after us.” She reported another incident where three men in a car went after her and her friends. Leticia mentioned the adult males that “hang out” at street fairs and markets, which happen to be popular places for poor children to work, play, collect leftover food scraps,
beg, and sometimes even steal. These men go to the fairs and show the children their penises. Leticia spoke in length about how she goes about evading sexual solicitation. She has thrown wood at men that have tried to take her. She also keeps her nails long so that when a man comes, she can scratch his face.

Alice also mentioned being solicited for sex as a danger. While almost all child street laborers said that males and females have the same experiences working on the street, Alice was the only participant to say that females are more defenseless, “Because there are bad men that try to abuse girls. There are men that pass offering money to the girls to go with them.” When asked if that had ever happened to her, she said, “Yes, it happened. They offered to give me money to go with them, to hook up with them on the street, to enter in their car and I said no. I didn’t go.” However, she has seen other girls go with them. “I have seen a bunch of girls who worked at the stoplight and men came offering money and they went with them. They were also selling candy. They go to make more money. They go because they want to.”

When asked what some of the dangers for children working on the street are, Maria (10) responded with the following without any hesitation whatsoever, “Men.” According to Maria, “They call kids to go a bunch of places.” “To go a bunch of places,” is Maria’s way of saying that the man is trying to pick the child up for sex. Maria said that men go after both boys and girls. During the middle of the interview Maria whispered the following into my ear: “Auntie, Elizabeth already went with a man that did a bunch of stuff to her.” On this particular day there were three females at the stoplight, all age 10, working with malabares. Elizabeth happened to be one of the girls.
Unfortunately, I was unable to carry out an interview with Elizabeth, who was in a situation of forced labor and whose mother threatened to beat her and not feed her if she did not come home with enough money. Elizabeth may have “chosen” to go with this man either as an escape from her situation at home or to make the money that her mother demanded of her.

Sandra (18) also spoke about being solicited for sex: “Sometimes people just wanted to buy candy out of interest. They would ask for things in return.” Most of her female friends went with the men. “At the stoplight, the guys came up and offered. Because they thought it was difficult to work on the street and make a real, they went, but I didn’t. I was more serious. I was a girl that was more quiet. I liked friendship, but these things with relations like that, with sex, no.”

Fights with other working children over territory or pontos, usually a stoplight, as they interfere with the economic opportunities of other children and adolescents are another danger that was mentioned by many child street laborers (Ferreira 1980, Hecht 1998, Huggins & Rodrigues 2004 and Kovats-Bernat 2006). According to Alice, “One arrives first and is selling and then another person comes and wants to take their place. There were days that we would get to the stoplight and there were other people there and they didn’t want to let us stay at the light, but we stayed.” Alice has been in one fight. She was 13 at the time and fought with a boy who was also around 13. “He wanted to stay at the stoplight where I was he and wanted me to leave. He tried to attack me with this glass lamp. Thank God it didn’t cut me. I went running after him and hit him. I left because he wouldn’t leave the stoplight.”
Josue (10) has also had runs ins with other children on the street. A group of three males between the ages of 11 and 13 from comunidade Hatsuta spend many of their days on the big sidewalk robbing stores and passerby. One Friday evening when I was walking Josue to the big sidewalk to work, these three males approached him. Josue told me that this same group of males tried to steal the flip-flops off of his feet. He was terrified, especially because he had 100 reais on him that day. I told him to take the night off of work and just go home. Because he was so afraid, he agreed, and I walked him to the bus stop and saw him off.

There are particular ways in which the labor of these children is organized and divided. Their work is largely organized around hierarchies of power and control over space and money, which is demonstrative of the ways in which they have internalized and reproduced the discrimination and hierarchies that exist in Brazilian society (Ferreira 1980, Beazley 2003, Rizzini & Butler 2003, and Rizzini & Thapliyal 2007). There are leaders of the spaces these children appropriate. Their leadership is based on either age, with the oldest usually being the leader, or who arrives first (Ferreira 1980). Samantha spoke about how things work at the stoplight when there is more than one person.

It’s like this, when everyone arrives to the light, each person will say, ‘I’m the first car. I’m the second car. I’m the third.’ If I was the first for example, and she went to the first then it’s understood that if you go to the car of the other, you have to share your money with them. For example, if she gets one real, then she’s going to give 50 cents, because it’s fifty-fifty and they split it. That’s how it is.

This is just one of the ways in which they organize their work. However, I have also seen Elizabeth (10) who was in a situation of forced labor, working at a stoplight with three older adolescent females. The three adolescent females were playing cards...
while Elizabeth was working. Whenever Elizabeth made any money whatsoever, she would walk over to the 15 year old, tell her how much she made, and give her all of the money. When I asked why she was doing this, she said it was because she did not have pockets. Elizabeth did have pockets. I had seen her about an hour or two before at a different stoplight working with two other 10-year-old females. At the stoplight with the younger females, Elizabeth put all of the money she made into the pocket of her jeans.

Unlike street children, the police pose minimal to no threat to child street laborers. However, similar to street children, many child street laborers reported disappearing as a danger. Disappearing is an all too common occurrence. On all too many occasions, I learned about a child or adolescent who had disappeared either by word of mouth, bumping into family members walking around with a picture of the disappeared, or bumping into signs like the one below posted (Figure 15) throughout the city center.

Figure 15, “Disappeared,” Photograph by Alicia Bolton, 5/02/2011
The street and their work on the street provide these children with a chance to access and possess goods that they would otherwise not have access to. Their work on the street also provides them with the opportunity to act as consumers and to gain status and social access through those goods (Zaluar 1994). In this way, their work is in many ways an attempt to gain or develop a sense of inclusion and self worth and find their place in the world (Rizzini & Butler 2003).

Child street laborers in many ways work so they can have what the North, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Brazilian Constitution and Child and Adolescent Statute (ECA) define as a childhood and claim their rights should be. Their street labor provides these children with opportunities and possibilities, allowing them to access the resources and rights that the international community asserts they should have, but fails to ensure (Bourgois 1996 and Offit 2008). These children are seeking out basic resources on the street such as food and decent restrooms, as opposed to a plastic bag, as many of their homes are without basic sanitation. Through their work on the street, they are also seeking out a childhood, which includes a space to play and the freedom to play, make friends, and become part of a community. Many people on the street also know these children. In this way, many of them feel like somebody on the street, where they experience a certain degree of acknowledgement, recognition, visibility, and belonging that they would not experience otherwise.

The informal street economy is the only place where these children and adolescents can experience a sense of agency or control over their lives, as these children and adolescents are excluded from all other aspects of social life and are therefore stuck
in lives in which they have minimal to no control (Berlant 2011:216). They are doing their best with what they have available to them and in this way their street labor is a rights claiming process. Their independent street labor provides them with necessary materials and emotional resources and allows them to experience childhood, make friends, become part of a community, gain control over their lives, and develop their identities, subjectivities, and economic existence as child street laborers, but not as full human beings, thus allowing more individual and collective agency.

When asked what they thought of the street, virtually all child street laborers said that the street is “good.” Almost all of them insisted that they like the street and like working on the street for its independence, freedom, opportunity, and what it has done to shape their lives, friends, agency, and subjectivities. However, the street is only good in that these children and adolescents hate the conditions that led them there, mainly their poverty and situations of marginality and exclusion (Kovats-Bernat 2006:59). These marginal children are carrying out marginal labor in one of the most marginal of spaces: the street. In this way, their mere identification with the street and their identities as child street laborers also unfortunately keeps them in their non-spaces, or zones of abandonment, further marginalizing them and denying them any rights, which I will discuss further in chapter 7 (Biehl 2005, Berlant 2011 and Kovats-Bernat 2006). In this way, their identities as child street laborers are shaped by their awareness of their exclusion, marginality, and lack of rights.
Chapter 5  Experiences Of the Street: The Lived Experience of Being a Street Child and the Political Economy of the Street

“The street molds the child, compelling certain behaviors, mandating a particular consciousness, and informing a unique version of reality.”

Kovats-Bernat 2006:59

Chapter 3 explored the economic and social reasons for why children go to the street to live while this chapter examines the lived experience of children and adolescents living on the street (O’Haire 2011). The goal of this chapter is to provide insight into how children and adolescents live and survive on the street. These children often go to the street because of family problems and extreme poverty. They also live in spaces of physical and social exclusion and go to the street in search of visibility, which does not exist in their neighborhoods. The city center and streets become their play center and provide these children and adolescents with freedom, adventure, friendship, resources, and family. However, once on the street, these children experience fear and find themselves in situations of extreme risk and vulnerability.

A common assumption and misconception is that street children are “abandoned” by or abandon their families (Rizzini 1994). Much of the literature reports that street children have completely lost ties to their families and homes. In this way, these children are said to have exchanged their homes for the street (Alves 1991). However, home, for some of these children, continues to exist. Unlike previous research has shown, many of those of the street maintain familial ties and some degree of contact with their families, even when living on the street (Glauser 1990). Some of these children and adolescents even have homes to go to (O’Haire 2011). Some do not have a home or a place to stay while others, although they may have a home, the conditions and their experiences in
their home and with their families makes the street a better option. For these children, the street is home (Kovats-Bernat 2006).

**Group Organization of Street Children: Daily Survival Tactics and Strategies**

In order to understand the experiences of those of the street, it is necessary to begin with an examination of the ways in which those of the street organize themselves. This includes an investigation of their daily survival tactics and strategies (Hansson 2003). The three organizational types that exist among street children include: small groups, couples, and loners. The type of group a street child is involved with in many ways depends on the sex of the child.

As already mentioned in Chapter 3, one factor that brings many children to the street is the search for freedom and autonomy (Scharf et al. 1986, Smith 1987-88 and Keen 1989). However, while those of the street tend to be individualistic, they are also at the same incredibly altruistic and united (Smith 1987-88, Bothma 1988 and Keen 1989).

**Small Groups**

Street children often group together for a variety of reasons. They often form groups for the purpose of protection and self-defense. Street children typically spend their days and nights together, sleep together, beg together, steal together, and use drugs together. All activities are usually carried out as a group (O’Haire 2011). As Everson stated:

> We spent the night awake and slept during the day. We got a place to sleep, and because we were children, we were afraid to sleep at night and we didn’t know what could possibly happen. We always slept in a group because it was safer. We would meet and have one little group go here and another little group go there, because a lot of kids together is trouble. I would always go with whoever would have the least problems.
Everson and Joao Pedro were in a group made up of approximately 10 street children, who were all males. Their group often slept by a bakery on a particular corner because it had a place that released hot air that would keep them warm. They would wake up in the morning, get their coffee from the bakery, and go buy glue to sniff. According to Everson:

Because we were minors, because we were children, the people who were older on the street wanted to take advantage and were like oh go and get me something to eat and give me money for this, so the way in which we protected ourselves was by coming and staying together. I am certain that if one of us got to the street and stayed alone, we would never survive. Because we had the company of others, we were fine.

Washington also spoke about the reasons for being in a group.

Before, there were a lot of us. It was fun to be together, we liked it. And for us it was better. It was safer for us to be together. I always had friends who were older and had more time on the street. With them, we had a place to sleep and we were more at ease. We always slept close to the police station. We slept there a lot sniffing glue and causing havoc right by the police. We would sleep at like 3 or 4 in the morning when there were already people out and about on the street, so there wasn’t too much danger. But we were always in a group. It’s also because if you’re on the street, you’re not just going to be alone without anybody. You’re always going to be with people.

Similar to Washington, Michele (21) also commented on why both males and females spend their time in groups. Beyond the need for safety and protection is the need for company. According to Michele, “It sucks to be alone. You have no one to talk to. The time doesn’t pass.”

It is reported throughout the literature that those with whom street children reside on the street are often referred to and treated as if they were surrogate family or their street family (Hansson 2003 and Rizzini & Butler 2003). For example, Alexa (25), who
has been living on the street since she was 10 years old, for the last 15 years, introduced those of her group as her street brother, street sister, street uncle, etc. However, Everson brought up another interesting and important point when he said: “The older people that already knew me, that watched over the younger kids, we were obligated to call street dad and street mom.” While Everson referred to those of his group as his family, he also demonstrates how street children do not always refer to others living on the street, particularly older people, in such a way out of love or by choice, but instead do so out of fear, obligation, and coercion. Even Alexa who introduced those of her group as her street brother and street uncle also said that she does not trust anybody. In these ways, their grouping together may be more of a survival strategy in an extremely hostile environment than that of an actual bond or family.

Couples

Another way in which street children organize themselves on the street, beyond small groups, is in couples. I never saw a couple. I just heard about them (Hansson 2003). Females are reported to have the option of either joining an already organized group or entering a relationship with a male if they want to survive on the street. However, I would argue that there are also advantages for being in a couple for males. Couples are less visible and call less attention, and therefore experience fewer problems than a group.

Many females spoke about having a boyfriend, whom they usually referred to as marido (husband), while living on the street. Maridos are a form a support and protection that females develop while living on the street. Both Alexa and Michele had
maridos at the time of their interviews and seemed to always have maridos while living on the street. When asked who she stayed with while on the street, Alexa said that she was never alone. “It was me and my ex-marido.” Alexa’s most recent marido, with whom she had been for only a couple of weeks at the time of the interview, wanted to bless their relationship by getting her pregnant and giving her a baby. Alexa was ecstatic about this.

Those who partner up with males, or maridos, appear to be protecting themselves from other males and violence, particularly sexual violence (Smith 1987-88, Keen 1989, Hansson 2003 and Rizzini & Butler 2003). According to Michele, the only difference between males and females who live on the street in terms of their experience, “…is that if you’re a woman, then everyone is going to be all up on you. Everyone wants you. When there’s a new woman, everyone thinks she’s pretty. I’m married and these people are still all up on me.” In this way, females of the street experience less personal autonomy than males (Hansson 2003).

Everson also spoke about the difference in experience among males and females while living on the street.

Girls are exposed to a lot more dangers than boys are… When girls arrived to the street, they were scared, you know, and they would join someone and it was usually an older guy and the guys would abuse them. So it was protection the girls were looking for and the guys wanted sex or they would put them out to make money.

Loner

Finally, the other organizational type that I observed, beyond small groups and couples, were loners. Female loners were much more rare. According to the research,
loner females are at higher risk of earning a living through prostitution. The only female of the street that I have knowledge of being a loner is Jaqueline, who I introduced in chapter 3, and does in fact prostitute herself for crack or money for crack. However, Jaqueline also had a boyfriend, although I never saw her with him.

Loners reported both advantages and disadvantages of being in a group and of being a loner. As Washington stated:

We were a bunch of people. We were always in a group. I was never alone, only sometimes. After a while I started to be more on my own because being in a group calls a lot of attention. It calls a lot of attention, so people see you and they’re afraid, you know. But if you’re alone, no. You have more opportunity. A lot more people come up to you. If you’re in a group, you call a lot of attention, the police stop you all the time. Thank God, after the time I started hanging on my own, I rarely had any encounters with the police.

Not only is being a loner often an advantage for street children, as they are less visible, call less attention, and therefore experience fewer problems and possibilities of violence, being a loner also seems to increase one’s chances of acquiring help, food, and other resources. This increased chance of success is most likely due to their being perceived as less of a potential threat when alone, as groups of street children are avoided because they are feared by the larger social body.

*Places of Street Children in Non-Street Spaces: Where Street Children Reside Off the Street*

Anderson, Michele, and Alexa, at the time of their interviews, spent most of their days in a plaza with their “street family.” However, they do not sleep there because it is too dangerous at night. They either sleep in another safer location on the street in a group or go to a homeless shelter, which they are not the biggest fans of because of the rules
and restrictions (Rizzini & Butler 2003). Many of those living on the street also seek shelter and create homes in abandoned buildings and homes. This is referred to as *invasões* (invasions), as the abandoned building is literally invaded or squatted.

After getting out of prison, Washington spent time in Santos living on the streets for a few months.

I was using drugs again. I was using drugs, smoking rocks. I was working again with recycling. I had my cart (for recycling). It was like a house for me. I had something I would throw over it so it was like a tent inside. I put my mattress inside and it was my little house inside of my cart and I stayed there. And sometimes I would stay at a gas station. When I didn’t want to cook, I would go to other people’s houses or just got already prepared food. But when I wanted to make my own food, I would get meat or whatever, and at the gas station I would get a small bottle of alcohol and a can, cut the can, and make a little stove. I had a little pan and I carried my own food on me, so when I wanted a coffee or to make my own food, that’s what I would do. So I lived like that for two, three months and then I came here (Guarulhos).

**The Political Economy of the Street: Income Generating Activities and Reciprocity Among Street Children in Guarulhos**

Street children and adolescents typically do not work. I observed only two individuals *of* the street that worked, although their work was incredibly inconsistent. One was a male “guarding” cars in front of a bakery and the other was Jaqueline who would either collect paper every once in a while on the street to recycle or prostitute herself, although I never observed her doing either. For those that do work, their work is not carried out in order to contribute to the economies of their households.

According to the literature, the income generating activities carried out by street children and adolescents are segregated by sex. Sexual services are reported to be more commonly carried out by females while males are more typically involved with theft and
robbery (Smith 1987-88, Bothma 1988, Keen 1989 and Hansson 2003). However, although involvement in prostitution did appear to be more common among females, I was also informed of males being involved with this particular type of work. Also, many of the females I spoke to that live or once lived on the street reported being involved with theft and robbery. During my time in the field, there was a group of five 11-year-old females that would do arrastão (group robberies). It is a misconception that the income generating activities of males and females on the street are so clearly divided and different.

The street is not equal to those who live on it (Hansson 2003). Similar to child street laborers, younger street children tend to have better economic prospects than older street children and adolescents (Aptekar 1988a, 1988b, 1988c & 1988d). Society is sympathetic towards cute young children on the street, but is much less so about older children, who are often viewed with fear and as threats. Younger children often feed on the pity of others, therefore bringing in more money and resources.

Street children and adolescents in many ways rely upon emotional manipulation of passerby and other adults in order to obtain vital resources such as food and money (Offtit 2008). They often manipulate society who in many ways supports their street lifestyle and their ability to live and survive on the street. Street children create networks of support with a variety of people including shopkeepers, churches, and non-profit organizations. These networks of support guarantee these children with certain resources by providing them with food, shelter, clothing, entertainment, a shower, and other
resources (Ennew 1994a, 1994b & 1994c and Hecht 1998). They also often provide these children with safety and protection, which I will discuss below in more detail.

Street children are aware of the pity many feel for them and they take advantage of this. As Everson stated:

Begging was the system that we always had. We grew up and they continued helping us. They continued to maintain and support our addiction for a long time, even after we were 18, 19 years old, because on the street, the situation is difficult. You’re in a situation where you don’t have a place to sleep. You don’t have the basics. You don’t have the basics to live with dignity. But you eat, drink, and sleep. There are people that maintain this kind of life. Because if I knock on your door and you don’t give me a plate of food, I know that next door they will, because it’s a human thing, helping others. Even though people have the tendency to judge, that person will sometimes give a plate of food.

Washington also spoke directly to this when he said:

I had everything. I worked collecting recycling, people gave me things. If I asked for something, they gave me what I needed. If I wanted to eat, if I wanted to take a bath, if I needed water, I did what I wanted. I also smoked a little rock too at that time, but I didn’t smoke a lot. For me, there was nothing bad. Everything was good (laughs) because you got everything so easily on the street. On the street you had a place to bathe. We could come here to the project to take a shower. In the morning we would come here for breakfast. Then we would go to the street and at noon there is Bom Prato (a cheap lunch place) and we would be there begging and at night there would be people who brought us coffee and food. What else could you want? You have everything in your hands.

Interestingly, Washington, who spoke the most about his need for autonomy and freedom, was actually completely dependent upon others for his survival.

Many spoke about how they went about obtaining their day-to-day needs. One strategy, as told by Washington, was the following:

We would be in a group of like 10 or 12 kids in the center and we would all do arrastao (group robberies) at the stores. We would go running with
the security guard running after us with blankets and shampoo that we stole. We would grab it and run. It was for fun.

Everson discussed another tactic, which was relying on their networks of support.

We didn’t have any intention of walking around with a shoeshine box over our shoulder with each of us making money in an honest manner. No. Instead, we came together and made friends with the owners of shops, because we were really young, so at the time they really helped. One would give one real and then the guy next door would give one more and we would split up and have one group go here, another there, and so each group at the end of the day had money. And so that was how we survived. And I tell you, if you have money in your pocket and a nine year old comes up and asks you for money to eat, it’s going to break your heart. So we took advantage of that and we did really well.

They usually contributed a portion of their money to the group (Smith 1987-88, Bothma 1988 and Hansson 2003).

As Washington grew older and started spending more time on his own, he started recycling paper. “I carried some loads so big that people said it looked like I was carrying around a truck. And I made 30, 40 reais and then I would go to the market.”

He made 30 to 40 reais with a days work of recycling. He also sometimes worked with carreto (carrying/transporting goods), which would bring in more income than recycling. “I could make like 100 reais, but just sometimes. It wasn’t everyday. There were days that I made only forty or fifty, but we would still go out and I would drink a little beer and she (his girlfriend, Alice) would eat something.”

Freedom

“The street is a permissive space allowing personal “freedom.””
(Rizzini & Butler 2003).

AB: Was it difficult for you to get accustomed to the street?  
Washington: To the street? (Laughs). It was too easy. Even the first time I went, it was easy to like.
AB: What did you like about the street?
Washington: The freedom. I had my freedom. I didn’t have to stay at home and didn’t have an hour to come and go. At home you have a time to enter, hour to leave, a time to sleep, a time to use the bathroom, there’s a time for everything. There’s no waiting your turn [on the street]. I had my freedom. I felt more free. I liked the street. We messed around the whole night, we used drugs. It was already a habit to be on the street. It was an addiction really. To have drugs and everyone would be using and messing around with each other, sometimes robbing, sometimes begging at the stoplight. Sometimes we would get glue. We had a bottle of glue, and we would go the center and we would get money and we would play video games and sniff glue inside the place (laughs). We would put the bottle inside of our long sleeve shirt.
AB: So you spoke about all of the things that you liked, but what were the things that you didn’t like about the street?

Freedom was a major aspect of street life that was reported by those of the street as well as throughout the literature. Although males in particular tended to emphasize the positive aspects of street life, particularly the freedom and adventure they experience in living as they choose, females also spoke about freedom (Scharf et al. 1986, Swart 1988 and Hansson 2003). Michele, who was 21 at the time of the interview, spoke about what she learned when she first went to live on the street at the age of 15. “It wasn’t bad, no. I met a lot of people, I learned a lot of things that I didn’t know. I learned to defend myself, to say no at the right time, to live alone. I learned to be someone, to be someone, how do you say it... independent.”

The street carries with it an image of freedom. It is a space where children can socialize, hang out and interact with peers, have fun, mess around, adventure, cause trouble and mischief, experiment with drugs, and it all occurs in an unsupervised environment, where the world is child-centered and ruled and not adult-centered and
ruled. Tobias Hecht (1998) refers to this as, “a street ethos based on spontaneity, insubordination to authority, and solidarity with other deeply rejected young people” (Hecht 1998:183).

Vogel and Mello (1991:145) also wrote about the street and freedom. On the street there is no right time to do anything, and one is not forced to do or stop doing anything. To live on the street means to have no boss or father. Because of this, beyond attaining in time and space a freedom inconceivable to home children, the children are also able to use their bodies in the manner they please, through sexual experiences and drug consumption.

Many child and adolescent participants spoke in length about this sense and experience of freedom. On various occasions throughout his life history Washington would say: “Like I already told you, I don’t like to be prohibited at all. I don’t like to be told what to do.” According to Anderson (18): “I’m on the street because I want to be, because I feel better here. I think it’s cool man. There’s more freedom. You can do whatever you want. Nobody tells you what to do. But that’s what it is auntie, I’m on the street because I want to be.” Everson, who was 22 at the time of the interview and went to the street when he was 9 years old said, “It was freedom at night and there’s no one controlling you and you’re living new things, having new experiences, making new friends.”

Many of those who live or once lived on the street stated that they had become so used to the street that they were not able to leave the street. Most referred to both drugs and the street in the same way, as addictions. According to Everson, “I think both of them are addictions. It [the street] ends up becoming a part of your life. I stay on the street. I have freedom to come and go where I want, when I want, with whom I want.”
You don’t have your family controlling you.” The longer these children stay on the street, the more they get used to the street, making it difficult for them to leave. Much of the addiction then with the street appears to be in the freedom that it offers. In addition to the freedom, the street also over time becomes inseparable from the identities of the children and adolescents that live there. The street becomes a fundamental aspect of their personhood, which is yet another factor that keeps them there (Kovats-Bernat 2006:64).

Those who live or once lived on the street told various stories that captured this sense of freedom. One of the major adventures that those of the street recalled were their walks to the beach, from Guarulhos to Santos, which is an hour drive. It usually took them one, two, sometimes three days to get there. According to Washington:

We would stop and use drugs on the way there. Each of us would always be carrying a can of glue. We would stop at waterfalls on the way and swim and take a bath and mess around. When we entered the city, we got food and went out. It was for fun. It was an adventure. Man, it was an adventure… I like it, even today.

Joao Pedro also spoke about this sense of freedom when he said, “We robbed a lot in the center of Guarulhos. We went to the beach by foot. We adventured a lot. We messed around, fell down, and got up again. We also got involved with prostitutes too, but it was all just for fun.”

Everson and Joao Pedro reminisced on the past and told stories of getting on top of trains to surf them and catching rides on the back of trash trucks while drunk. They knew the truck drivers, who would give them alcohol. They also spoke about their many walks to the beach with a group of 12 to 13 other kids. According to Everson: “It was fun. Think about a kid who’s in a diversion park. We were in the play center. It was all
really good. It was very rare for us to fight. We fought more for banal machismo. And if we did ever fight, we were all playing again very soon, so it was a good time.”

Following the observations of Kovats-Bernat (2006), these children and adolescents “do in a way love the street, for its independence, its freedom, [its economic opportunity], and for what it has done to shape their identities as friends, comrades, and social actors. But they love the street only insofar as they hate the conditions that have led them there and that keep them there” (Kovats-Bernat 2006:37). There also comes a time in a street child’s life, when words like freedom are often followed with stories of violence when talking about the street.

**Violence: The Myth of Freedom**

“Their worst enemy is what they describe as the addictive power of street life itself.” (Hecht 1998:207).

Those who live on the street are more vulnerable than those who work on the street and return home. For those who sleep on the street, they’ll kill you, shoot you. A lot of people are disappearing. There are a lot of deaths and a lot of people are afraid here in Guarulhos. It’s a crisis that we’re going through.

Amanda, 27

Violence is one of the few guarantees and constants in the lives of street children. All participants who either live or once lived on the street have suffered various forms of violence while on the street whether by police or security guards, other street children, and others from the larger social body (Rizzini & Butler 2002). In addition to the violence that these children experience, they also experience and live with daily discrimination, marginalization, and are feared by the rest of society (O’Haire 2011). As
they get older and bigger, tolerance for those of the street lessens. This is when life becomes particularly dangerous for them (O’Haire 2011).

There are common assumptions and misconceptions about the degree to which these children are violent. There are many contradictory images of street children, which range from innocent to threatening, victims to perpetrators, and as at risk to as risks. These dual images of their being violent are often countered with and followed by statements about the violence that they experience. Both are true. Street children and adolescents are victims of serious violence while also at the same time they can be extremely violent and unpredictable themselves, especially now with the major role that crack and oxi play in their lives. Their being violent also goes hand in hand with their identity as street child, as it is one of the many survival strategies they have had to develop in order to live on the street in that it allows them to “get by” by acquiring resources by instilling fear in the larger social body through theft, robbery, and assault. Their being violent also serves as a defense mechanism.

Many of these children and adolescents become aware of the fact that the “freedom” they initially sought on the street was also in many ways an illusion. When looking back, Everson referred to many of their adventures as “situations of risk.”

Going to Sao Paulo to surf trains and getting on top of the train… How many times we went from here to Santos. We went walking and we always made it. Always. One time we got lost in the forest. Imagine all of these kids in the middle of a forest. And they started crying and were like, ‘We’re never going to get out of here. For the love of God, I want my mom.’ In the beginning we would go with a lot of people. Like 12 or 13 people. So it was always fun. And one time when we went, Marina, she died on one of those trips. She was hit by a car. Another time, everyone from the group was reunited one day. We caught a bus from here and went to a nearby city, Aruja, and a fatality occurred. One of our
friends was hit by a car. He was killed on his 12th birthday, hit by a car… There was another incident with one of our friends who died when he was really young. He drowned in a lake. There were so many risks. Because we didn’t have anyone responsible for us these kinds of things happened. That was the freedom that we were looking for? No. Those were the consequences of the things that we were doing.

It seems that all children that live on the street at some point begin to experience disillusionment with the street, which is usually the result of violent episodes and experiences. At this point, they begin to experience the costs of the “freedom” they sought when leaving home. They discover that the street is not a space of freedom and does not provide the child that lives there with any opportunity to grow or improve their life. They realize that although family life was difficult, life away from the family is usually more difficult (Rizzini et al. 2007). While their identity as street child allows, or once allowed, them to access freedom, agency, and solidarity, it also at the same time marginalizes them, further denying them of any kind of rights. Their identification with the street and their identities as street children results in their being labeled and perceived as criminals, threats, dangers, and social ills and they are therefore feared and hated by society. In this way, their identity as street children is ultimately the cause of much of the violence they suffer, as it locks them on the path of imprisonment or death (Kovats-Bernat 2006 and Rizzini et al. 2007).

All participants who live or once lived on the street reported experiencing various forms of violence and dangers while on the street. Street children are exposed to all types of dangers including getting involved with drugs and prostitution. Other dangers reported by those of the street were being stabbed, set on fire, beaten while sleeping, tortured, and killed. Many have friends who have disappeared never to be seen again.
Many have watched their friends go to prison, die from drug overdose, being beaten, or violently killed.

Similar to many studies, those with whom I spoke to that live or previously lived on the street reported that larger, older street youth take advantage of younger street children (Tellez 1976, Munoz & Pachon 1980, Munoz & Palacios 1980, Hickson & Gaydon 1989, Subrahmanyam & Sondhi 1990 and Rizzini & Butler 2003). When they were younger, they would stay awake at night out of fear of older street kids who would take all of their money and whatever else they had. They were also often beaten by older street children and adolescents. Joao Pedro referred to the older people that lived on the street as, "The worst people on the street."

Virtually all of those who live or once lived on the street reported police as a major danger (de Pineda et al. 1978, Fall 1986, Felsman 1981, Lusk 1989 and Pereira 1985). Violent death and assassinations of street children are still extremely common (Swart 1990 and Rizzini 1994). These children and adolescents are killed to keep the city streets safe and clean. Police protection in Brazil is inadequate and those who work as assassins are rarely, if ever, punished (Pinto et al. 1991). Most of the deaths of street children are not reported or registered. Instead, they are merely treated as cases of disappearing or as self-generated by the individual. There are no preventative measures or even attempts to prevent violence against street children. Even within Brazil’s new regime of human rights and citizenship, the judicial system continues to not treat or handle all cases equally nor does it pursue all cases to the end making sure that all crimes are dealt with (Rizzini 1994 and Biehl 2005).
Because there is no recent breaking news about extermination groups does not mean that street children are not being killed or are being treated better by the police. As a result of the worldwide media attention that has been given to the violent practices of Brazilian police, their work now takes place in less visible spaces, as they are afraid of getting caught. Street children continue to be actively killed. Police violence is viewed as a left over from the military dictatorship (Jeffrey 1997). What were once known as extermination groups in the 1980’s and 1990’s are now referred to as *justiceiros* or *pe de pato* (the avengers) and they now kill in *comunidades* as opposed to the city center and open street. This way, their work is much less visible and therefore much less likely, if ever, to make the news. *Comunidades*, because of their heavy drug trafficking, are also where many street children and adolescents spend their time, especially now with their high rates of drug use and abuse. *Justiceiros* or *pe de pato* are usually supported by members of the police and are made up of off duty police officers (O’Haire 2011). Brazil continues to exterminate its undesirable children. According to Everson: “*They want to do a cleansing. So one dead person who lives on the street is one less person who lives on the street, you know.*”

Everson further described the violent practices carried out by the police.

They collected people while they were sleeping and killed them right inside *Parmalat*¹, in the *comunidade*. Because it’s a big space and it’s closed and cars can’t access it, but you can access it by foot and that’s how people would get there to use drugs so they wouldn’t be so exposed to the street. So, the police would come by, and people would be smoking (crack) and sleep there at night, and the police would come by at night and

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¹ Parmalat is a *comunidade* in Guarulhos, where a lot of people die from either drug overdose, are assassinated due to drug related issues or for merely being present in the *comunidade*, as drug trafficking in this particular community is very strong.
kill, you know, with firearms. Close to Parmalat, there is a bridge and there were people sleeping under the bridge and they came and killed 11 people… Because for them it’s tiring, a storeowner always being robbed by the same people. The police here in Brazil, they have their fixed jobs, but they also have their bicos (side jobs), you know, they’re called bicos. Those propinas (tips) that the storeowner pays him [the cop] for a certain service, the storeowner has to pay extra (propinas) on the side to feel safer. I’m paying you for a particular service and my store is robbed and I don’t know who it is, so I’m just going to kill everyone. So, that happens a lot there [Parmalat], so of course the vibe is going to be heavy.

Michele expressed her greatest fear of being on the street:

If you’re alone and someone passes and sets you on fire. That’s what I’m most afraid of, someone passing and setting me on fire… The skinheads, they don’t like people from Bahia, homosexuals, or people who live on the street. They set people on the street on fire. It wasn’t like that before. It’s been like four years more or less since that kind of stuff started.

Everson and Joao Pedro also spoke about skinheads.

Everson: On the street we see a lot of skinheads. They go around beating everyone on the street. These guys take people who live on the street and beat them. It happens a lot.

Joao Pedro: Skinheads are those white dudes who…

Everson: They don’t like people who live on the street, homosexuals, black people.

Joao Pedro: They only like themselves.

Everson: They’re against multi-culturalism.

Joao Pedro: They like anarchism and adore Hitler.

Everson: And when they assault someone their objective is to kill. Whoever is an outsider is viewed as a sickness. They take a group, generalize, and they want to see them in only one way. They don’t know that they have stories, that they are often people who experienced difficulties that marked their lives, or that they’re there because, maybe they don’t have a problem, but because you start using drugs for fun, that ends up becoming a problem. Back in the day [when we were living on the street] there wasn’t a lot of that.

Virtually all of those of the street have spent time in juvenile detention centers or prison. Vitor’s older brother has been to prison two times. Vitor went to prison almost immediately upon turning 18, which was at the end of my stay in the field. Joao Pedro
has been to FEBEM. Everson has been to prison two times. Washington has been to prison. Washington’s older brother went to prison and shortly after getting out was shot and killed by a police officer. Alexa has been to prison twice.

All of the participants I spoke with who live or once lived on the street have many friends who either died or went to prison. Of those that died, beyond the two that were hit by cars and the one that drowned in a lake, several others were violently killed or died from drug-overdoses (Huggins & Rodrigues 2004). One female who went to the street after her boyfriend, got addicted to crack, and ended up staying on the street, was violently murdered. While her boyfriend was in prison, she was assaulted in Parmalat. She was beaten to death with a stick of wood and shot in the head. She was found in Parmalat naked and dead.

Everson, while remembering, told stories about the deaths of many of their friends.

I’ve already lost friends who overdosed. A friend of ours, Rodrigo, he died because he robbed the girlfriend of someone from the favela, a guy who’s involved with drug trafficking. He [Rodrigo] slept in an abandoned car and they [the drug trafficker boyfriend] set the car on fire with Rodrigo inside and he died. He was 14 years old. He was handsome, young, and intelligent. That’s what really happened. A bunch of friends died. I had two friends who were brothers, twins. They both died. They were killed. They were lost in drugs and they were killed and found in the middle of trash. I have a friend who is still in prison and was shot in his mouth and has a hole there. It’s horrible. He was shot and arrested. His brother is also in jail too… So it was difficult. It wasn’t really how we planned it. We were shocked. We were like we’re all going to change our lives. No, it was the other way around. One went and the other followed. We continued to enjoy our freedom and these things all happened over time. More bad things than good things happened.
In many cases, street children begin their search for freedom, but instead, discover what Everson referred to as “reality,” especially through their discovery of drugs, particularly crack and oxi, and the serious substance abuse and dependency issues they develop. Along the way, their search for freedom changes into a search for something else. I really believe at a certain level that these children and adolescents, at least those who are smoking and seriously addicted to crack, which is most of them, are seeking out their deaths. Maybe they are dying, or trying to die, because, as Everson stated, they feel they have nothing to live for. They have nothing but death to expect from their lives, making death their only relief from life (Biehl 2005). Or maybe their death is a choice, and therefore an expression of their agency. Street child agency then may not be about striving to preserve life, but instead may be their resistance against life (Johnson 2003).

Because street children and adolescents are excluded from social reality and social life and have no access to social existence, social spaces, social goods, education, life building, upward mobility, or a chance to even dream, they feel that they have nothing to lose (Biehl 2005 and Berlant 2011). Their lives while on the street are not future directed (Berlant 2011). Street children and adolescents also feel that they have nothing to lose because they have internalized their exclusion. They have internalized and embodied society’s views of them, which is that they are worthless dirt and non-human. In their abandonment, whether by the family or society, they feel responsible and worthless, leaving them with nothing to lose, including life.

However, street children and adolescents may also be struggling and searching for life in painful ways. Maybe with crack and through their addictions to crack they are
struggling to stay attached to life (Berlant 2011). Maybe their struggle for death is also a struggle, or their way of struggling, for life or what Lauren Berlant called “embodiment toward death as a way of life” (Berlant 2011:114). In this way, street children are caught between life and death (Biehl 2005). Their street situation and status as street child began as a search for life and a place in the world. However, their search for life ended up bringing them closer to death.

Drugs

“I want to check myself into Crackland.”

This is what Douglas, who turned 18 toward the end of my time in the field, and attempted to rob me on various occasions when he was fiending for crack, said to me. The severity of crack in Brazil really hit me when I discovered that there are particular locations in cities across the country that are literally known as Cracolândia, or Crackland. Parmalat is the crackland of Guarulhos. All participants, when talking about Parmalat said, “There are drugs everywhere.” Because of the heavy drug trafficking and high incidence of child prostitution within this particular community, PMMR, much of whose work is carried out in comunidades, has not been able to make its way into Parmalat because it is too dangerous.

So many times that I went to Parmalat I felt really bad because the vibe there is really heavy. The vibe there is different. You see a lot of children, young people everywhere all dirty, young girls prostituting themselves for drugs, young boys prostituting themselves for drugs, adults prostituting children because it’s a lot easier to send someone to do your dirty work. You see a lot of that there. So, the police were called a lot and because there were so many complaints, the police would arrive and kill… I just went to Parmalat to get drugs and came back here [to the center of Guarulhos]. For you to have an idea about how heavy the environment was there, there were people that went from here to there and
never returned. Did the guy die? Could he be dead? And then he shows up. The guy went there to get drugs and he stayed. He stayed. It sucked him in. He lived there, slept there, somehow got something to eat there, didn’t bathe because there’s no place to bathe, and he ended up surviving there. And you thought he was dead and he wasn’t. He was living in all of that. So it was the kind of environment that either sucked you in or pushed you away.

The majority of those living on the street today in Guarulhos, Sao Paulo, and most of Brazil, are drug users and addicts. Anderson, who turned 18 while I was in the field and was 12 when he first went to the street to live, was the only person I met that was of the street and was not using or had never used drugs or alcohol, beyond merely tasting beer (see Appendix).

Virtually all participants who live or once lived on the street spoke about drugs more than anything else. They all wanted to talk about drugs. It is or was a huge part of their lives. Drugs have moved from being used socially, as they were in the past with drinking alcohol, sniffing cola (glue), and smoking marijuana, to being an issue and problem of dependency with crack and oxi. Changes in drugs have resulted in changes in group dynamics and group formation. What previously may have been a collective identity and solidarity in terms of street life style is not as strong anymore (Awad 2002 and Beazley 2003). The introduction of crack, and more recently oxi, has in many ways interfered with the social and group cohesion, collective identity, and sense of mutual responsibility and solidarity among street children and adolescents (Aptekar & Heinonen 2003 and Hansson 2003).

It has been reported that among younger children in particular “glue sniffing is an initiation rite that makes them feel part of the group” (Moorehead 1990 and Fernandes &
Drug use then in many ways is a method of peer acceptance and is important to the creation of relationships, the strengthening of the group bond, and the formation of their identity as street child (Rizzini et al. 2007). Everson spoke directly to this when he said:

“I was always kind of insecure in terms of rejection and stuff. Even with drugs. It wasn’t because I had a problem or because I was weak minded. My problem was acceptance. My friends started to use and I felt the need so I wouldn’t be excluded. And in order to be accepted I ended up using to get close to them because the relationship that I had with my friends, I didn’t have at home. I never felt the need, that need, desire to wake up and feel like I need to use drugs. It was more for friends. I didn’t have anything to do and my friends were like let’s go to this place and I was like let’s go and we got some money together and we were using drugs. I was never open to drugs, but I was always really open to the company of my friends, so one thing led to another.

Drug use also acts as a form of protection or defense against the extremely intense environment and lifestyle these children live on the street. According to Joao Pedro, “Being in that reality is so heavy man. They want to find ways to anesthetize to a certain point.” In other words, as a result of their suffering, they are seeking out relief and escape through drugs (Biehl 2005). They are seeking a momentary sense of wellbeing, a relief from themselves, their realities, and their lives. This self-medication is both a response to their material and social context as well as their attempt at being part of a community or space that produces or provides a sense of belonging and solidarity through comfort and escape (Berlant 2011:117).

However, drug use has gone far beyond that of mere peer acceptance and protection and has instead become a serious issue of addiction. As Washington stated:

“Today I think a lot of people are on the street because of drugs. The majority are there because of drugs… rock (crack). The worst drug that
there is today is rock. It’s not because of cocaine or whatever. It’s rock. It’s because of crack. These guys spend day after day without bathing, without taking care of themselves. I used to be like that. I spent days on drugs. Crack is a drug that they say you’re high in like 7 seconds, but the high of the drug, you feel fear. You feel fear. With whatever noise, you’re afraid. And you just finish using, you’re not even finished and you already want more. It’s a pleasure. I don’t know how to explain it. We do it to escape from our everyday reality. We alleviate ourselves a little. Then on the drug, you don’t want to know about anything anymore. You just care about the drug. I spent the whole week from Monday to Sunday hardly sleeping at all, using drugs all night, smoking crack, just using drugs without stopping.

Amanda also spoke about her issues of dependency when she said, “I wasn’t taking care of myself. I didn’t eat. I didn’t want to do anything. The only thing I didn’t do was prostitute myself to be able to use the drug. But I did rob. I robbed others, yes. I collected paper on the street. I did whatever I could to get crack.” She was around 11 or 12 when she was living on the street and lived there for one year and a half. Amanda also spoke about how crack takes away your desire and ability to do anything. “You can’t even drink a cup of water.”

Joao Pedro’s first contact with drugs was when he was 10. It was in 2000 when he started sniffing glue. During this time, he went back and forth between the street and home. He would always try and hide as much as he could in terms of what he was doing from his family.

All of the kids that I hung out with were sniffing glue man. They would grab a can and be like hey let’s sniff some glue and I was like, no, that stuff is bad for you man. But I did it. And then I started going to Sao Paulo, Anhangabau, Praca da Se, and I met some of the most violent people there, some who even walked around armed, you know. And then I started smoking marijuana.
Joao Pedro was 16 when he first smoked crack and it was all while he was living on the street. Joao Pedro developed a serious addiction to crack.

And then when I was 17, I went to Parmalat where my contact with crack got worse. I was no longer able to control it. I would do anything and everything to anyone just to get more. I didn’t even care about my family or about anything. So summing it all up, I was no longer at a social level. I was at an anti-social level. And then I started to witness a bunch of horrors. I’ve seen a lot of people die right in front of me. I’ve seen people overdose. Bodies on fire and burning. You know man, summing it all up, the drug, the guys would rob to be able to use and then the pe de pato, justiceiros (avengers) arrived and killed. For them, people who are in that kind of life aren’t worth anything.

When Everson first went to the street about 13 years ago at the age of nine, there were not drugs like there is today.

There weren’t drugs. Things have changed a lot because today drugs are really strong. I got into drugs. I started using glue. The group just had access to glue at that time. I even remember how we bought it. When we were minors, we got a drunk on the street and got him to buy us cachaca (sugar cane rum). We were like, ‘This here is for you to buy your cachaca and this here is for the glue for us to sniff.’ So we gave our money to the drunks and they bought it for us, and we went and hid in some empty wasteland, sniffed, and were louco (crazy, which means high) the whole night. On cold nights it ended up being something that we did to warm us up more than anything but then that just ended up being an excuse because then we were sniffing day and night. It didn’t matter what time it was… Then I started using other things like mixtures of chemicals, and then it was marijuana, cocaine, and then crack. I stopped there. I could have gone further, but I stopped there. Thank God.

Everson started smoking crack at the age of 14 and used until he was 21.

Everson also spoke about how crack changed the social dynamics and group formation of street children. He talked about people being afraid of them because there were a lot of children their age that assaulted and robbed people. However, “They didn’t hang with our group because they assaulted and we thought it was wrong. So much so
that one of the guys in the group, when he started smoking cigarettes, we kind of excluded him. That didn’t work to hang with us.” But then when drugs started entering their lives, things changed.

We were friends ever since we were young and everything changed. We weren’t so close anymore. We already were more divided. Because of the drugs, I think that all of a sudden we thought that people were going to start depending on us, ‘Oh, you’re going to want to use my drugs. I’m going to want to use yours,’ so we kind of split up and only wanted to hang with those who made more money and those who made little were excluded. Our friends were those who were by our side going after drugs, buying and using. Those were our friends. And those who were more removed, or those who weren’t as deep in the drugs, weren’t the same company anymore. Yeah, when I was on the street, we were a family, but what came between us were the drugs. Drugs transform people in a way that you can’t even imagine. It’s crazy.

With the introduction of drugs, particularly crack and now oxi, street children have become more individualistic, with the group and their bond of solidarity quickly fading and life on the street being more about individual survival and addiction. Their initial search for freedom quickly ends with their addiction. Their addictions, to the street and to drugs, take away their agency and autonomy and make leaving the street even more difficult, ultimately imprisoning those that live on the street to a life that quickly comes to destroy and kill them.

Everson shared some of his memories of Joao Pedro when he was living on the street.

Many times I found Joao Pedro disfigured, totally dirty, ugly, under a bridge with a bunch of rats running around and sewage, smoking crack. Over time we became more and more distant… Joao Pedro spent a lot more time than I did in Parmalat. I was here. I lived here in the center. I rarely went there. I only went there to get drugs. But not him, he stayed there. He stayed there for a long time and there was a time that we lost
contact. We didn’t talk. We didn’t see each other. Joao Pedro would disappear in Parmalat where there was always news of someone dying.

Joao Pedro also spoke about his addiction to crack.

Before it was all day, one after the other. I spent the whole day, the whole week high, without sleeping, just using drugs. You don’t even feel hunger… When I was using drugs, I wasn’t able to talk to anyone. I wasn’t able to open up to anyone. I wasn’t even able to talk. I was a guy in prison [in quotes].

Crack and oxi are some of the saddest things that I have ever seen in my life. They completely destroy lives. Upon my arrival I realized the severity of these drugs and knew that death for those living on the street was only a matter of time. Death was quickly on its way and I feared hearing about their dying.

Social Processes and the Formation of Subjectivity and Identity Among Street Children

“\textit{I think that humans are like water. They adjust to any and everywhere, in whatever environment… We end up standardizing certain behaviors.}”

Everson, 22

You can laugh at the situation, ‘Oh, everything’s good. I’m eating, drinking, sleeping for free. On the street, I get by. I wake up in the morning, have breakfast, lunch, and dinner.’ But life’s not so simple. They’re talking about the good side, but people living on the street have to go knocking from door to door asking for a plate of food. It’s difficult. It could seem good. After your stomach is full, it’s all good, but that moment that you were hungry and you had to go looking for a plate of food, that’s difficult. Even today I think about Sundays in particular. On Sundays everything’s closed. You go knocking door to door when the family is altogether. You’re ashamed. I’m going to go knocking at the door of your home and you’re with all your family and the people, seeing the condition you’re in, are afraid and because they’re afraid you have to explain your situation and that you’re there for a plate of food. It’s difficult. It’s humiliating. And then when your stomach is full, oh, on the street I eat, drink, sleep. So the person isn’t really aware. It’s more in the moment. It’s more of a reflex. Like when you step on a thorn, you quickly take your foot away. But then after you take your foot away from
the thorn you quickly forget. On the street all of the daily problems end up becoming so common that people end up losing that awareness. It’s already having a negative effect on their life, but because it already has become their reality, they think it’s normal. It ends up becoming something so normal in their day-to-day life.

Many street children manipulate their identities and create scripts or stories as a means to obtain vital resources such as food and money as well as to access social services (Shanahan 2003, O’Haire 2011 and Offit 2008). In many ways, street children respond to the contradictory images that exist of them by manipulating their identities or “performances” or even taking advantage of their identity as street child (Goffman 1959). Gregori Filomena calls this *viracao*, which is getting by or making do, and speaks to the ways street children go about obtaining and accessing resources and social services and present themselves in particular social settings and situations based on the expectations that others have of them (Gregori 2000).

Street children internalize and reproduce the discrimination and prejudice that they experience on an everyday basis, which is essentially that of extreme social exclusion and marginalization (Rizzini & Thapliyal 2007). Society creates their status as non-person (Biehl 2005). Everson on many occasions throughout all of our conversations commented on how he felt “useless” and “tossed aside” when he was living on the street.

I was in a comfort zone. It was comfortable for me to be on the street, to be using drugs, to be with the company I had. I wasn’t aware of anything. The only thing I was aware of was that I didn’t have a future. I thought that way, that I didn’t have any kind of a future and not only that I didn’t have a future, but I also thought that I would never be able to leave that life ever. One time I was asked what my life expectations were on the street and I said, ‘On the street? None.’ Yeah. ‘What are your expectations today as an adult?’ And I was like, ‘I have no expectations.
None.’ I was totally beaten and broken down. Unfortunately I’m never going to be able to leave here.

When talking about those of the street, Everson said:

They end up not believing and they lose some of that hope and self-esteem. And in the middle of all of that, everyone here hasn’t been able to change their lives, so I won’t be able to either. Their self-esteem drops and they think that they can’t. A lot of Evangelical people are out on the streets and go around passing out pamphlets and spreading their word and their words are always the same. The message is love and improvement whether spiritual or financial. ‘God is watching you. You can do it.’ But we were in a difficult situation and were like, this guy says that we can change our lives, but I can’t. I’m not able to get out of here. I think that we have the need to depend on someone to extend a helping hand. ‘I don’t have anyone to help me. How am I going get out of here?’ There wasn’t any way that you could count on anyone. We had to walk our own path alone. Not believing in yourself, and leaving your family, and a lack of self-esteem, and your family is like you’re not going to be anyone in this life and the person begins to get it in their head that they’re not going to be anyone and if my own family kicks me out of the house, it’s because I’m a horrible person. I’ve also thought that way too. So I left a good place for a worse place. So I was like, is my life always going to be like this? Maybe I don’t have the capacity to change. The changes that do occur in my life are always directed by others and I always end up in a bad place. So I think it’s also because of a lack of support. A person is in a bad place and doesn’t find anyone to extend a hand.

Social Networks and Support: Interactions With Organizations and Accessing Available Social Services

Projeto Meninos e Meninas de Rua (PMMR): The Project

I spent a lot of time in the project. But during the time I was in the project, I didn’t want anything. Nothing. I had no life expectancy. I spent a lot of time on the street and the project ended up becoming a place of rest, a comfort zone and they welcomed us and told us comforting words. We ate, took a shower, changed clothes, and it ended up becoming a family, you know, because a lot of us ended up losing contact with our families. We ended up leaving our families, so people from the project ended up becoming our family. So we got accustomed to being on the street and going to the project. But what they had to offer us at the time, we didn’t want. We wanted to keep the lives we were living. After we turned 18, at least the majority, we turned 18, which is when you stop
receiving help from the project, and we started to miss it. I had the freedom to do a course when I was under 18 because I was protected by the government. I had the freedom to go to a shelter where I could live and study, but I didn’t want those things. All of the benefits they had to offer me, all of those services, for me, they didn’t serve for anything. It wasn’t the time.

Everson, 22

Not only did they use the project as a resting place, but they also used it as a place to escape the cold, to escape the daily dangers and violence of the street, to get food, take a shower, and hang out. Washington spoke about when and why he would go to the project.

Sometimes we came here when we were needing a document or something for work or when we wanted to take a shower or eat something. So we came to the project when we needed something. When we got picked up by the police, we would have them call the project to come and pick us up and the tios (aunts and uncles, or PMMR employees) would go and get us to help us… They would always try and get us to leave the street and everything. They always wanted to take us home. Many times they took us home but it didn’t do anything. They brought us home and when it was late, we were back on the street again (laughs).

Joao Pedro spoke about how they even had what he referred to as “rebellions” when they went to the project. “We would come here and mess around and break everything. It was for fun.” One street child even held a street educator hostage in the project with a pair of scissors held up to their neck. These rebellions are representative of the pleasure these children and adolescents experience in breaking and violating prohibitions. The rebellions, violence, and destruction they cause at PMMR is because the project is the only place they could do it and get away with it. They would not be able to behave this way and stay alive anywhere else. There are no negative repercussions or consequences for this kind of behavior at PMMR, which has an always
open door policy, and these children and adolescents are very much aware of this and they take advantage of this. PMMR was the only space beyond the street where these children were in charge, or felt they were in charge. These acts are also viewed as powerful statements being made by these children and adolescents. They are expressions of revolt against society. According to Paulo Freire, “I imagine, that in truth, each time one of these youngsters breaks a window, he is breaking the dominant class of this country. Symbolically he is not breaking the window, but is killing who kills him on a symbolic level” (Freire 1984:8).

They would also often try and manipulate the street educators to give them money so they could go and buy glue, but it never worked. Not with the street educators. “And when we were really hungry, then we didn’t use [drugs] and we came here [to the project] to eat.”

Everson also shared memories of their experiences and rebellions at the project.

The more problematic that we came here, the more well received we were. So, the project, I even still joke around with them now that we’re all adults, but they’re always going to be our tios and tias (aunts and uncles). They fought for us. On the street we didn’t have any rules and when we would come here we had to have rules… We either followed the rules or we messed around. It was our way. We were in charge. But no, they were in charge. Everyone used to climb on top of the roof. Imagine the project Boys and Girls of the Street with all these street kids up on the roof. I had conflicts with the street educators. I assaulted one. I attacked him with a chair and made it so that he was limping.

There were many street educators during that time who were former street children themselves, although this is not so much the case today. As Everson stated:

The project was a huge example for me. No matter how much I didn’t think they were, they always had words of encouragement and were always an example. Many of the street educators were previously street
children themselves, so we had living examples. How can he do it and I can’t? Only that we preferred to follow the example of the wrong people. The great examples that we had right in front of us and we followed the example of those I guess who were closer to our reality. It was easier.

Non-Governmental Institutions

Non-governmental organizations are currently the primary source of support for street children in Brazil (O’Haire 2011). However, once they turn 18, they are on their own and vulnerable and they lose most, if not all, of the rights that they had, if they even had any (Jeffrey 1997). Brazil’s Child and Adolescent Statute (ECA) protects only those under 18 years of age.

Gregori Filomena (2000) discusses the various institutions that exist and are set up to work with and help street children. However, as already stated, this entire foundation of support is no longer available to them once they turn 18. There is also minimal to no preparation that occurs while they are in this institutional framework of support that prepares them for life after and outside of it. These children learn to live and get by as street children. In the large majority of cases, they do not learn or develop the necessary skills or tools nor do they receive the support that is necessary to transition into adulthood and become adults. In this way, Gregori concludes that "the greatest tragedy of this kind of life is the fact of their being locked within circularity" (Gregori 2000).

Everson spoke to this issue when he said:

So I was waiting for the mayor and the public power to see if they could give some help but they told me no. They didn’t want to help, but they should have done their part. But because I couldn’t be part of the project anymore and can’t be part of their department, the people from the public power kind of abandon us.

Because Everson was not allowed to stay in a shelter, he slept on the street.
Many of those who are now adults and still living on the street since childhood complained of their not being any space in homeless shelters. There is definitely a lack of resources for this particular population, especially when they become adults. As Everson stated:

During that interview that I did so that I could participate in the program, he asked me that question and I answered. I was totally sincere and honest with everything I told him. What are your expectations today on the street? I told him nothing. A week passed so they could analyze everything and I asked if I was going to be able to participate and he said no. I asked why not and he said, ‘How are we going to put someone in this space who doesn’t have any hopes and expectations in life?’ And I was like, ‘But isn’t the objective of your work to give help? Isn’t your work to give life back to us? This expectation that I don’t have, do you think maybe that in there I could have some?’ And he was like, ‘Unfortunately that’s the decision.’ So there’s a lack of support.

What Brings Them On and Off the Street?

Although street children typically have fixed locations where they tend to gather, sleep, and spend their time on a regular basis, they are also a very mobile group. Virtually all participants reported a constant moving back and forth between home and the street. The street often requires a high degree of mobility from those who live on it, whether for economic opportunity or safety reasons (Rizzini & Butler 2003). Therefore, an examination of their movements between different locations and places over time is of central importance. However, in their mobility, these children are not always leaving the street. Mobility and migration among street children, whether between different spaces and places in the city, between street and non-street locations, including the homes of family members, relatives, and friends or shelters and correctional facilities, or between different towns and cities, occurs as long as these children are living on the street (Rizzini
& Butler 2003 and Van Blerk 2005). Migration and mobility occur for a variety of reasons and is often vital for these children, as it is a fundamental survival strategy that they develop and have to develop as street children (Gregori 2000).

There are a variety of things that bring these children and adolescents on and off the street. Not all of them completely abandon home or their families. Some leave the street and return home for periods when they are sick, injured, afraid, or in danger. Others leave the street due to being arrested and going to prison (Swart 1990, Aptekar & Heinonen 2003 and Hansson 2003). However, there is a huge difference between those that leave the street by choice and those that are removed from the street and placed in prison or correctional facilities as the former, not the latter, is a choice and an act of agency on behalf of the individual (Rizzini & Butler 2003). For those who went to prison, and almost all of those of the street that I spoke with have been to prison, once released, all of them went back to the street.

Everson spoke about when and why he would leave the street and return home.

When I was younger, I would always return home because of being tired. The street made you tired. Because I was always the kind of person who was always comfortable but I also never really liked the tiring day-to-day exhausting routine that the street offers. And everyday was exactly the same thing. You wake up in the morning and when you wake up everyone is looking at you and you’re all dirty. The lifestyle is tiring, just surviving on the street.

Even as young children they needed home or some kind of an escape from the exhausting and harsh life style of the street.

Joao Pedro’s first contact with drugs was when he was 10, which is when he started sniffing glue. During this time, he would go back and forth between the street and
home. Again, he would always try and hide as much as he could in terms of what he was doing from his family. He used the street and his home, and went back and forth between the two, using home as a resting place. “When I got beat up on the street, I went home all tore up to recuperate a little and then I would go back to the street.” He was usually beat up by the older people who lived on the street.

Joao Pedro also spent time in FEBEM when he was 15 years old, which was another thing that took him off the street.

I was only there for one month, but let me tell you something, it was really difficult. And my mom had to go through humiliation to see me there. From there, I went home, but then in one week I was back on the street and using drugs again. I didn’t have a structure man. And a weak mind too. I was weak minded.

What brought Washington off the street was the following:

Sometimes, like every three months, I would return to my moms house. I would go home and stay there one month more or less or a week. When we were living on the street, we didn’t always want to be on the street either, like when it was cold. When it was cold we would seek out a place to stay, like the project, a shelter, or an abandoned house to sleep in.

What brought Washington back to the street was the following:

I was used to the street. After a certain time, you get accustomed. It’s the same as anything you do everyday, you get used to it. So, we got used to staying on the street and it didn’t work staying at home. Then I didn’t want to stay at home and I would leave. I lived to be on the street, sniffing glue and messing around all night, robbing up and down.

Jaqueline goes home only when she is sick and not well, but she does not go to her mother’s who still lives on the street or to her aunts who mistreated her while raising her. Instead she goes to her cousin, Amanda’s, mother’s house. Once she is better, she goes back to the street.
Everson spoke more in detail about other factors that brought him on and off the street.

I was nine years old and my mom got sick with an aneurism. I was nine years old but I didn’t have the awareness of when her sickness started to manifest itself. But between nine to 11 years old, she came from the interior to look for me. I went with her to the interior. I spent like three months with her, but because I was so accustomed to the street, I wasn’t able to study. I missed my friends. I missed the freedom to mess around. And living with her, I had all of these rules to follow and I wasn’t able to adapt. So I spent three months with her. I was 11 or 12 years old when I returned to the street. Because of my own will, I preferred to always be on the street, but my mom always came looking for me.

Another factor that may take these children off the street and back home is fear. On their adventure to the beach when their friend was hit by a car on his 12th birthday and died, Everson and his group left the streets because they were afraid.

During the time that our friend died, some went back home. We were like, no, now we’re going to change. I was like now we’re going to start going to school. And for those of us who don’t have family, we’ll go and look for a shelter, because we always received invites. Even Vitor who was like I’m not going to stay on the street cause if everyone disappears then the ghost of the kid is going to come after me cause I was there that day. He [Vitor], because he the youngest of the group, found himself alone and left too and everyone went their own way and so I left and went to Sao Paulo and stayed there for 6 months. I went to Sao Paulo to forget and make new friends. I was 12 years old at the time. Those who had family to go to went after their families. Because my mom had already left and went to get treatment in the interior I didn’t have anyone to run to. I even went to my house and everything was closed and locked and I was like I’m not going to stay here alone all locked up. So it was complicated after our friend died and everyone was pretty scared.

Everson described his impressions of and experiences in Sao Paulo and how he went about his life there.

The reality here in Guarulhos didn’t even compare to the reality there, because there, kids who were seven or eight years old assaulted with pens to stab you. I was like 12 years old and like four or five little kids got
together to attack you, to freak you out, we’re the boss here. That happened a lot. But I ended up adapting there, just as I adapted here. I think that humans are like water. They adjust to any and everywhere, in whatever environment… I spent like six months in Sao Paulo. I found out about a shelter. And the shelters in Sao Paulo, you sleep there at night and leave during the day. The ones here [in Guarulhos] no. In Sao Paulo, they’re closed at night and by day you’re free to the world. I met a group of kids and they took me there the first time and from there I learned how it works and that’s how it started. I stayed there during that period of six months. They never asked about my family. There was never any kind of follow-up or monitoring, if I wanted to study or… never. So I slept there, at six in the morning I had breakfast and left and returned at seven at night. So I had that routine for six months more or less.

Street children also seek temporary relief from the streets. While living on the street, Everson spent many days in the library. He loved and still loves reading and books. He and his friends would also often go to the library to sleep. “We knew about a place where we could go and rest and stuff so it was awesome.”

Many street children stop by the project for a bite to eat, to shower, to watch movies, to sleep, or to pass the time and mess around when they were high. Douglas, who wants to check himself into Crackland, would spend full days at the project, sometimes every single day of the week, or at least he did when he was under 18. He turned 18 towards the end of my time in the field. Douglas went to the project because he had people to talk to and could watch movies. He always watched Batman, the one with Michelle Pfeiffer. He also went to the project when it was cold and rainy or when he partied too hard and smoked too much crack and needed a place to get good sleep. He also went when he was afraid, either because he had witnessed people dying in Parmalat, where he spent a lot of his time, or because he was in trouble and had people after him either for drug related issues or for stealing. There were also the rare occasions that he
would go to his adoptive father’s home. However, he is not welcome there. There is not enough space for Douglas there and his father is unwilling to take him in because he steals all of his stuff for crack.

Everson spoke about the last time that he went home.

I had some comings and goings. I tried various times to adapt. I felt the lack of all of that freedom. I went to shelters, I tried returning home a few times, but it didn’t work out. I couldn’t stay more than three months at home. I couldn’t adapt to the rules. It was more difficult because it was other people making the rules for me. I went to stay with my mom for a while when she was sick. I think I stayed six months. And she was working, even with the problem she was having. She was also receiving some sort of financial help, a government benefit because she was sick. But she wasn’t able to stop working because even with the help it was difficult to take care of her children and everything. Leaving her own home that she owned here in Guarulhos to live in the interior to pay rent and being sick with young children, so she told me to get a job. And I was like oh, now I’m going to have to work. I’m obligated to work. I’ll go back to the street. So it was a lot easier to run from responsibility, from the rules of other people. And they weren’t even ridiculous rules. They were necessary. I thought that because I was a minor, I thought that I wasn’t obligated to do anything. I didn’t want to study. And I was like, I’m going to go back to the street. It’s easier you know. You eat, drink, sleep. I spent so much time on the street that I forgot (unlearned) how to treat someone from my family. We have a certain way of thinking because of the street, and then you arrive home and they want you to do simple things like wash dishes. On the street after you eat you throw the aluminum to-go box away or you eat in a popular restaurant that’s one real and you leave your dishes for them. So you get home and have to wash dishes or wash clothes. Clothes were disposable for us. We got clothes in one place and then threw them away in another. And it was those kinds of things I tried to get out of at home and I messed around a lot and got a lot of clothes dirty and I gave it to her to wash and she was like, go and wash your clothes and I thought it sucked and I was like, I’m going to go to the street. On the street I don’t have to wash clothes. So, it was stupid insignificant things that made me not want to stay home and go back to the street. I returned to the street for any little thing.

Freedom from responsibility in one of the main attractions of the street. For those of the street that have a long history on the street and have completely crossed the
boundary in terms of being completely socialized to the street, their emotional attachment is to the street, to their friends, and to the promise of freedom that the street once held. The longer these children are on the street, the more they grow spatially, socially, and emotionally further from the home and family, making the street their home and those of the street their family (Glauser 1990 and Kovats-Bernat 2006). In this way, the street becomes a place to live in opposition to the home. For them, the family is no longer a realistic alternative. The family is not even viewed as an alternative to the street, to which these children have their greatest attachment.

The first time Everson left prison he went back to the street.

I went to the street. I didn’t have an option. My family left Guarulhos and went to live in a city in the interior where it’s more peaceful, because my mom, I don’t know if it was because of the problems that I gave her along with my brother too, but she developed a brain aneurism. My family thought that because the interior is more calm and peaceful they would bring her there and I stayed here. My mom died. I was 15 years old. I lived on the street still and I ended up finding out and made it to her funeral and everything and I ended up losing that contact with my mom, that affective relationship.

After some time, Everson tried to go and live with his biological father, his stepmother, and siblings from his father’s side.

I went to live with my dad here [in Guarulhos] for a while to try and see if it would work out and his wife told me, ‘You don’t fit in our family.’ For me it was a form of rejection, for sure. And so I left her house and went to the street and then I went to a homeless shelter.

After the death of his mother, Everson tried to re-connect with whatever family he had, attempting to create and build new ties and a new sense of place for himself off the street. He clearly experienced difficulty with this attempt, through refusal and rejection by his stepmother. However, this attempt is particularly important because it is the start
of Everson’s repeated attempts, which were repeated because of a general lack of support in his trying to create opportunities that would allow him to leave the street. Here we can see that Everson takes on the project of the process of leaving the street.
Chapter 6  Leaving the Street: A Look Back on Street Life

*AB:* So you’ve told me many stories about people who have died, people who are in prison, and people who stayed on the street, but why do you think that you two are alive? Thank God. But why do you think you’re alive and not on the street?

*Joao Pedro:* I can explain that to you. First, we’re alive because of God. We had a spiritual awakening. Because we still think that we have something, some meaning, some value in life that we should find. I want to be known, but I want to be known for me. I really want to know myself more. I want to have my own sense of satisfaction because I don’t know *this* Joao now, *this* Joao Pedro who’s looking for a quality of life. I just know *that* Joao. *That* guy who’s malicious, manipulative, who tricks people to get what he wants. I stepped on people. I stepped on everyone just to get drugs.

*Everson:* I don’t know why I survived and many others didn’t. And even more for him [Joao Pedro], because a lot of people died in the place he spent most of his time [Parmalat]. Because our moms already gave us advice, our dads gave us advice. A lot of things had to happen to wake us up. Joao’s mom recently died and it was a shock. My mom died and I found myself alone in the world and now it’s me and only me and I lost a lot of opportunity. So, there are people who are going to lose a lot of things and some are going to react by waking up to life. There are others who are going to say, ‘Now I really don’t have anything.’ I’ve heard a lot of people say that, ‘I don’t have anything to lose. You aren’t afraid of dying? No, I don’t have anything to lose.’ I see that a lot on the street. Those who are afraid to die have something to lose in life… I don’t know how to explain to you why we’re still alive. I attribute it to God. And leaving that life, I attribute a little of that to the effort I made. A lot of effort. Like I said, there are people who think they have nothing to lose and there are so many things to lose and there are so many things in life to conquer. If I tell you that I have nothing to lose, that might be the truth. There’s just life to lose. But if I see that the time that we have is so precious, there are so many things that I can conquer and there are people who don’t think like that. They think that they have nothing to lose and they don’t feel capable of conquering anything.

As Everson and Joao Pedro stated, many children and adolescents of the street feel that they have nothing lose. Because street children and adolescents have chosen to leave home, they are excluded, mostly because they have in many ways created their exclusion by “choosing” to detach themselves from the institution of life, including the
family, school, and mainstream social and economic reality by making the street their main point of reference. By attaching themselves to the marginal street, they only further remove themselves from social reality and social life, further intensifying their already marginal positions in society.

However, as I have stated many times, their “choosing” to leave home was less of a choice and was more about being dislocated, sometimes even forced out of their homes, as they were not given the minimum chance to live a dignified life nor were they provided with the minimum conditions to remain in their homes with their families. These children are born into lives and spaces that are without life and space. More important, these children come from a group of people who have also been dislocated and excluded from life. Many of their families have migrated from their own places of origin, attempting to escape their misery and lack of opportunity. They left in search of a chance at life and opportunity in the world only to find themselves in situations and lives of greater struggle, misery, and suffering. In the same way as their families, these children leave home in search of life. However, their search for life occurred in a place where they have less access to social spaces, social goods, education, life building, upward mobility, or a chance to even dream. Their search for life is usually one that ends in less options and loss and only brings them closer to death (Lucchini 2001, Biehl 2005, Berlant 2011 and Rizzini et al. 2007).

These children and adolescents, after having spent their early lives and formative years on the street, have internalized their exclusion. They have embodied society’s views of them, which is that they are worthless dirt and non-human. In their
abandonment, whether by the family or society, they feel responsible and worthless, leaving them with nothing to lose, including life. Somehow, somewhere, Joao Pedro, Everson, and the other young adults with whom I spoke that left the street, discovered life and value in themselves on their journeys towards death, which is what this chapter gets at.

There are minimal to no longitudinal studies that have been carried out with street and working children (Ennew 1994a, 1994b & 1994c). There are also few studies that have focused on or even discussed the leaving process. As Tobias Hecht (1998) wrote: “Research on street children has been mostly like a snapshot, a portrait of a particular moment in time, with no effort to discover what happens over the long run” (Hecht 1998:202). For this very reason, although my work was all captured at one very short and particular moment in time, I did my best to talk to this particular population of children, adolescents, and young adults at different stages in their lives.

From the few studies that have been carried out, the lives and futures of street and working children and adolescents appear to be extremely grim and bleak at best. For example, Harriot Beazley (2003) asserts that: “Abandonment of the street is often difficult or even impossible for children who have been on the street a long time, as it has become a part of their lives, and is the way of life with which they are most familiar.” Similarly, Tobias Hecht (1998), based on his research with street children in Recife, a city in the Northeast of Brazil, concluded that there were “no reports of children returning home [full-time from the streets] and no reports of street children finding jobs and leaving the street except to live (for a time) in a shelter” (Hecht 1998:205). Although this is very
likely the case for the large majority of street children, such a statement is incredibly problematic as it completely fails to acknowledge and recognize the tremendous strength of will of the small few that have managed to leave the street, and not just merely to survive, but to live their lives and create futures for themselves off the street.

This chapter explores the final stage of their “street career,” which is their leaving the street (Goffman 1961, Becker 1973 and Karabanow 2004). I examine the processes by which these individuals leave the street. I refer to their leaving the street as a process in that it involves processes of change and describes how change occurs (Prochaska et al. 1992 and Baker et al. 2010). I also identify barriers and facilitators encountered as they attempt to leave the street.

According to Fuchs Ebaugh (1988:23) leaving is a “social process that occurs over time” and is made up of various stages and different exits, depending on the individual and their particular circumstances. Leaving the street is not a linear process. The individual may instead return or shift back and forth between the street and their previous role on the street. The leaving process may be a long one made up of several attempts. There are multiple reasons for and experiences that lead to their leaving the street. Leaving the street has many dimensions and can occur at various times and at various stages in their street careers. The exit process varies tremendously and depends largely on where the individual is or when their leaving, or thoughts and attempts at leaving, occur in their “street career.” The longer they have been on the street, the deeper their addictions, making it more difficult to leave. The process of leaving the street is a
project that the child who once lived there has created and defined themselves on their own terms.

An examination and understanding of their leaving process brings us back to the factors that led these children and adolescents to the street in the first place and kept them there. Again, there is no single issue that brings a child to the street. There are a number of factors that bring them there, keep them there, and prevent them from leaving. For those that do leave, there is a clear desire for freedom from the role that initially brought them to the street in their search of freedom.

A study carried out by Visano (1990) demonstrated that the process of leaving the street, similar to the process of going to the street, is not something that occurs abruptly or over night. Instead, it is a slow and gradual process that occurs over time. This process is often triggered and brought on by a number of forces, which varies from person to person, but typically begins with a slow break from and disengagement with the street that is brought on by some sort of difficulty with street life or inability to live well on the street, dangers and issues that threaten ones safety and life, a feeling of meaninglessness or dissatisfaction in ones life, falling in love, and realizing that issues that initially led one to street in the first place have not been resolved and have actually only worsened (Aptekar 1994).

The leaving process is initiated by some sort of interruption to the connection between the child and the street. This interruption often results in the child being made aware that the street may not be the best alternative or solution, or that it may not even be a solution at all. At this point, there is a heightened self-awareness with the individual
becoming aware of their situation and image. Leaving then depends on a change in one’s self image and requires the individual to be able to see other alternatives for their lives and futures beyond the street (Hewitt 1970 and Rizzini et al. 2007). Leaving must involve the desire to leave. The individual must actively choose to leave while also be able to imagine a life for him/herself off the street. This process of leaving the street often consists of a slow and often difficult re-adaptation to non-street life and dominant forms of social relations that is filled with a variety of challenges, which I discuss in this chapter.

As previously stated, the street is often referred to as a “habit” or “addiction” that is difficult to break and hard to leave once one has had a taste of it and has grown accustomed to it. However, a common response from those who have had a long history living and working on the street is that the street is not good. For example, when I asked Douglas, the loner, who turned 18 towards the end of my time in the field, had been living on the street for at least seven years, continues to live on the street, is addicted to crack and whatever he else he can get his hands on, and attempted to rob me on various occasions, what he thought of the street, he said, “It sucks.”

Although the street often provides, at least initially, a sense of escape and pleasure, which is why it is referred to as an addiction, it soon proves itself to be a violent place. There comes a time when the pleasure, freedom, risk, and excitement of the street are gone and the street no longer provides for or meets the child’s needs. Life on the street is not as it used to be. The large majority of these children, adolescents, and young adults do not like the street. This is particularly the case for those who have lived
significant periods of time and have grown older on the street. Their perceptions of themselves and their lives tend to change over time and they begin to feel differently about their situation, as their initial search for adventure, freedom, and escape ends up becoming, in most cases, a violent reality shock and imprisonment (Beazley 2003). Their initial dreams of freedom and escape are not realized. However, they often continue on the street because of a lack of choice or a perceived lack of choice or because their addictions, to the street and to crack, keep them there. The individual is not able to see other possibilities beyond the street, which is essential to their being able to leave the street (Mansson & Hedin 1999). They usually continue on the street because they are used to it. The street is what they know. It is all they know, the only self that they know, and the only space where they know how to live, or die. Over time, the street, particularly for those who live on it, wears them out, essentially killing them. However, they are often not aware of this while on the street. While on the street, they do not see other options or alternatives. They do not see a way out.

**Leaving the Street**

It appears that there are two general ways of leaving the street. The first is what Ricardo Lucchini (2001) refers to as the active exit of the street and the second is what he refers to as the exit because of expulsion or forced dislocation (Lucchini 2001:49). It is important to point out that going back and forth between home and the street, which was discussed in chapter 5 under What Takes Them On and Off the Street?, should not be confused with actually leaving the street. As already mentioned, street children often leave the street and return home for short temporary periods when they are sick, injured,
afraid, or in danger. However, they always return to the street. The second type of leaving the street, the exit because of expulsion of forced dislocation, refers to those that leave the street due to institutionalization or imprisonment (Swart 1990, Aptekar & Heinonen 2003 and Hansson 2003 and Lucchini 2001). This type of “leaving” consists of removing the individual from the street and inserting them into what is usually the adult world of delinquency (Lucchini 2001). There is a huge difference between those who leave the street by choice and those who are removed from the street and placed in prison or correctional facilities as the former, not the latter, is a choice and an act of agency on behalf of the individual (Rizzini & Butler 2003). Also, as already mentioned, upon being released from prison, these individuals always return to the street and drugs. As the focus of this dissertation is child agency, this chapter is concerned with the first type of leaving the street: the active exit of the street.

Leaving the street, or the desire to leave the street, has to come from the individual (Rizzini & Butler 2003). The active exit of the street is connected to a choice. Just as the child decided to leave home, they also have to decide to leave the street. Again, this usually occurs as the result of an event, usually a violent episode, or because the individual realizes that the street no longer meets their needs and only puts them on the path of death (Castel 1998). The individual that is able to leave needs to be able to imagine a life off the street or at least desire a life and a future off the street. At this point, the individual attempts to create opportunities that allow them to leave the street, which include reaching out for help from non-street figures, various behavioral changes,
and an exploration of non-street identities in non-street spaces. There has to be a real alternative to street life for their leaving the street to actually occur (Lucchini 2001).

When asked why some leave the street and some stay, Michele (21) said: “Oh because they want to change their life and leave that situation. They have willpower and then there are people who don’t want to. They like it [the street].” It seems then that in order to leave the street one needs forca (will or strength) or forca de vontade (willpower), which come from the individual and their desire to change in addition to their strength of will and personal effort. Similar to the tendency to blame themselves for their going to the street in the first place, these children, adolescents, and young adults that live or once lived on the street also place the whole, or at least the majority of the responsibility of their leaving the street on themselves (Hecht 1998:186). In other words, those who choose to leave the street appear to do so when they believe that they themselves chose to be there in the first place (Shaw 2002). At this time, the process of the active exit of the street begins “when the child has acquired the capacity and will to elaborate his own motivation with enough autonomy” (Lucchini 2001:89). In other words, the individual needs to pass from thinking as a street child, where their behavior is formulated and dictated by others, and begin thinking as an autonomous individual (Rizzini et al. 2007).

When the street no longer provides a sense of escape or pleasure, with the initial freedom and adventure that was once experienced, or idea of freedom and adventure that they attached their identities to, quickly vanishes, a search for other alternatives may occur (Karabanow 2004). For those who live on the street, sometimes an extremely
traumatic experience needs to occur in order to make these children aware of the reality and consequences of their “choices,” ultimately bringing them to a place in their lives where they decide that it is time to leave the street. While the street may appear, usually in the beginning, to offer those who live on it positive aspects such as independence, freedom, community, support, and a sense of belonging, for the large majority there comes a time when it becomes clear that the street has more bad than good to offer (Karabanow 2004). As Visano (1990) states: “This is when they have to confront reality shocks about their way of life, and begin to experience a sense of estrangement and frustration with their nomadic existence [as] the child’s idealized image of street clashes with their struggle for survival” (Visano 1990:156). It is at this moment that the individual considers leaving the street and street life (Beazley 2003).

Child Street Laborers

I first met Sandra (18) and her older sister, Lucimara (20), at the project. They stopped by to get help creating resumes, as they were both looking for work. Sandra started working selling candy and maca do amor (candied apples) that her mother made for her children to sell at the age of 14 and stopped working when she was 18 years old. When asked why she stopped working on the street, she said:

Oh, because it wasn’t working out. It wasn’t worth it and I was experiencing discrimination on the street. I was a person that was more beautiful, you know, and then I started becoming ugly because I worked a lot in the sun and my skin was becoming ugly. I was worn out, you know. I started getting that way, dirty from walking on the street and my hair was starting to get all messed up and all of the junk that I ate on the street. My life was more or less like that.
As a result of her informal street labor, Sandra began to experience a marginal sense of self and self-image. It was her experience and awareness of her own marginality and her status as marginal deepening as a result of her street labor that brought her off the street and kept her off the street. However, more important is the idea of being beautiful that Sandra mentioned. In poor urban areas, beauty is of extreme importance to females. It is their “promise” of recognition, wealth, and power. Social and economic mobility for poor females is in many ways centered on the body. Beauty then for these females can be viewed as a form of capital that can be exchanged for other advantages. Beauty may be viewed as their only means of escaping poverty. In this way, Sandra left the street to preserve her beauty, therefore increasing her chances of success and a future (Edmonds 2010).

Alice (22) who was raised by her three older sisters after the death of her mother and abandonment by her father also spoke about what brought her off of the street. She started working at a stoplight selling candy when she was nine years old. “Things got better for us. My sister got a job and everything and then I came to the project. The project helped us with cesta basica (basket of basics, containing basic food necessities such as rice, beans, sugar, oil, flour, milk powder, etc.) and a bunch of things and then I stopped going to the stoplight and I would come to the project.” With her sister working and PMMR providing her family with basic needs and helping them access government benefits as well as providing her with a new space to go, Alice no longer needed to go to the street.
Street Children

Amanda (27)

AB: So when you went to the street you lived there for one year and a half. Why did you leave the streets and crack?

Amanda: It was something that I saw. I saw one of my friends, it was dawn and we were smoking crack. She was beautiful and young, and all of a sudden, she just took a hit and out of nowhere, she had an overdose and she died right in front of us and we were there all crazy high. It was then that I realized that it wasn’t for me. It was seeing that. And then someone from social services, a psychologist that works with people from the street and adolescents who want to stop using crack, asked if we wanted to go to some lectures. So it was what happened to my friend. She was 12 years old when she overdosed on crack. She died right in front of our face. She took a hit, started shaking, her eyes rolled back in her head and she fell on the floor and we thought she was messing around to kill our high, but no, she took her last breath and that was it. Then we went to check her out and her tongue was all twisted and inside her throat and she was drooling and she died. And so on the same day of her burial, some guy came and talked to us on the street and asked if we wanted to go to a lecture, take a shower, eat something. And it wasn’t just me that left. It was me and two other friends.

The shock and terror of witnessing the death of her friend was what ultimately “woke” Amanda up and led her to leave the street. This particular event made Amanda question her life and the choices she made in going to the street. It also made her want to seek other alternatives, as the reality of the life she had chosen on the street was no longer what it once appeared to be. As Visano (1990) states, the death of her friend was a moment when Amanda was forced to face and confront the “reality shocks” about street life, as the street and the promise that it once held, was no longer what is used to be or appeared to be. It was the violent death of her friend that brought about an awareness of herself and her situation. All of the pleasures that were once associated with the street and crack were shattered at the moment her friend took her last breath.
The help of someone, whether it is formal or informal support, services, counseling, addiction education and treatment, are critical to those who are in the leaving process or even considering leaving. Being able to identify with a non-street figure, which in Amanda’s case seemed to be the right person at the right time, is essential to being able to leave. This individual was able to offer Amanda the knowledge and support necessary to take the action and do that which she was already wanting and looking for, which was a way out from the street and an alternative to street life, or death.

Something that almost all of the young adults with whom I carried out a life history commented on was being young and not knowing the consequences of their actions. As Amanda stated:

We were so young in all of that and we didn’t know what could happen. We didn’t want to know what could happen or what it does to you. We just wanted to know about how good it was to be high on the stuff. And then we started going to lectures and learning about what crack really does to you and that’s where I got interested. And my friend died at my side and I saw that and it stuck in my head and I was like, no. So I went to the lectures and I started to like it. It wasn’t all at once. I continued using, but not in the way I was using when I was on the street. I used crack only when I had money. When I came to the fair to work is when I had money for that. I used for like two years and then I started smoking marijuana again. A lot of people say that marijuana is a drug. Yeah it is a drug, but it’s the kind of drug that takes away any desire for you to use other drugs. Because the high of marijuana, you’re calm, you’re not agitated, it makes you hungry, it makes you want to eat things you don’t usually eat. It doesn’t leave you like crack. It’s totally different. I started using marijuana when I was nine years old, marijuana and cigarettes, and it was with marijuana that I started to forget. When I had the desire to smoke crack, I would smoke marijuana and I was chill. That’s how I did it. And I didn’t even miss it. I started missing marijuana and that’s how I continued on with my life and here I am. I still smoke marijuana.

Again, Amanda’s statement captures the uncertainty of these children’s lives, choices, and actions when they “chose” to go to the street, whether to live or to work.
The uncertainly lies in their initial search that brought them to the street, as it was an action or a moment that was made up of the unknown, with unknown consequences. The end of Amanda’s search for an escape from home life began when she witnessed the death of her friend. The reality shock of her friend’s death was what triggered her disillusionment with the street. At that moment, she had to face the costs of the “freedom” she sought when going to the street to escape the violence in her home.

Similar to Amanda, many children and adolescents come to realize that although family life was difficult, life away from the family is usually more difficult (Rizzini et al. 2007).

Another factor that helped Amanda leave her crack addition was marijuana. Amanda does not smoke marijuana in front of her children. She said that she does not want that for them. She also said that smoking marijuana gives her disposition. After a hard days work, she smokes a joint, which motivates her to make food for her children and clean the house. She said that marijuana gives her that pique, or the energy, to be the woman of the house and help her children with their homework unlike crack, which took away her desire to do anything and everything. Her two older brothers are still using crack and not working.

I never saw Amanda again after her life history. Does this worry me? Very much so. With all of the people from comunidades and the street that go missing or are found dead and her and her family’s history of substance abuse, her disappearing worries me tremendously. Although I went looking for her at least once a week on the street where she works or at her extremely precarious wooden shack, she was nowhere to be found. Amanda is in my thoughts and prayers.
Washington was 12 years old when he first went to the street to live. He “left” the street when he was 20. However, although Washington no longer lives on the street, he has not completely “left” the street.

I started to leave the street when I was renting a room for myself. I left the street because I had a place to stay, but I continued using drugs. So it was easy for me to leave the street. It was easy because I continued using drugs and doing the same things. And then I got back with Alice, which made it even easier because we really care for one another, even today. Thank God. So it was easy. When you have someone you like and they are there with you, that’s the main thing that you need, so you can leave without difficulty. So it was easy for me both going to and leaving the street.

“Leaving” the street was easy for Washington because he did not completely leave. In many ways, it appears that Washington is still trying to leave the street, which probably has more to do with him trying to overcome the rejection and abandonment of his life, which started out in a trash bag. Although he is no longer living or sleeping on the street, he continues with a lot of his street ways and behaviors, making it “easy” for him because he did not “leave” the street completely. As Everson stated:

If you get away from drugs and keep the same behaviors, you’re going to go back to drugs. If you let those behaviors go, you’re going to have a complete transformation. If you keep the same behaviors, you’re going to feel the same and it’s not going to make much of a difference just stopping using drugs, just leaving the street. The change has to be complete.

Fuch Ebaugh (1988) refers to this as “role residual” or “hangover identity,” where specific behaviors of the previous self remain with the individual even after leaving the street.
Washington also mentioned Alice as playing a major role in his leaving the street. Alice and Washington first met at the project and started dating when he was 17 years old. They broke up for a period and then got back together when he was 19. They have been together ever since. Many of those that live or once lived on the street mentioned the importance of having support and love, someone to love and love you back, particularly through the difficult process of leaving the street. Everson also spoke about this when he said:

After he [Washington] met Alice he started to become more responsible. He owes her a lot. So I think that ends up making us more responsible because if you have someone you like, you’re going to want to show your best side. You’re always going to want to be progressing in order to win the person. So for Washington it was wonderful. The best thing that happened to him was meeting Alice, for sure. Many never have the opportunity that he had, meeting a good person and to be dating. After Washington met Alice, his life improved a lot.

It seems that Alice was able to provide Washington with the love, stability, security, sense of place, belonging, and family that he never had. With Alice, and now his son, Washington discovered meaning in his life and a reason to carry on with life.

Joao Pedro (21)

“The person has to want it. They have to have willpower. You have to have that will and God gave it to me. If I stayed in that any longer, I would be dead already.”

Joao Pedro lived on the street for 10 years, from the age of nine to 19 years of age.

There’s really no way of leaving that life. It’s just based on if you want to or not. It was the same thing for me. It was kind of spiritual. I was like, no I don’t want to use anymore. I asked some dude I had known for years for help. I told him that I needed help and that I needed to stop using drugs. He helped me make a video and we sent it to Ratinho (a popular Brazilian television show). Then they called me to do the television show
and I was put in a [drug] clinic for one year. It was in the interior of Sao Paulo… My mom died after I had been in the drug clinic for two months. When I found out, I couldn’t believe it. I fell on the floor. For me life didn’t have any meaning without my mom at my side. And then I started asking for help. I asked for help and told them that if I didn’t get help I would throw my life away again. And that was when I went to see my mom. I wanted to stop living, but I didn’t. I continued. I continued.

Joao Pedro’s exit from the street was a choice. Leaving the street was something he wanted and it was therefore an active exit, but it was also at the same time an exit that required institutionalization. Although Joao Pedro chose to leave the street, he had to have himself locked up and placed in the care and under the control of others in order to be able to do so, as his addiction to crack was too powerful. His seeking help and support from a non-street friend was essential to him taking the steps to get himself into a drug clinic. Asking his friend for help was an action that demonstrated his desire to leave as well as his desperation for life. His resistance against life turned into a desperate attempt to preserve life and the only way he was going to be able to do so was by getting himself locked up (Johnson 2003). Joao Pedro wanted the change, but he knew that as long as he was under the control of his addiction, he was not going to have the will or the strength of will to make that change on his own. It also seems that the death of Joao Pedro’s mother in many ways gave him all the more incentive and strength to fight to change his life and to continue moving forward with that change.

**Everson (22)**

Everson first went to the street to live at the age of nine. He left the street when he was 21 years old.

The first time I went to prison, after that my stepmother, she took me to a drug clinic and I stayed there for six months. At that time I already
wanted to change my life. Just that, because I didn’t have family, I didn’t have any incentive. I wasn’t able to see any path that I could follow. In two years I was arrested again. So during that period, I spent six months in the clinic and then I spent four more months here [on the street]. I was like, I want to try and do this alone. I left the clinic, I got a construction job and I stayed with it 100% for four months. I rented a house for myself. I paid every month and I was at that house for those four months. And then after that job was done, I wasn’t able to get another job so I had to sell all of the things that I had conquered and I had to go to a shelter. But inside of the shelter there were people that used drugs. During that time I was really good. I was really aware of what I wanted and I was certain that I wasn’t going to go back to using drugs. But I ended up getting back into it through friends. I got weak and used again. And it wasn’t just one time. It was at least three or four. And after that, they [social services] really cut me from services. I ended up staying on the street another eight or nine months after I left that last time. So sometimes no is better than yes. They could have said yes. I would have been able to stay at the shelter, and I wouldn’t have conquered everything that I have today. So many times denying help is help. It’s a form of help. Honestly, if they would have said yes, I would have been comfortable, I wouldn’t have gotten a job, I would have continued using drugs. I needed to suffer a little more and I was like now no one is there for me. It’s me and me alone. If I don’t go after things, no one is going to help me. I don’t have anywhere else to run.

First and most important, Everson wanted to change his life and he was very aware of his wanting to change. He made repeated attempts to leave the street. However, a lack of family and therefore support resulted in him having no incentive to leave. Although he wanted to change, he was initially not able to see a way out, or a different path or alternative to the street. Over time and after many repeated attempts to leave, Everson got a job. His getting a job was a drastic change from his daily routine on the street. It was also the start of his redefining his sense of self and his place in the world off the street. His job provided him with the structure and resources necessary, which ultimately allowed him to completely remove himself from the street, both spatially and behaviorally, and to meet his basic needs by getting adequate and more
stable housing. Getting a job and renting a home were concrete actions that were demonstrative of his desire to change and leave the street. A job is representative of conventional life, which is completely counter to street life. However, after losing that which provided him with the stability of non-street life, which was his job and his home, Everson found himself back in a shelter and over time using drugs again. At this point, he was no longer able to receive services because of his repeated attempts, or what the system viewed as failures. This left him completely on his own without any support whatsoever, which is what Everson views as one of the major events that helped him achieve his active exit from the street.

The moment that Everson realized that no one was there for him, that it was him and him alone in the world, was a very significant moment that ultimately led to him deciding to change his life and leave the street. At that moment Everson not only realized but also accepted the very difficult and harsh reality that he is responsible for his decisions, his wellbeing, and his life.

I wanted a different environment. I saw people passing me dressed really nicely, smelling good, well fed, with their girlfriend by their side, getting around by car and I’m sleeping on the street at 21 years of age. I thought it was absurd. I got a job as a security guard. I slept on the street and I worked during the day. I did that for one month. Then I went to live in a pension and I was able live in the pension for two months. Today it’s been almost one year that I’ve been living in this house.

Everson began to experience a shift in how he wanted to relate to people and who he wanted to attach himself to. He began to gain awareness and a shift in his own self-image and position in relation to the rest of society. He developed a new ideal or desired self that no longer fit his own image and way of life on the street, which was the result of
the positive references he made to the larger social body (Lucchini 2001:66). Everson started to identify with the “values, norms, attitudes, and expectations” of the larger social body whose main reference is not the street, demonstrating a desire and wish to join this group (Fuchs Ebaugh 1988:107).

Also important to mention is that Everson at this particular time was no longer a street child seeking adventure, freedom, and friendship. He was an adult living on the street and he found his situation to be “absurd.” Similar to Everson, for all children that go to the street, whether to live or to work, that moment that they go to the street is filled with uncertainty. They have no idea what they are getting themselves into. They do not go to the street with a plan or goal in mind, but instead go with the idea that their time there will be a temporary and short-lived experience, adventure, and escape. Unfortunately, for most it was not short-lived and those that do end up leaving the street forever experience the permanent marks of their time there.

After so many years of living on the street and as Everson got older he began to develop different needs and a strong desire for a different lifestyle. Everson experienced awareness and therefore the desire to transform his identity through his identification with or as separate from the larger social body. He became aware of and experienced his marginal status and identity, which was central to his leaving process. Through his awareness of others, he became aware of himself and his existence as “other,” experiencing a separation from society, which made him aware of his desire to change his life and do something different and be somebody different.
Everson went into great detail about what the process of leaving the street was like and how he experienced that change and need for change.

I had to choose between my friends and myself. I changed my friends, my environment, my company totally changed. One guy even said to me, ‘After you got a job, you forgot us,’ and I was like ‘No. I forgot about you guys first and then I was able to get a job. It was actually the opposite.’ I needed to remove myself in order to be able to get my life together. It may seem ridiculous, but your company can hold you back. They pull you. They attract you. If I see you stopped there and you don’t go after anything in life, why am I going to? If you’re so good, I’m going to be good too and then one person joins another, two, and then I’m not alone and then another person comes, three, and then it ends up being a little group on the street and it just seems like it’s a lot easier to give up than to fight. So, it was more a question of need, of not having anywhere else to run because before I was in a comfort zone. Before it comfortable for me to be on the street, to be using drugs, to be with the company I had. I really felt the need. I needed new friendships, I needed a new environment, I needed the basics, like a house or a job, cause everyone has to have a job. My life revolves around my job. When I had something to do, something to keep myself going through the month both financially and time wise, things started to get better. Even while I was living on the street and working for that period, I was already able to become more stable, at least psychologically. And so I was able to get a job and I was able to become stable. So that was where the change started, out of need. I’m not sure if it was spiritual or if it was… I think it was more out of the need to be good. To see that people can do things and that if I can adapt to the street, I can also adapt again to a normal life.

Everson speaks of the need to let his street ways, behaviors, and friends go in order to undergo a complete transformation of self, which is necessary to leave the street. His want for change was really a need for change. He began to desire roles and behaviors that do not belong to the street. His job was central to his being able to leave the street and begin a new life. Again, Everson getting a job was a concrete action that was demonstrative of his desire to leave. His job is counter to the street as it belongs to the conventional world of the larger social body, making him a part of the institution of life.
It was this entrance into the conventional world through his job, that Everson was able to create an opportunity that gave him the structure and stability necessary to leave the street (Lucchini 2001). As a result of his desire and need to change and leave the street, Everson began exploring a new identity that was not related to the street and he began to be able to see and therefore create a real concrete alternative to street life (Hewitt 1970).

Everson spoke about some of the difficulties that he experienced during the process of leaving the street.

There’s a lot of things. It’s fear of change, fear to take responsibility, fear to leave your comfort zone because on the street the situation is difficult. You’re in a situation where you don’t have a place to sleep, you don’t have the basics to live with dignity. They think it’s easier to leave home and it will be better. The problem is that we’re always going to have problems we have to deal with. The major difference is how we deal with them. So I think that the support of family counts a lot during times of change. It counts a lot. For those who don’t have that option, you have to do things alone. And on the street, it’s difficult. So I was like, I’m not going to have help from anyone. I’m going to have to do this on my own. And so that’s one of the difficulties that a person faces when they’re leaving the street. There’s a lack of motivation, there’s a lack of support, a lack of self-sufficiency. The person doesn’t think they can do it. There’s a lot of things. And so for me it was awesome to start thinking for myself. Today I can’t even see myself on the street.

Looking Back, Life Today, and Moving Forward

*Everson:* We’re in a phase of self-discovery.

*Joao Pedro:* Uuhh. We’re discovering ourselves.

*Everson:* And to face society, it’s very difficult.

This section looks to the past, present, and future all at once, with all of them occurring at the same time. It explores the realities of the young adults with whom I carried out life histories and their feelings and experiences, as told by themselves, on how they grow and cope with the past, present, and future. It tracks their becoming across
many situations over time and through various life stages. It documents what has happened, what is happening, and the potential of what is going to happen next all at once (Berlant 2011).

Where they are in their lives, at least at the particular moment in time that I spent with them, is a place where the past, present, and future all came together. This very particular and fragile moment in their lives has to do with them coming to terms with and accepting their pasts in order for them to be able to carry on with their present lives and move forward into the future. Looking back to the past, their childhood, and their lives on the street is filled with a combination of extreme sadness, anger, pain, regret, laughter, and nostalgia. The street is viewed as the cause of violence, loss, and painful episodes in their lives. Their lives on the street are viewed as detrimental to their personal and social development and you can hear the emotional and psychological pain in their stories.

Their present lives are often a struggle, as they carry the past and the future. While their present situations are full of challenges, their futures are filled with hope, doubt, fear, and possibility. In their present lives, they are open to a new life that carries the potential for change, possibility, growth, and transformation. They are learning to be in the present and how to be in the present, which is what Lauren Berlant calls “the historical present,” as historical forces are impacting their present lives (Berlant 2011). In this way, their present lives have to do with historical processes and future possibilities in a new world (Biehl 2005).

This section also provides insight into how these young adults who have left the street interpret their experiences there. It highlights the subjective processes by which
these children and adolescents, given their constraints and against all odds and 
expectations, discover, create, and pursue another chance at life (Biehl 2005). It has to 
do with “the power of specifically growing out of one’s self, of making the past and the 
strange one body with the near and the present, of healing wounds, replacing what is 
lost, repairing broken molds” (Nietzsche 1955:10, 12). It also demonstrates how their 
identities as street children are never completely left behind (Biehl 2005).

**Alice (22)**

*AB: What are you doing now?*

*Alice: Still selling candy.*

*AB: And how long have you been doing that?*

*Alice: Like three years… When they [the project] have donations (basket 
of basics) they call us to come here for one because they know that we’re 
not working. And if they have donated clothes, they call us to come and 
pick them up… If I had studied, I wouldn’t be selling candy. I would 
have a better job… Children don’t know the importance of school. They 
just think they have to go. They don’t know that when they’ll grow up 
they’ll see what they’re missing.*

For the last three years, Alice, Washington, and their son have spent their nights 
at a park selling candy. The first time I met them was at the project. They stopped by to 
get help creating resumes, as they were both unemployed and seeking work. I never saw 
the three of them apart. They were always together on a single bike, with a duffle bag 
filled with candy. Unfortunately their son loves eating the candy that they depend on for 
their livelihood.

Alice has only one year left to complete high school. Of all participants, Alice 
has gone the furthest in school. When asked if she plans on completing school she said, 

*“Of course… I have to finish because if I don’t how am I going to get a good job. Who 
knows if I’ll go to university too. I still can. Who knows, I could have a career.”*
All young adults with whom I carried out a life history are aware of the importance of formal education in terms of gaining access to opportunity, employment, and having a decent future. They are also very aware of their lack of education and the effects that it will have on their futures and lives. As Alice stated: “Today you have to have gone to school and studied to get a good job. You have to have experience.”

However, this awareness appears to be only in retrospect. Only when looking back at her life and her past is Alice able to experience the effects of her informal street labor as a child, which leaves her as an adult without any formal education and experience, which are required to make it in the world.

When asked what her hopes for the future are, she said: “For us to get a job, to get our home, to give a better life for our son so that he doesn’t have to sell candy at the stoplight.” Alice dreams and hopes for a better life for her family, for a different life for her son, which is that of the conventional life and path of formal schooling and a decent job. However, for now, Alice and her family spend their nights selling candy at a park.

**Washington (23)**

On the day of his life history, Washington, Alice, and their son arrived to the project on their bike and had a little radio from which they were playing Evangelical music. Alice is Evangelical and you can tell that Washington is also trying to take that path. He made reference to God and gave thanks to God throughout his entire life history. Every single time I saw Alice, Washington, and their son, you could see that they were struggling. Washington always spoke about the difficulties they were having finding work because everyone wants experience. He attributed the difficulty he was
experiencing finding a job to his lack of education and his past, which includes a police record and a history on the street. Towards the end of my time in the field, I received news that Washington got a job.

Washington was the only participant to express only good feelings when talking about his past on the street. When asked what he did not like about the street, he said:

“What didn’t I like about the street? (Pause. Thinking). Yeah, for me, I liked everything.” This may be why he has still not let go of all of his behaviors and ways of the street. Washington still has plans and hopes to continue to change and improve his and his family’s life.

Today I don’t really drink too much. I stopped drinking a bit. Drinking doesn’t work with me. When I drink I turn into another person. Today, I stopped using all drugs that are chemicals and everything, but I still smoke marijuana. But it’s not the same as before. Today I’m more controlled and I don’t smoke as much either. Before it was all day, one day after the other. A lot of people say that it’s difficult to stop using drugs but it’s like I said, it’s not difficult. It depends on the strength of your will and on how bad you want it because like I said, one day before I started dating Alice seriously, I was using drugs. And then when we got together I wasn’t hanging out with the guy I did drugs with as much. That’s when I started to break away from him and I stopped using stuff that was chemicals and I just smoked marijuana… I stopped using rock, but every once in a while I snorted [cocaine], but then in this last year, I started to see that every time I snorted, I also became revolted and all of that so I stopped and just smoke weed. But I want to stop with that too, faith in God. I don’t want my son to grow up seeing me use or start to use. And also, the money I waste on the stuff, I could use to buy other things for my son and other things for our house.

Joao Pedro (21)

“Looking back it was all a persona that we created. It was all a persona.
We wanted to run and escape from ourselves. We wanted to be more,
but really, we weren’t anything.”
Once those of the street leave the street does not mean that their struggle, difficulty, and hard work is over. For Joao Pedro, it is clear that integration into conventional society, maintaining sobriety, a stable life, and carrying forward are his greatest challenges. At the time of the interview, Joao Pedro had a little over two years since he had been off the street and clean from any and all drugs. He was the only participant from whom I got a sense of suffering. Joao Pedro more than any other young adult who has left the street struggles today with himself, his past, and his desire to use. Throughout his life history, there were moments that he was hit with regret, anger, and desperation while remembering the past. You can see that he is struggling and his biggest struggle is with himself. He is only very recently learning to be in the world sober and learning to be in his body and mind, with his thoughts and emotions, feeling and experiencing life and all of these things while also trying to come to terms with his past and with the death of his mother. He does not quite know how to go about all of this yet, but he is pushing forward everyday. You can feel that too. Afraid and all, he is pushing and moving forward.

**Joao Pedro:** I am starting to evolve. I wasn’t able to evolve with time. Time evolved and I was just a vegetable ten years ago and just now I’m starting to live.

**AB:** And what do you think? How is it, living?

**Joao Pedro:** Well, I’m living by my instincts, you know man. If I could live without having to experience difficulties, it would be good for me. But we have to battle huge things everyday. But for me, in my case, it seems crazy man, I still have the desire to use. I carry with me this progressive, incurable, fatal disease and if I don’t stabilize it I’m going to end up using again. If I allow my emotions to get too strong, I’m not going to be able to deal with the feeling and I’ll end up using again.
At the time of the interview Joao Pedro had been going to Narcotics Anonymous meetings for two years. He usually went to meetings two to three times a week. Upon being released from the drug clinic after being there for one year and returning back into the world, Joao Pedro has had to maintain some sort of structure and system of support, which he seems to have found at Narcotics Anonymous, which in many ways is what has helped him maintain the changes he has made and avoid relapse, making his exit from the street as That Joao Pedro and his re-entry into the world as This Joao Pedro successful. It also seems that Joao Pedro has taken on the Narcotics Anonymous model of disease and disorder as his own. As such, he continues to view his life and himself as diseased and disordered, although in a different way from when he was living on the street.

Besides going to meetings, his life consists mostly of work and school. He lives with his father and his younger brother in Guarulhos. His sister left school and later left home. At the beginning of 2011, he took the supletivo and passed (the supletivo is an exam that when passed allows adolescents and adults who were not able to study or complete school to take a course where they can complete their education in a shorter period, completing two grades in one year). “I am doing elementary school right now. I am in the fifth grade. And it’s like this, there are many people that like to make fun of me, you know, because of my schooling, but I don’t pay any attention.”

Those that lived on the street and leave the street, return to their lives where they are forced to confront and deal with the humiliation and exclusion they ran from. Even in their return to society, they are marginalized because they continue to be on the outside of the standards of society. As a result of their formative years spent on the street, they
return to society as adults who lack formal education, formal work experience, and the appropriate social and personal skills, therefore resulting in their continued marginality, although in a different way. As a result, they are excluded from decent jobs and opportunities. However, this time around they seem to be willing to face their situations of marginality and exclusion and deal with it because they realize that it was always there and will always be there. They deal with their exclusion differently. They realize that they were never able to run from their problems, which never went away, and they are aware that they must be dealt with.

Joao Pedro was also working in Sao Paulo at a clothing store, which he likes more or less, but really less than more. “If I had studied and done university, I would have been good now, man.” He said that his boss exploits him. Joao Pedro is black, poor, has a police record, lived on the street, has minimal education and is semi-literate. He therefore feels stuck and is concerned about what opportunities, if any, will be available to him in the future.

Joao Pedro is clearly making a very concerted effort to create a separation or split from his old street self (That Joao) in order to create and carry on with his new post-street life and self (This Joao). He had to emotionally distance himself from his old former self in order to try and establish a new self.

Today I have a formed opinion. I know what is good for me and I know what is bad. I self-analyze, you know. I analyze everything that I think and feel. I even analyze what I’m going to say. But I’m also weird and really dramatic and that’s why sometimes I suffer, because I’m always self-analyzing. I worry a lot about what people think about me too. I feel a strong sense of inadequacy.
Even after leaving and having spent some time off the street, Joao Pedro, as all others, struggles with working through and understanding his life and experiences on the street, and continues to deal with shame and marginalization. However, *this* Joao Pedro today dreams for a better future.

Today I think about having a normal life and I think about having a family, a structured family. Beyond just having resources, which is essential, I need a lot of responsibility for myself. The way that things are is good but I still have a lot to learn to develop a certain level of maturity and reach my goals. My goals for the future, I think I’m still looking for that.

**Everson (23)**

“There were so many risks, but we always remember, it’s a bit nostalgic… It’s cool. I like remembering these things. But I can’t understand how I lived on the street for 13 years. 13 years lost.”

*AB:* You said that you went to the street in search of freedom. So did you find the freedom you were looking for?

*Everson:* Honestly, my mom always protected me a lot, you know. And I always looked for a lot of freedom and I ended up getting into something I wasn’t prepared for. She knew what she was doing and I didn’t think she did. We come to know the world little by little. You have to have time for childhood when you act like a child. Today I’m an adult. I act like an adult. Just that during that time when I was a child, I wanted to act like an adult. I wanted a freedom that nobody would have at that age. I went to look for something I wasn’t prepared for and I didn’t find freedom. I found something very similar. I found the freedom to live, not freedom itself. I don’t think I found freedom, no. I found something that I wasn’t prepared to deal with. I went after freedom and I ended up finding reality. Reality of how life is, which is really different. Really different than what I was looking for. It was totally different from what I found. I went looking for freedom and I found reality. In the beginning it was really good. It’s the same thing as drugs. In the beginning it’s great. The sensation. And then after time you become dependant and instead of having that good sensation, you end up creating slavery. It’s totally different. Sometimes the person gets into drugs simply looking for that sensation and they end up with problems like dependency. So I went looking for freedom and what I thought was good for me and at the end of the day look what it cost me. The cost was very high. You know those
that made the decision earlier and accepted the support of their families, today they’re great. Better than me.

*AB:* Were you aware of that while it was all happening?

*Everson:* No. No. Just looking back. Only when we reflect. If I had any notion that everything that I was doing was bringing me to that place, I wouldn’t have done it. That’s where I’m going to be in a few years. No. In that kind of life, the person is either dead or in prison. It’s one of those two paths, just those two paths. And we weren’t aware that it was there that we would end up if we continued on that path. Today we reflect a lot. The only problem is that we can’t go back in time. What I wouldn’t do. Today I know everything that I wouldn’t do. To fix. There are so many things that I can’t fix.

Their initial search for freedom and adventure, their identification with the street and identity as street child, is what ultimately created their situations of confinement, imprisonment, or what Everson refers to as “slavery,” and for many of their friends, death. Their identification with the street and the strong bonds that were developed between them as a result of their identities as street children resulted in an unintended consequence, which is that of further exclusion, marginalization, and violence. Their search for freedom, or the false promise of freedom that the street initially offered, turned them into prisoners of the street, and their solidarity and sense of belonging was destroyed by drugs and addiction.

Loss was the major theme throughout Everson’s life history. It is also one of the major things that he is struggling with today. Only when looking back do Everson and others come to realize the consequences, or costs, of their decisions (Berlant 2011).

I have the stability of being in a home for more or less one year. I’m working. I’m fighting. But before this one year, I spent 13 years on the street. I can’t understand how I lived on the street for 13 years. 13 years lost. I did an analysis thinking about all of the things that I have already lost. When I was on the street without anything to do, you end up stopping to think, reflecting on what you lost. I lost a lot of things. It was good, but I lost a lot of things. First we end up losing that which is most
precious, time, right. Today I still haven’t finished my studies. I went up to the sixth grade only. I’m trying, I’m fighting to go back to school. I should have already been graduated by now… Because I spent so much time on the street, I don’t have my own home, I don’t have a car… Today my relationship with my family is very little. Today I see all of the opportunities that I lost. There are a lot of opportunities that I lost and I can’t go after. If I could go after them, I would, but unfortunately it’s not possible.

As a fairly new member of conventional society, Everson is very aware of that which he lacks or was not able to acquire as a result of the thirteen years he spent living on the street. Leaving the street requires getting one’s life back on track. However, getting back on track usually means having to start from where they left off as young children when they left home and went to the street. They have to return to where they were in their lives, however this time as adults in order to make their way and make it in the world.

Everson does not view his life, or his past, as only loss. He tends to view it as both a loss and a gain or what he refers to as an “exchange,” which he describes in the following way:

It’s never just a loss. We never just lose and we never just win. It’s more or less an exchange. So as some of the bad things go, new positive things come with the new… We want to think that it was all worth something, that it wasn’t a completely lost cause. If I could pass all the knowledge that I have to someone without the person having to go down the same path that I went down, that would be awesome. And that’s when we stop to think about destiny and where it’s going to take things. If I hadn’t gone through all that I went through, maybe I wouldn’t be able to teach anyone in the future about how to live or how to survive. Maybe it was all so that I can teach adolescents. So it’s things like that that make us think that not everything was lost, you know, that it was worth something. We have to learn to grow, forget the difficult time that we experienced, forget the bad things always keeping the moral of the story in mind. There’s always a lesson to be learned. From everything that we went through, there’s something to be gained from it. But you have to change your behavior. If
we weren’t able to change, no one will change. And we can’t just complain about how life was hard because it was something that we went looking for. So if we were able to enter this addictive circle, we can leave it too.

As already mentioned, those who choose to leave the street appear to do so and be able to do so only when they believe that they themselves chose to be there in the first place (Shaw 2002). In this way, they find the will and the motivation to leave the street because they believe they can leave. In this process, they regain a sense of autonomy that they lost on the street as street children. Everson and Joao Pedro both continue to struggle regardless. As Everson stated:

We’re still in the phase where we’re trying to discover what we want. And even more with us, because we spent so much time on the street and our personalities were formed in the middle of that which is not conventional. A family, we didn’t have that. Responsibility, we didn’t have that. So these were the things that were creating our characteristics. To change that now as an adult, it’s a bit more complicated. So they’re personality deficiencies. And now, especially that we’re trying to get out, we try to communicate better, we try to understand how to act. It’s very difficult, especially for us as we’re in a phase of adaptation. We already know the importance of a job. We know the importance of having responsibilities, but we’re still missing a lot of things. There’s still a lot for us to learn.

A major challenge for those who have lived on the street for a significant period of time, particularly during their formative years, and then leave, is that their identities have largely been formed and developed on the street as “street children” (Beazley 2003).

Before leaving the field, Everson continued working at his job as a security guard, but started working the day shift, which allowed him to go back to school and take different courses, as he hoped for. Everson and I keep in touch via email. The latest news that I received from him is that he is doing well. He is still working at his job as a
security guard by day and he also started taking an English class and a course in hotel management. He said that he is preparing for the World Cup and the Olympics that will be taking place in Brazil.

Everson mentioned some of the new and satisfying experiences he has had since leaving the street that keep him moving forward.

In that exchange that I made in leaving the street in order to have a better life, there are satisfactory benefits, like I told you with the example of the woman who came and asked me for directions. It makes us feel good. Before when I was on the street, people would cross the street to avoid being close to us cause they were afraid. And today I still talk to people who are like, ‘Wow, you’re so different. You’re really well. Congratulations. I didn’t even recognize you at first but now I see that it’s you and that you’re doing great.’ This type of treatment doesn’t have a price. It’s fundamental for the person to keep going and to see that people recognize you as something other than unrecyclable human trash. Now I’m a person, you know. And that gives you incentive to do a million other things that you know that if you just push yourself, you’re going to be recognized. It’s awesome. It’s really good.

Here we can see that Everson’s former “role identification has to be taken into account and incorporated into a future identity” (Fuchs Ebaugh 1988:88). In other words, the identity of one who leaves the street in many ways “rests not on one’s current role but on who one was in the past” (Fuchs Ebaugh 1988:180). Everson gained recognition and acknowledgement and was applauded for the changes he made, particularly when compared to his former role and self as street child. The positive reactions and acknowledgements of others solidified and strengthened Everson’s leaving process, giving him all the more incentive to leave.

It has been argued that one’s sense of self or identity is based on or related to the need to be recognized by others. According to Judith Butler, “It is only through the
experience of recognition that any of us become constituted as socially viable beings” (Butler 2001:2). Everson states that through social recognition, he realizes and experiences that he is a person, which he never experienced or felt before. He has finally achieved the bare minimum of human recognition and social existence (Biehl 2005). It must be an amazing realization. Everson spoke a lot about his new experiences as a person.

You enter in a place dressed nicely and people say good morning to you. That’s rewarding. And it’s a thing of effort and will. You know that the treatment that you have today, which is better, you know it’s because you’re helping yourself. You are going after things, so you’re rewarded, and you have the right. You feel important. You feel valued. It’s cool to be treated like a responsible adult and respected as a person who can contribute and not as a problematic adolescent. It’s always good to feel that way, useful rather than feeling useless and tossed aside. I want to be a good person. I don’t want to be another statistic of someone who is out on the street. I want to be a really successful person. You have to have hope… One thing that I’m doing today is taking care of my life. Finally.

We can see here that Everson has a strong desire to be “normal” or part of society. His desire to be accepted as “normal” is clear in the ways he maintains his self-esteem through his job, using his earnings from his job to pay rent and buy food instead of drugs, and taking care of himself in terms of how he dresses and does his hair, adopting a presence or appearance that is more acceptable to others.

The longer that those who once lived on the street are off the street, the more they are able to shed their street child identity and begin to view themselves as humans and less as street children, or even worse, unrecyclable human trash (this is what a police officer called Everson). In this way and throughout this process, this new identity and
sense of self gradually develops and becomes more dominant over time (Karabanow 2004).

The young adults with whom I carried out life histories are remarkable. They have made actual changes in their lives, values, and identities. Their lives were for many years defined by the street and their identities as street children. The changes that they have made are remarkable in that they have found the courage and strength within themselves to make those incredibly difficult changes and transformations, choosing life over death. They have discovered meaning in their lives and value in themselves, which was essential to their leaving the street. They were also able to look back at their pasts while living their present lives, moving forward into their futures facing their challenges and fears while also at the same time beginning to dream and pursue those dreams.

Their goals and desires today in large part are for that of structure, stability, and normativity. All of the young adults that left the street spoke of wanting to lead and live normal conventional lives, which essentially is off the street and free from drugs, where they have a job, a family, and a home. They long to discover and know themselves in their new unfamiliar post-street lives. They long for a new sense of self and social belonging, which they are still struggling to find. They desire to feel normal, be a part of something, and live a dependable life in a dependable world (Berlant 2011). Their present lives are very much about seeking “reconstitution of their place in the world” as well as their “insertion in the universe of normality” (Castel 1998:210). They have the need to make a place for themselves in the world, carrying out different acts and
behaviors in order to differentiate their lives from their previous lives on the street. Their leaving the street is about a return to the institution of life that they tried to escape.

Their hunger for life and their choices in life today bring them closer to life as opposed to death. Their attachments and therefore their identities are no longer linked to the street and the image of freedom that it once had, but instead today they are attached to dreams of normativity and chances at a conventional life. They become attached to life building, dreams, and opportunity that will allow them to grow and become someone. In this way, their search for acceptance and search for a sense of self, self-worth, belonging, and a place in the world continues, but in a different way and in different spaces. In their search, they still find themselves excluded, as they are outside of the norms and standards of society as a result of their time spent or lost on the street, where the skills and personal development needed to make it in the world were not developed. However, they are reproducing the idea that a way out of their status as marginal is possible.

As a result of his past, Everson’s present and future are filled with fear, doubt, and struggle, but they are also filled with hope, promise, and possibility.

Today we can see how tough things really are. Today you have to go to a good university to get a good job. Today in order to be accepted, you have to be perfect. And we lost so much time on the street and now we see ourselves as almost useless, completely outside of the standard of society and so we are kind of excluded… And then the fear comes because you’ve already been in prison, you don’t have education, you’re black, you’re poor, you’re an ex-drug addict, you’ve had trouble with the law, you’re semi-literate. So there are a lot of things that really make you afraid… I was on the street for thirteen years. We have a certain way of thinking because of the street. Before I was in that thing where I’m working and when that job ended I was like, am I going to be able to get another job? Am I going to go back to the street again? Those things cross my mind. I’m good today, but what about tomorrow? And because I’ve already been in prison, I was in prison two times, it’s not easy to get a
job. I go to a job interview and it’s all good. This has already happened. It’s all good and then my criminal record comes up. And that might not even be the reason that you weren’t chosen, but you’re always going to think and wonder if maybe it was. Is it because I was in prison? Was I not hired because I don’t have a good education? We think these things. But I’m starting to think that it’s possible to be happy, it’s possible to go after things. There is always possibility for growth and it doesn’t matter how, but there is always that opportunity to grow.
Chapter 7 The Best Interests and Rights of Which Child?: Disputes and Tensions

“The problem of street children presents us with the issue of social class in Brazil. The street child is a factor that points out the problem of social class.”

Markinhus

The previous chapters have explored why and how the street has become a solution for the children and adolescents that live and work there in order to identify and consider what the best needs of the child might be, which is explored in this chapter. This chapter examines both government and non-government responses to the phenomenon of children in a street situation. The children’s narratives are contextualized within the current international debate regarding childhood, child labor, and children’s rights. This chapter also explores the tensions and intersections between government and non-government responses to street children and child street laborers, the global debate on childhood and children’s rights, and the actual situation of these children.

Children’s Rights

“Humanity ought to give children its very best.”

Declaration of the United Nations on the Rights of the Child, 1959

Although the International Convention on the Rights of the Child states that the intervention shall be in the child’s best interests, a majority of the interventions, just as our notions of childhood, are ethnocentric and based on Western values. These values are centered on the child’s right to a family with a mother and a father. However, these children are not given the minimal conditions to live dignified lives and remain in their homes with their families. According to Claudia Fonseca, labeling families as incompetent or inadequate with the child’s rights in mind is actually infringing on the
rights of the adults, taking away their rights as parents. To avoid this, we need to develop a notion of plural, or many childhoods (Fonseca 2002:364-365).

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is based on the notion that there is one standard of childhood, differentiating between what is acceptable and unacceptable for children. Differences between individuals and across cultures are ignored, and are therefore treated as unimportant and non-existent, making rights a “one size fits all” solution (Prussing 2011). For this reason, rights do not fit or are not in line with these children and adolescent’s own perspectives and lives. Many children from non-Western societies do not have the “right” to the childhood that the Convention and the West claim as legitimate (Cowan et al. 2001:83 and Montgomery 2001). In this way, rights often work as a form of control and repression, as they do not take into consideration the actual child and their needs and therefore their best interests (Prussing 2011). The global discourse on rights treats the child and their family as if they are doing something wrong. Such a discourse fails to acknowledge that their actions, motivations, perspectives, histories, and lived realities are linked to the political economy, which constrains and limits their options and opportunity and maintains their exclusion and marginality (Rizzini et al. 2007).

Some anthropologists argue that the discourse on children’s rights is an act of exclusion, as it recognizes the rights of children that live in a “home” with a “family” (Hecht 1998). These anthropologists have taken children’s rights to the extreme by claiming that children should have the right to live on the streets. They refer to children’s rights, as discussed in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as a violation of the
rights of street children and child street laborers, as production and talk of rights are exclusionary practices (Ennew & Swart-Kruger 2003:12).

Discussions of children’s rights in addition to global “solutions” to children living and working on the street are usually made up of standards based on the nuclear family and the school as the only legitimate spaces and places for children. However, this is dangerous as it fails to recognize ways of surviving in difficult conditions. It also criminalizes and punishes the poor and the ways that they raise their children. The discourse on children’s rights has made poor parents responsible for their children’s destitution, implying that they have failed in their own lives as well as in their roles as parents (Nieuwenhuys 1996:242 & 2001:550).

The current literature on street children and child labor is centered on discussions of their rights and their best interests as advocated by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Byrne 1998, UNICEF 1998 and O’Kane 2003:11-13). Although the emphasis has moved from the needs of these vulnerable children to defending their rights as citizens, the Convention continues to view the child as both a self-determining subject while also in need of protection. The notion of the child in need still permeates the language used, especially when discussing street children and child street laborers (Woodhead 1990). The issue that is most often addressed is individual, psychological, and familial and not social and structural (Panter-Brick 2002:154-155).

A. Gomes da Costa analyzed the transition of the legal position of street children in Brazil from “minors” to “citizens.” The term minor is associated with the highly repressive Minors’ Code. The term referred to an individual less than 18 years of age.
The term “minor” has been replaced with the term “citizen.” The term citizen is representative of Brazil’s hopes for economic and social justice, citizenship, and inclusion (da Costa 1989, Alves 1991:77 and Biehl 2005). The Children’s and Adolescents’ Act, unlike the Minors’ Code, has the goal of promoting the well being of all Brazilian children and of defending and guaranteeing their rights (Alves 1991:81). Assigning citizenship to all Brazilian children is to include their access to full economic, social, political, and cultural rights (Alvez 1991:96).

Brazil’s most recent Constitution’s Chapter on the Rights of Children and Adolescents, approved in 1988, states:

It is the duty of the family, society and the State to guarantee the child and the adolescent, with absolute priority, the rights to life, health, food, education, leisure, professional training, culture, dignity, respect, freedom, family and social life, and to protect them from all forms of negligence, discrimination, exploitation, cruelty and oppression (Art. 227) (Alves 1991:79).

In 1990, Brazil’s Child and Adolescent Statute (ECA) was enacted, which is aimed at providing full protection and inclusion of all children and adolescents. The Statute changed policy and discourse by replacing the punitive policy language with that of rights, with the idea that children are citizens, or persons who are entitled to rights. Another change is that of the idea of punishment was replaced by that of protection and the Statute mandates that all members of society are responsible in terms of protecting the rights of all children and adolescents to live with their families and in their communities (Rizzini & Thapliyal 2007). However, participation, recognition, and realization of rights in Brazilian society continue to be on a very selective basis and are essentially determined by one’s social class. Economic condition is linked to social status. In other
words, the rights of these children and their status as citizens still very much exists on paper only (Rizzini & Thapliyal 2007, Dias da Silva 2002, Roland 2001 and Rosemberg 1993).

The Statute also states that, in accordance with articles 6 and 227 of Brazil’s 1988 Constitution, that:

…the family, the community, the society in general, and the government have the duty to guarantee, with absolute priority, the enforcement of the right to life, health, food, education, sports, leisure, professionalization, culture, dignity, respect, freedom, and close family and community association.

Parents then are to be made aware of their responsibility to nurture, protect, and provide for their children (Nieuwenhuys 2001). In this way, a new discourse is created where the family, not the state, is given responsibility to care for the child. By assigning rights to the “suffering child” the state gains access to the family and is therefore able to assign blame to the “responsible” family (Biehl 2005:135). However, the large majority of the children and adolescents I spoke to reported that their parents are not able, which is very different than not willing, to provide them with these rights.

Despite the Brazilian government’s new regime of human rights and citizenship and claims of including and recognizing all children as human rights bearers and citizens, “zones of social abandonment” continue to exist. In these zones, we can find those who are deemed not worthy of life and humanness (Agamben 2002:42 and Biehl 2005).

**Citizenship**

Children are central to our discussions of culture, citizenship, and power. Childhood, as citizenship, includes notions of personhood, morality, order, or lack
thereof. Citizenship and its absence, just as childhood, home, family and their absence, are socially, culturally, and politically constructed (Chavez 2008:25).

The creation of categories is ultimately about distinguishing between who is acceptable and legitimate and who is not. Those who are not included as acceptable and legitimate are excluded, marginalized, and persecuted. They are perceived as threats to the social order and the larger social body. According to Foucault, state violence is not a matter of causing pain but instead is about creating categories that are punishable while enforcing the norms of the state and society (Foucault 1977 and Scarry 1985). Violence then, just as rights, or talk of rights, is a process by which categories, and essentially people, are legitimized and delegitimized (Nagengast 1994 and Kovats-Bernat 2006:171). Rights and citizenship have to do with “making live and letting die” (Foucault 2003:247).

Citizenship has to do with belonging and not belonging (Chavez 2008:15). It is a boundary-making concept that includes and excludes, creating and defining who is recognized as community members, citizens, and persons (Chavez 2008:5). These binaries of citizen/non-citizen also apply to street children and child street laborers and the binaries that their lives have been reduced to, such a person/non-person, home/street, absence/presence, etc.

Because street and working children live and work on what is viewed as the unstructured and unsupervised street, they are perceived as unsocialized and therefore a threat. These children are viewed as rejecting “childhood,” the “home,” and the mother by making the street their home or their place of work and play. They are viewed as
disorder and are representative of social ills as they are living outside of the “normative”
bounds of motherhood and what is accepted as the family and a home, as they are not
supervised by and under the “care” and control of an adult (Ennew 1995 and Kovats-
Bernat 2006:4). In this way, the “home” and the “family” serve as metaphors for the
nation.

Leticia Veloso, in her article “Universal Citizens, Unequal Childho
ds: Children’s Perspectives on Rights and Citizenship in Brazil,” raises the issue of
citizenship and difference through examples of ethnographic cases. She discusses
Brazil’s Child and Adolescent Statute, enacted in 1990, which was conceived as an
instrument for addressing problems of poverty, exclusion, and violence through a legal
framework. The statute attempts to assign a universal, liberal-democratic citizenship to
all children and adolescents in order to integrate them into the larger society. These
formerly excluded children are now being assigned formal citizenship or status as
citizens, persons, and rights-bearers (Inciardi & Surratt 1998:4, Earls & Carlson 1999 and
Veloso 2008:45-46). However, according to Veloso, this act or attempt at formally
including street children and child street laborers does not and cannot overcome
difference (Veloso 2008:45-46). The reality is that citizenship and social, political, and
economic inclusion are not realized for these children and their families. Biehl refers to
this as a “concept of citizenship,” in that the government and state fail to provide that
which is necessary for their citizenship to become a structural reality (Biehl 2005:65).

Veloso asserts that the discourse on children’s rights and citizenship that targets
poor marginalized children in particular may instead reinforce and perpetuate difference
and exclusion. The actual rights specified in Brazil’s Child and Adolescent Statute include the right to schooling, health care, and protection in dangerous situations. These rights, as Veloso points out, assign a special status to children. This is contradictory in that children are referred to and viewed as in need of special protection because of their status as children while at the same time they are deserving of rights as citizens, which Veloso refers to as “the ambiguous nature of children’s citizenship” (Veloso 2008:46-47).

An examination of the experiences of street children and child street laborers within the discourse of children’s rights and citizenship is especially important as notions of an ideal childhood are built into the statute. Minimal to nothing is known about how these discourses, programs, policies, and practices they give rise to are understood and experienced by the children themselves in their everyday lives. Veloso argues that these children are very well aware of their position of marginality in society and learn to play with this notion of “rights,” which is most often directed at them. She argues that they have learned to maneuver their rights and the domain of children’s rights (Veloso 2008:49).

This attempt and ideal of a universal rights-bearing childhood is placed upon an incredibly unequal social world. Although “citizen” implies having rights and inclusion in public and social life, it continues to be understood and viewed differently based on an individual’s class, ethnicity, gender, and age (Rizzini 1994 and Kless et al. 2000). In this way, it is through these very acts of “recognition” and “acknowledgement” that a site of power in which humans are produced, differentiated, determined, and qualified as worthy
and are recognized as human and citizen, or not, is carried out (Butler 2004:2 and Veloso 2008:28).

The large majority of these children and adolescents and their families do not have necessary documents or formal identification including a birth certificate, identity card, military registration, work permit, voter registration, etc., all of which are required by Brazilian law in order to gain formal official employment (Rizzini & Butler 2003). Without these documents you can hardly do anything, especially in Brazil’s highly bureaucratic society. In this way, bureaucracy is in many ways a barrier to their being able to work and the ability of their parents to work (Hecht 1998). Another important point raised by Everson about these documents are that, “They’re your certificate for citizenship” and personhood in Brazilian society. Without these documents, these children and adolescents and their families do not exist in the way that the state recognizes (Berlant 2011).

**Child Labor**

UNICEF defines working children as children who work, part time or full time, paid or unpaid, within or outside of the home/family setting, and in conditions that are exploitative and damaging to their health and development. According to UNICEF:

Children should be protected from hazardous work, inappropriate work, excessive hours of work, work that may stunt their growth, and work in harmful environments… [and should be] provided with an environment that fosters their healthy, happy growth and development.

Child labor in Brazil is illegal. Both the Federal Constitution and the Child and Adolescent Statute (ECA), according to the law 8.069/90, prohibit anyone under the age of fourteen to engage in any kind of work. In December 1998, the Constitution was
modified, making those under the age of sixteen years old prohibited to work. However, the reality is that many children and adolescents are introduced to work very early in life. This includes youth under the age of sixteen and children as young as five years old.

The International Labor Organization (ILO) states (1997:2) that labor during the formative years “deprives children of their childhood and their dignity… hampers their access to education and the acquisition of skills, … and is harmful to their health and development.” The International Work Organization (IWO), the Federal Constitution of Brazil (article 227) and the Child and Adolescent Statute (article 60) determined that sixteen years old is the minimum age to begin working while fourteen years of age is the maximum obligated age for school. Various articles were adopted with the objective of eradicating child labor. They were accepted in 1973 in Brazil and in many other countries (Pereira Alberto 1999:3).

Working children are often portrayed and described as robbed of their childhood and future in order to provide for their families. Many assert that any and all child labor interferes with and is detrimental to the wellbeing, lives, education, and development of children (del Vecchio 2008). This is also known as the “betrayed childhood theory” (Filho & Neder 2001). This theory is extremely prominent throughout the literature, policy, and society at large. It is also believed and agreed upon by many of the child and adolescent participants themselves. Virtually all of the children and adolescents with whom I spoke stated that children should not work and instead should be in the home, at school, and playing. Some children stated that parents should work harder so that children do not have to work.
Many of the parents of child and adolescent participants expressed that it is better for their child to be occupied with some sort of activity as opposed to having free time, which is viewed with fear and suspicion. Having something to do keeps children out of trouble and away from danger, particularly the drug trafficking that is so prevalent in their communities. While privileged middle and upper class children spend their leisure time at soccer practice, swimming and piano lessons, poor children often spend their leisure time on the street and working (Filho & Neder 2001).

Many children around the world see it as right and as a moral obligation to work in order to contribute to the family income as well as to meet their own wants and needs (Offit 2008). These children view not contributing to the family income as “abandoning” their families and as a violation of social norms (Fonseca 2002:361). Tobias Hecht (1998) asserts that, “discouraging poor urban children in Brazil from working in the street, far from protecting them, will likely weaken their ties to the home.” According to Hecht, if these children are not able to contribute to the economies of their households, they are at risk of violence. However, the International Labor Office (ILO) fails to mention the very needed extra-income that working children contribute to the household economy and therefore the important and central roles that children play in the political economy (Niewenhuys 1994, Levine 1999:140-141 and Montgomery 2001). In this way, children’s work and the importance of their work to their families and the household economy remain invisible in the rights discourse.

According to Nieuwenhuys, work is one of the most critical domains in which poor children can contest and negotiate childhood. She argues that because current child
labor policies fail to address the exclusion of children from the production of value, they actually reinforce children’s vulnerability to exploitation. Nieuwenhuys demonstrates how such moral condemnation of child labor implies that children must be passive and dependant, which denies their agency as producers and contributors of value. The denial of work is problematic and contradictory especially when the family is unable and the state fails to provide children with what they need to live (Nieuwenhuys 1996:238-242).

Susan Levine in her article, “Bittersweet Harvest: Children, work and the global march against child labor in the post-apartheid state,” examines the agency and rights of working children in the wine lands of the Western Cape Province in South Africa. Levine argues against anti-child labor campaigns in South Africa because they fail to provide economic solutions or alternatives to poor children who have to work in order to support and maintain their households. The prohibition of child labor fails to recognize the important role that children play in the labor market and only perpetuates and reproduces the economic conditions that give rise to child labor in the first place (Levine 1999:139).

Although such a campaign and discourse reveals the issue of child exploitation and is intended to change and improve or repair exploitative conditions in the work place, the existence of adult exploitation is much of what causes and perpetuates child labor in the first place. As reported by both child and adult farm workers, poverty and not child labor should be the focus of these campaigns to end exploitation. There are many more harmful aspects to the lives of these children than their working (Levine 1999:140 and Kenny 2007:4).
These anti-child labor campaigns tend to focus on the rights of special interest groups, ultimately ignoring and removing the situation from the larger social, economic, and political context that directly affects these children and their families and in which particular forms of rights abuses and exploitation exist. The discourse and movement for children’s rights fails to acknowledge poverty as central in creating the need for child labor. These individuals believe that eliminating child labor will eliminate poverty. However, it may instead only further reinforce social inequalities and worsen the situation of some children and their families (Levine 1999:149-151).

Child labor has been reduced to either the mere socialization of children or to exploitation and marginalization. We are far from taking children, particularly poor children, seriously as social, political, and economic actors as well as capitalist consumers. Child labor provides children with the opportunity to be involved in the production of value while also at the same time maintaining agency and control, at least to some degree, over their lives. Child labor is a response to imposed external structural realities, conditions, and constraints. Through their labor and by taking to the streets, these children are demonstrating their agency by attempting to take control of and improve their lives and sometimes the lives of their families, by utilizing that which is accessible and available to them (Offit 2008:57-58). In this way, their labor and their going to the street are a rights claiming process.

Children should not be criminalized for their working nor should their families be blamed. The goal of abolishing child labor will be successful only when conditions of poverty and adult work improve. Because children are denied access to regulated
employment, there are no other forms of well-paid labor available to them. Prohibiting child labor, while intending to protect the child and promote the rights of the child, actually may only worsen the living situations of children and their families, pushing children into even more precarious and illicit forms of work, such as drug trafficking or prostitution (Levine 1999:150, Montgomery 2001:156-57 and Kenny 2007:112).

The Right to Education: “There are no spaces for enrollment.”

“The street attracted me more than school. I remember one day Guina told me he didn’t know what love was. He said that when he was a child, it was a mixture of hate, frustration and pain of how humiliating it was to go to school wearing donated clothes.”

Mano Brown, Racionais MC’s

Child labor is said to be an activity that results in immediate benefits in terms of income, while at the same time it is also referred to as a costly activity in terms of competing and interfering with the leisure time, play, and worst of all, the education of children (Kassouf 2002). Various reports of poor schooling performance in Brazil and children who enter the labor force often not excelling or performing well in school support this concern (Birdsall & Sabot 1996 and Duryea et al. 2003).

“There are no spaces for enrollment,” is one of the most common statements I heard from working children and adolescents and their families when talking about school. The reality of public education in Brazil is a sad and disappointing one (Offit 2008). Public schools experience tremendous difficulty in keeping up with rapid urban growth and increasing population, making simply getting enrolled in school an issue (O’Haire 2011). Children and their parents alike complained of a lack of enrollment spaces (Filho & Neder 2001). Even with public school being free, many of these children
continue to not have access to primary school with very few completing elementary school, less completing high school, and even less ever making it to university.

Many of the children’s parents complained that the schools that do have available spaces are too far, making in nearly impossible for them to get to school due to insufficient funds for public transportation. There is also a constant shortage of funds in primary and secondary education, an extreme shortage and lack of qualified teachers, a high rate of teacher strikes, costly field trips making poor children unable to attend, a lack of educational resources, low quality education and therefore low levels of learning, with public schools often being environments of extreme neglect and even violence (Rizzini & Thapliyal 2007, Abramavoy 2003, Abramavoy et al. 1999, UNESCO 1995 and Waiselfisz 2006).

Some children attempt to combine school and work. However, most child street laborers do not attend school regularly. These children often experience high absenteeism, inability to concentrate and stay awake because they work as late as 10, 11, and 12 pm on the streets on weeknights, and therefore experience high failure rates, constant grade repetition, with some repeating the same grade as many as three to five times, while others end up rebelling, resulting in their being expelled, dropping out completely, or not enrolling at all. The large majority of these children are not in grades appropriate to their age level, are not performing at their age level, and have extremely low rates of literacy.

Moving, or a high degree of mobility, which is common among this particular population, is another factor that interferes with their education (Gregori 2000). Many of
their parents were also unable to study themselves as children for many of the same reasons as their own children. For a variety of these reasons, abandoning school is very common among child street laborers (Offit 2008). Street children abandon school altogether.

These children are excluded from a variety of spaces, including school, making the street their only viable option. Their work is not the only factor that deprives them of education. Treatment of students is also an issue. These children are extremely marginalized, stigmatized, shamed, ridiculed, and discriminated against in school because of their status as poor (Rizzini & Thapliyal 2007). Their status as poor is apparent and visible in their clothing, the way they speak, and their body language, all of which are markers of their poverty and reveal their status as *favelado* (a person from a *favela*) (Bourgois 1996). In this way, they are constantly reminded of their status as subordinate, ultimately making them out of place at school. These children are often treated as problematic by teachers and ostracized by classmates and are labeled, referred to, and treated as hopeless thieves. Similar to the rest of society, school reinforces the idea that they are the problem as opposed to looking at the education system itself. These children are treated as inferior and receive no incentive to invest in, dedicate themselves to, and continue with their education (Filho & Neder 2001). This is probably why most child and adolescent participants reported not liking school or their teacher (Filho & Neder 2001 and Offit 2008). As Bourgois (1996) states, “To have obeyed his teacher and to have liked school would have required” these children “to internalize society’s disrespect” (Bourgois 1996:252). Maybe their indifference towards and absence at
school is their way of attempting to maintain some sense of personal dignity (Bourgois 1996).

The children’s families view education as important. However, they do not seem convinced that education is profitable for their children nor that it will bring about changes in their lives, providing them with a better future. Many of the children’s parents expressed concern over the high inadequacy of schools, the poor quality of public education, and the poor quality of teachers, with school often failing their children who are often ridiculed, humiliated, excluded, and mistreated (Lieten 2010).

While all child and adolescent participants stated that they think school is important, they also view it as out of their reach. Similar to many other children and adolescents, Marcelo (15) stated that school is important, “Because without school you won’t get ahead.” According to Leticia (12), school is important because, “It gives us education and it takes us off the street. It’s important for us to be someone in life.” However, statements on school being important were usually followed by statements such as, “Children work because they need to. At home we need it.”

It is also important to keep in mind that many of these children, with the money they make from their working, are able to do the things that we argue children should be doing such as playing, socializing, and interacting with friends. They are also able to access resources that we argue they should have such as school supplies, food, braces, and items for play. For example, Maria (10), uses some of the money that she makes from working with malabares, so her and her sister, Leticia (12), can go to an internet
café, thus gaining access to important educational resources that they would not be able to access otherwise.

There is no doubt that working interferes with the education of these children. These children themselves stated that work puts education at risk and that children should not be working. When asked what children should be doing instead, most said, “playing.” These children and adolescents reported school and home as appropriate spaces for children to have a healthy development and adequate preparation for their futures as adults. According to Amanda (27): “A child’s place is in the home and at school. The life that I wasn’t able to have, I want to give to them. I don’t want to see my son doing what I have to do, having to work in this way.”

The large majority of the children that I spoke to said that they liked working. However, when asked if they would rather be doing something else, most said that they would rather be riding a bike or playing soccer. They also said that they want to be working so that they can make money to help their families and access the things they would otherwise not have access to. In other words, these children, if they had a choice, would not choose to work. Unfortunately, work results in immediate benefits, unlike school, which seems to have no benefits at all for poor children. In this way, most of these children and adolescents prefer work over any of the other options available to them because in many ways it is their only option. If it were not for their work and the street, many of these children and their families would not have access to some of their most basic of needs or to the rights that policy makers and the international community argue that all children should have such as leisure and the freedom to play.
All young adults with whom I carried out life histories, when looking back, expressed regret and reported experiencing the consequences of their “choices,” particularly their not completing school. As Alice (22) stated:

Children don’t know the importance of school. They just think they have to go. They don’t know that when they grow up they’ll see what they’re missing. They have to go to school. They shouldn’t be working. If I had studied, I wouldn’t be selling candy. I would have a better job.

As a child, Alice worked when there were not things at home, when there was need. While working she also went to school.

I would go to work and I would return home tired and I wouldn’t go to school. I stopped in the fifth grade. I was 14 years old. I had repeated and repeated grades because I didn’t go to school because I went to the stoplight and I got home tired. When it was time to wake up, I couldn’t get up, I was so tired. I couldn’t get out of bed and so sometimes I missed school. And then I stopped in the fifth grade after missing so much… I repeated the fifth grade three times. 12 years old I repeated, 13 years old I repeated, 14 years old I repeated. I kept repeating the 5th grade. I never got out and I was like, I don’t want to go to school anymore. I was tired of being in the same grade, so I stopped going to school.

Through her constant repetition of the fifth grade, Alice received no incentive whatsoever to continue studying. She also believes that work interferes with school because, “Children get tired. Sometimes too tired.” Although she agrees that children should not work, she also said: “What are you going to do if these families don’t have conditions to take care of everyone? Because some parents have a bunch of kids and if the children don’t help, everyone will die of hunger.” When asked what children should be doing, she said: “They should be studying. Children should study and not work, but they first have to help their families.”
Similar to Alice, Sandra (18) stopped going to school because she was working a lot. “I missed a lot. I returned home tired, ate dinner, took a shower, and went to sleep and that’s why I wasn’t able to go to school, because I was tired.” She started working at the age of 14. Before she started working, Sandra said that she went to school every single day.

All of the young adults with whom I did a life history are now aware of the importance of formal education, as they are now suffering the consequences of their lack of education. “Today you have to have gone to school to get a job. You have to have experience.” Sandra does not think that children should work. “They should study and not be on the street because the child suffers having to work. Children should not be working. They should be studying and playing.”

It is erroneous to blame their failures in school on their work only. Many of the challenges that these children experience in school are associated with and a result of their poverty. I met many children that do not work and still do not go to school either because of being expelled, there not being any space for enrollment, or just not wanting to. Working children and adolescents do not leave school solely to work or because of their work (Filho & Neder 2001).

Students from disadvantaged backgrounds often perform less well than their more privileged peers in school. Without a doubt there is a relationship between economic inequality and student performance. Policy makers ignore or fail to mention the strong link between children’s access to school, length of stay in school, achievement and school performance with that of economic background (Filho & Neder 2001 and Ladd &
Fiske 2011). In this way education also reveals social problems and inequalities (Filho & Neder 2001). It is their poverty that is detrimental to their wellbeing and interferes with their education as well as a system that does not respect or recognize them, that is all too unequal and unjust, and from which they are violently excluded and abandoned. These are the structural realities that shape their lives, decisions, activities, and futures (Filho & Neder 2001, Huggins & Rodrigues 2004 and Duryea et al. 2003).

In the literature and larger international discourse, the issue of education, or their lack thereof, is always directly linked to their work. However, their poverty is more of a barrier to their getting an education. I am not a proponent of their work nor am I saying that it is beneficial to them. Without a doubt the work of these children interferes with their education and has a negative impact on their lives. Their work is carried out on the marginal street where they are often exploited, they perform activities that require minimal to no skills and qualifications, they are exposed to a variety of dangers, and they work long hours, all of which pose a threat to their immediate wellbeing as well as close doors to their chances of having a future, if they ever had any to begin with (Rizzini 1994). But again, it is their poverty and the system that marginalizes and oppresses them that robs these children and is detrimental to their wellbeing, education, lives, and futures.

**Government and Non-Government Approaches in Brazil**

**Government Approaches: Contemporary Social Economic Policies**

What is needed is effective work at the Federal, State, and Municipal levels. The Federal government distributes Bolsa Familia, but it does not solve poverty, which is the real problem.  
Markinus, PMMR Director
Starting in the 1980’s onwards, Brazil began experiencing a shift in its legislation on children. In 1980 there was a fight for democracy. Today Brazil is a democratic country. In 1985 the National Movement for Street Children (Movimento Nacional de Meninos e Meninas de Rua, or MNMMR) was born. Brazil’s seventh and most current federal democratic constitution of 1988 pronounced children and adolescents to be an “absolute priority.” In 1990, Brazil’s Child and Adolescent Statute (ECA) was passed.

In the 1980’s the Brazilian federal government developed programs aimed at combating extreme poverty, reducing and ultimately eliminating child labor, and increasing school attendance and educational achievement among poor children (Ravallion 2009). These programs were implemented in 1995 and are supported by international and non-governmental organizations and have been widely recognized and praised for their effectiveness. The programs are Bolsa Familia (Family Grants or cash transfers) and Programa de Erradicacao do Trabalho Infantil (Program for the Eradication of Child Labor, or PETI) and are part of the Fome Zero (Zero Hunger) network of social welfare federal programs in Brazil (Kassouf 2002).

Bolsa Familia, previously known as Bolsa Escola (School Grants), is a preventative program that aims to eliminate poverty, increase educational achievement, and reduce child labor. The program provides a small monthly stipend or income subsidy for up to five school-aged children per family as long as they have 85% of school attendance. Money is given to the mother of the children that are receiving the stipend through what are called “citizen cards,” which are similar to debit cards (Gustafsson-Wright & Pyne 2002 and del Vecchio 2008).
PETI established through the Ministry of Social Security and Assistance as a pilot in 1996 provides low-income families with monthly stipends as long as they keep their children in school and out of work. The program also provides after school sports and cultural activities to children to keep them from working. Similar to Bolsa Familia, PETI aims to eradicate child labor, reduce poverty, and increase educational achievement among poor children. To be eligible, all school-aged children must be attending school, participate in after school activities, and agree not to work.

It has been reported that as a result of these government efforts, there has already been a reduction in poverty as well as a reduction in the number of children and adolescents living and working on the street. In addition to the international recognition Brazil has received as a result of these government efforts, the country has also been quickly making its presence on the world stage with its rapidly growing economy. Brazil has experienced significant economic growth in the last two decades and is currently the sixth largest economy in the world. For this reason, Brazil has made international headlines and has been referred to as the country of the future, especially during this global economic crisis, during which Brazil has shone through (Ituassu 2011).

Problems With Government Approaches

Economic growth does not necessarily take away or decrease the demand for child labor. Instead, a decrease in poverty relieves or decreases such pressures for children and their families. Unfortunately, economic growth in Brazil continues to be extremely unequal and unevenly distributed with only a small and very select few enjoying this growth. Prices have stabilized at a level beyond the reach of the large majority of the
population (Rizzini, Barker & Cassaniga 1999). Sao Paulo was reported to be the 10th most expensive city worldwide in 2011, making it more expensive than New York and London. Brazil also has one of the world’s highest taxes.

During these times of growth, the government has demonstrated a commitment to the poor by targeting the issue of extreme poverty throughout the country through the social welfare programs described above. Despite these efforts, already existing inequalities, as they are deeply rooted in Brazilian society, continue to be produced and reproduced. The issue is that these programs and models of development in Brazil do not address the income inequality and structural issues that maintain and reproduce the serious inequalities that exist and have existed throughout Brazil’s history (Rizzini, Barker & Cassaniga 1999). Economic growth that does not include a reduction in economic inequality and improvements in education is not sustainable. Brazil has developed laws and charitable services for these children and their families as opposed to a national policy of equal access to basic human needs, dignified living conditions, and quality education for all (Rizzini & Thapliyal 2007).

Another issue with these government efforts relates to the concept of assistencialismo, which essentially translates as paternalistic handouts. Although these social welfare programs, or handouts, may be helpful in the immediate short-term, they do nothing to resolve or deal with long-term historical and structural inequalities, which are the root of the issue. Assistencialismo is what Paulo Freire (1970) referred to as false generosity or false charity, which ultimately reinforces already existing hierarchies and inequalities by strengthening the poor’s dependency on the state through government aid.
and therefore increasing their position of oppression and marginalization (Freire 1970, Hecht 1998 and Schwinger 2007). In other words, it maintains and even deepens their situation of struggling while also making it so that they are unable to survive on their own (Biehl 2005:52).

Brazil has a history of extreme inequality. It is a country with traces of first and fourth worlds. The abandonment and neglect of children in Brazil is not a new phenomenon and dates back to slavery (Mattoso 1988). Afro-Brazilians have historically been marginalized, even though there is a widely held belief in Brazil that there is no racism, but instead a rejection of the poor. Brazil’s political context has always privileged a small minority.

Brazil’s problems with inequality remain strong, as they are deeply entrenched in the country’s history. New problems have also started to develop with new and high levels of consumerism in the country. While the income gap may be lessening and Brazil is currently the sixth largest economy worldwide, it is also at the same time the seventh most unequal country in the world in terms of economic distribution. This inequality is particularly noticeable in the country’s education system. Despite all of the hype of Brazil’s success, the country is not becoming a welfare state. Brazil continues to experience high rates of violence. Much of Brazil’s success is in large part the result of what has been called a “capitalist revolution,” which Arthur Ituasso describes as, “a market-oriented transformation in an industrial, centralized society marked by bureaucracy and motivated by materialism and consumerism” (Ituassu 2011). In order to develop and create a more just, equal, and humane society, Brazil needs to expand
upon its current political and economic model of development and include values beyond that of consumerism and materialism (Ituassu 2011).

Mere economic growth does not always eliminate or even lessen inequality and therefore child labor. According to Markinhus:

This economic increase in Brazil is linked to consumerism. It’s not linked to social improvements. With 800 reais you’re considered middle class, but with 800 reais and a family of five people, you can’t give your child a good education and you can’t pay for a reasonable health plan for your children. You can’t have a house, but you can have a car that you pay in 60 payments and then once it’s all paid off, you’re in debt. It’s the same thing that happened in the States with housing. So you have debt and you can’t get sick, you can’t travel, you can’t have a good health care plan for your children. And when children have bad quality education and health care, how are they going to get out of that and break that barrier so that they can have a better life than their father? Classes A and B (the elite classes) who historically have always had access to good universities and good schools, they’re the one’s who are consuming. So, this growth doesn’t mean anything. So the guy drank really crappy beer before and now he drinks Skol (one of the most popular Brazilian beers). Cool, but they’re not structural and long term changes. The economic base continues to reproduce itself.

Despite Brazil’s economic growth, the structure is the same. The inequality continues and reproduces itself. These changes that the country is experiencing are fragile and not sustainable because inequality is at the base of Brazilian society. Brazil has created political hegemony among the elite. You see this contradiction on the street. As Markinhus stated in chapter 2, you won’t find an elite kid working on the street, living in shelters, locked up in juvenile detention centers or in prison, but they are smoking crack. Such contradictions are in the history and roots of the country and culture.
If you look at Brazil’s history, you will find that the issue behind the phenomenon of street children and child labor is an economic one. However, as Markinhus said in chapter 2:

It’s not just with a higher salary that you’re going to be able to solve things and that is where policy comes in that is not only about economics. The issue is economic in terms of where it originated, and to do many things you have to have economics but you also have to have other things and opportunities. Rich families beat too. Do they suffer yes, but they have a *rede de protecao* (safety net) that keeps them from going to the street. They don’t need to go to the street. The base of their going to the street is economic. Making more money may change things a bit, but the cultural factors and everything else continues.

*Non-Governmental Approaches*

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are now the primary source of support and help for these children, their families, and communities (O’Haire 2011). Their work replaces the state that does not care for those who are poor and forgotten (Biehl 2005). The work of NGOs, including PMMR, is aimed at involving the whole of the family, working with them to meet their needs in order to eliminate the needs of the child to go to the street. NGOs are filling the shortcomings of the state and taking on the responsibilities of the state. Much of the work of NGOs is aimed at defending the rights of these children and their families so that the poor are included, with improved and increased access to social policy, education, health, employment, and housing.

These children and their families are, as Markinhus phrased it, “outside of policy.” PMMR views policy as key to giving these children and their families a structure and support that guarantees their rights by providing them with the opportunity to go to school, to have food and other necessary resources at home, and to have a
childhood and be children. Another goal of PMMR and other NGOs is to attack directly the social inequality between classes in Brazil. PMMR is trying to break the model. Through street children, PMMR carries out their fight for political, social, and economic justice in Brazil. As Markinhus’ quote at the start of this chapter states, street children are symbols of social injustice and inequality in Brazil. Street children are symbols of larger social and political debates and are used as a means to impose pressure on the government to guarantee rights and inclusion for all, particularly those who are socially, politically, and economically excluded, marginalized, and forgotten (Hecht 1998 and Biehl 2005:133). According to Markinhus: “Political power is necessary to solve the problem. Simple cash transfers are not enough. It is necessary to give them housing, leisure, sports, culture, and education.”

Almost all of the young adults with whom I carried out life histories reported that the government was not doing what it is supposed to do, ultimately placing responsibility of everyday violence, human rights, and a violation of those rights on the government. These young adults were very vocal on the failures of the state in providing basic resources and services as well as ensuring basic human rights, particularly among deprived and marginalized groups and communities. They spoke to larger structural neglect and discrimination of the poor (Rizzini & Thapliyal 2007). Everson in particular spoke about the lack of opportunities and the fact that they are blatantly deprived of and denied opportunities and rights that they are entitled to. In this way, they are very aware of and able to articulate that much of their situation is the result of larger structural and historical issues.
All of the children, adolescents, and young adults that I spoke to also know that some enjoy more rights than others. They are very aware of their lack of opportunity to education, basic dignified living conditions, basic human acknowledgement and respect, and they are aware of the privileged status of other children and adolescents. They know that they do not have the same opportunities in life to learn and grow and are aware of their extreme exclusion and marginalization. Their agency then in many ways is born out of their identification with rights and being denied those rights. They are very aware that they are denied rights that they should have and their identities and subjectivities are shaped by their awareness of their lack of rights. Why then would these children abide by child labor laws and the larger human rights discourse when they are not recognized by or included in law as citizens?

These children and their families continue to be denied rights and citizenship (Carvalho 1991). They are not being treated better by police as a result of their new status as citizens and as subjects of rights. Instead, the police are simply afraid of getting caught violating ECA. The police are aware of the laws and the new found rights of these children, which is why assassinations are now occurring in comunidades, where they are less visible and less likely to make the news.

These children continue to be viewed as dangerous and violent social ills despite their new status as citizens and rights bearers. Such an attitude is incredibly difficult to change. Upon turning 18, they are no longer protected and essentially lose the few rights they once had as children and adolescents. Putting the law into practice is the major challenge in Brazil. While things today may be labeled in a different way with new
terms, the situation remains the same. These children, their families, and communities continue to be abandoned by the state. In order for any true change to occur and for ECA and other laws to actually be enforced would require the full-participation of a conscientious and mobilized civil society with the inclusion and full participation of these children and the poor in policy and political decisions that directly affect them.

While ECA has provided Brazil with a new concept and ideal, it has not brought about a new structural reality. However, the mere fact that discussion and conversation is even occurring over and about denial of their rights is significant and hopefully over time will result in an actual change in attitude and thinking (Jeffrey 1997). One change that I did notice since my last trip to Brazil, which was a decade ago, was that children and adolescents, who either live or work on the street, when being harassed by police, spoke about their rights and demanded to know what the charges against them were. This is an important start but there is still a very long way to go.

However, also important to mention is that many of these children and adolescents do not view their lives in terms of rights or a lack thereof, which is also why a rights-based approach seems to not be the best approach. However, they are very aware that this is the dominant discourse that is targeted at them, as they gain such knowledge from their connections to PMMR and other organizations and they therefore try and utilize the rights discourse in their favor, as they are informed that they have rights and are citizens. They instead spoke about their situations in terms of resources, particularly their lack of resources and opportunity to space, education, and adequate and dignified living conditions.
These children and their families continue to experience a serious and profound social exclusion, which places them in a situation of vulnerability and ultimately creates their street situation (Filho & Neder 2001). Everson points out how their street situation is in many ways state sponsored.

Some are favored and others are still forgotten despite the statistics that we have about Brazil being able to get out of misery. President Lula is said to be one of the best presidents because he favored forgotten people. But they’re small things because the government owes us a lot more. The government thinks that they’re doing a lot for people (like with *Bolsa Familia*), but they’re not doing anything. It’s totally covered up. The government is not favoring many people. They’re creating thousands of jobs for people, but these people are all going to be selected, separating the good from the bad… There are neighborhoods here where we don’t have pavement. There are neighborhoods here that don’t have water. People without water. Or they have water by day and not at night or vice versa. There are neighborhoods that don’t have basic sanitation. Sewage passes right by their homes. These people need to be remembered and they’re not. So that is the part that they forget. It’s something people have, to forget. If you can’t solve it, get rid of it quickly. So instead of Brazil helping the poor and less favored, they prefer to help the bourgeois… There are people who have more opportunity in life and then there are those who don’t have opportunity and they are separated at birth.

Everson also spoke to how larger structural forces affect generations of people by maintaining their situation of poverty, which he further discussed though his own life experiences and family history.

So my life history begins there. With the opportunities that my mom didn’t have, my dad didn’t have, they didn’t give me the opportunity to grow in life too… We didn’t get a lot of opportunities, which is what we deserved. That’s what happens in Brazil. They end up favoring certain people and not others… They always favor the upper classes… They think they’re doing so much but they have forgotten so much about us that they owe us so many things today… A person who comes from the Northeast and arrives to the capital, they come here to receive some sort of help from the government and sometimes they get it. They receive some material to build, go and build a home in the *favela*, stay there and they’re forgotten. And then comes a time when the government thinks that the
person is accommodated. The person doesn’t have any food at home so they give a *cesta basica* (basket of basics). They get a *cesta basica* for a certain period of time instead of offering conditions to that person.

What Everson is referring to here can be summed up in a statement that many Brazilians, particularly the young adults with whom I carried out life histories and employees from PMMR, used, which is “*I’ll give you the fish but I won’t teach you how to fish.*” In other words, as Everson states: “*Instead of Brazil providing ways for people to become someone in life, they instead give them 100 reais, 120 reais, and they think that the person is fine.*” In this way, they are made to be always dependent on a government that abandons and forgets them (Biehl 2005:3).

Alice (22) also said that the government is responsible for helping poor families. Similar to Everson, she also criticized *Bolsa Família*. “*It’s not enough to buy anything.*” It is especially not enough in Sao Paulo, which again, is the 10th most expensive city in the world. “*They need to give a little more.*"

**Is a Human Rights-Based Approach Really What These Children Need?**

One of the main problems in human rights discourse is the a priori assertion of an irreducible common humanity that should provide the basis of our interactions and our social organizations… …there are places in the present, even in the state founded on the premise of inviolable human rights, where these rights no longer exist… Such places demonstrate that notions of universal human rights are socially and materially conditioned by medical and economic imperatives (Biehl 2005:317).


…is not culturally neutral but is grounded in the assumption both of the superiority of the North and of the need to impose this model on a global scale. As this global project denies the possibility of diverse childhoods, it not only underscores the superiority of the Northern ideal but also
condemns “other” styles of upbringing as a “lack,” or, to use the popular expression, of being “outside childhood.”

As Jo Boyden stated (1990), “The major tenet of contemporary rights and welfare thinking is that regulation of child life should give priority to making childhood a carefree, safe, secure and happy phase of human existence” (Boyden 1990:185). In other words, children’s needs and best interests are filled with assumptions and judgments about children and childhood rather than convincing empirical evidence from actual research (Woodhead 1990). We need to be extremely careful with our assumptions regarding what is best for children, particularly when these assumptions make generalizations about all children.

The international community has developed a variety of policies and laws ultimately hoping to abolish child labor. The process has been slow and ineffective and may therefore be because the laws and policies do not come close to touching the root of the issue. While poverty is a major cause of child labor, it is not poverty alone. Efforts must be multi-dimensional and include economic, social, cultural, and political reform. As Markinhus and some young adults stated, a mere increase in income by providing families with government stipends does not keep these children off the street and away from their work. While _Bolsa Familia_ is set up and intended to supplement or replace a child’s earnings so that the child can go to school, these children are making above and beyond what their families receive in terms of government benefits.

Despite all of the legislative commitments, laws, and policies, Brazil does not always implement these commitments, particularly not in the informal sector where these children work, partly because it is extremely difficult to monitor (Hunte 2009). There is
also a serious lack of actual enforcement of laws, policies, and rights among those living in sub-human conditions. Without any context, it is all too easy to accept the idea that the existing laws and policies are in the best interests of all children. However, these laws and policies are very similar across the globe from country to country and therefore are clearly not including or taking into consideration the tremendous diversity of experience of all children (Levison 2000). Instead, these laws and policies are largely representative of the power of the North imposing a particular image, notion, and ideal of childhood and therefore of family as both a universal norm and expectation (Nieuwenhuys 1998).

The global discourse on human rights and the Brazilian government’s attempts to guarantee the wellbeing of its “citizens” who are in most need through its current social welfare programs is really about new expectations and the state intensifying interventions on their lives. Rights and these government programs serve the interests of particular sectors of society and they are ultimately created to keep these children in their place. Rights is about trying to produce autonomous, law abiding citizens, by disciplining their actions in order to bring them in line and act as the autonomous law abiding citizens that society needs. However in reality, they are alienated subjects. Rights then are a form of control to bring those who live on the outside in line with the kind of citizen the state wants and needs.

Rights and talk of rights often times either directly or indirectly stigmatize poor children and adolescents. There are few who can accept the street as an appropriate place for children to work and even more so to live. However, we must deal with the situation
as it is and not how we would like it to be. Unfortunately, policies, laws, and rights are largely and merely at the written level. Poor children continue to experience and live in extremely inhumane and violent conditions. They continue to lack rights and the conditions necessary for a healthy and normal development. As Lucimara (20) stated:

None of those laws are put into action. Even though the law exists, like there is a law, it has already existed for many years, with children asking for money at stoplights, it’s already prohibited, and people giving money to kids at stoplights because it motivates kids to stay on the street and I think it’s a bunch of crap because there are many times that I haven’t seen anything. It’s only written, cause I don’t see anything followed through with. So I don’t think that a government exists, or a president, or any kind of policy. It only exists on paper and not in real life because I see a lot of children who are in need of something to eat and are exploited and they don’t care. They could be helping their families because they need it. I already experienced that in my life. I know how it is.

**Resources Not Rights: Getting Back to Basics**

Human rights themselves have denied rights to a certain part of humanity (Gomes Pereira 2008:46).

When I asked Amanda (27) who she thinks is responsible for children being in a street situation, she responded in the following way:

The government. The government a little bit. If there was space for children and adolescents that study in the morning for when they leave school, if they had space, because there is so much land, so many things that they don’t have for us, for us who need it, for us who are poor who really need it. If they opened up a space for example, the government, and opened a space for computer classes for children who don’t have conditions. And you shouldn’t have to pay for the child to take the class or give 70 reais for the class. Then you’re buying the person. It’s not with the person’s own effort. They just want to buy the person and they’re going to do that course just with the interest in money. It shouldn’t be about the money but it should be about learning.

Alice also asserted that in order to keep children out of work, they need to give the parents jobs. With her now being a parent and in search of a job herself she said,
“They need to give us jobs. You have to help the kids right, everyone, help the families.”

Both Washington and Alice spoke about rights, or expressed a criticism of rights talk, through their assertions that the entire family needs help in order to change the situation of the child and guarantee their access to rights.

Alice: They say that children can’t work, right?
AB: Yeah. And what do you think about that?
Washington: Those rights where they say that children can’t work and all that. The right of the child, what they say is that the child has to study and learn and not go out and work. But today, there are many children whose parents don’t have conditions to buy everything for the house. There are many children that are working on the street because they don’t have this or that. But for me, it’s not about the kids, it’s about giving work to their parents. Because today there are a lot of parents who are unemployed and if you aren’t registered to work (do not have documents) and don’t have experience, they won’t give you a job. We’re young. I’m 23 and she’s 22. You look for a job but they don’t give it to you because you don’t have experience. Because we never worked, they don’t give you an opportunity. They never give you an opportunity to learn. They want you to already have experience. And we’re young but there are many parents they’re older, but they never had a chance to study. They didn’t study or have a profession, so they have children and their children go and help them at the stoplight. What’s missing today is work. Give more opportunity for their parents to work. If their parents had a job, the child wouldn’t need to be at the stoplight selling something. They could be at home learning something, studying, doing something. They would be in school. They would be doing something for their future and they wouldn’t be in the street working. So what’s missing today is work and opportunity. We don’t give their parents a chance. There are parents and you feel sorry for them, but that doesn’t do anything. You have to give them an opportunity to work. Teach people.

Children and adolescents in a street situation are living breathing examples of the contradiction between the global human rights discourse and the reality of socio-economic inequality. Children’s rights is a discourse and we must examine how it is used, by whom, and for whom? Human rights is a current and fashionable trend that has spread across the globe, but rights is mostly talk and is more representative of a mere
change of terms and language, making it empty. We spend more time talking about
rights than providing actual opportunity for rights. The words do little, if anything, for
these children and their families. Conversation of rights is not advancing or going
beyond the realm of conversation. For some, these rights are not being put into the realm
of action, practice, and reality. Talk of rights is exactly that, talk, and it is always adult
talk or conversation and therefore is often used to serve adults interests and agendas.

Also problematic with our current human rights discourse is that when we
acknowledge these children as citizens and rights bearers, we then bring in issues of
personal responsibility and the problematic blame the victim type thinking. Also
problematic is that talk of rights makes the state appear as if it is restoring social and
economic opportunity and justice to all (Berlant 2011). Although these rights are
intended to help these children, they actually in many ways end up working against them
and their families as it treats them as individual agents and brings in issues of personal
responsibility. With personal individual agency comes responsibility (Berlant 2011).

I am not saying that I am against human and children’s rights. I am actually a
huge proponent and believer in equal rights for all. However, simply assigning these
children rights does not guarantee their rights at all. “Rights” in many ways have instead
had the opposite effect of that which they were set out and intended to do. “Rights” can
actually harm the children and families that they are targeted at. “Rights” can also
strengthen, deepen, and justify already existing inequalities and discrimination.

I view rights, or talk of rights, as the governments way of “demonstrating” that it
is “doing” something, when instead, it actually relieves the government of having to do
anything. The state has already “done” its part by acknowledging that these children are citizens and “giving” them rights in the first place. The mere creation of rights, such as the right to health, food, education, dignity, and leisure, just as any abuse and violation of those rights, for example child labor, ultimately sets the family up by targeting and assigning blame on them and failure on their part, as all responsibility to meet, provide, and fulfill these rights falls on their shoulders, but not as much as the inability to meet, provide, and fulfill these rights. When children’s rights are not being met, the family is the first place we point our fingers. In this way, a rights-based approach ultimately criminalizes the family. Responsibility implies condition and many of these families do not have even the minimal conditions to care for their children and meet their basic rights that we demand and place upon their shoulders (Biehl 2005). How can they ensure their children’s rights when they have no rights themselves?

The use of this language or discourse of rights within the global political order is a mask for dealing with marginal populations. The discourse on human rights is problematic in that it is a discourse that is occurring on an international level and is filled with assumptions about children and childhood. Such a discourse also often results in the poor and marginalized, who are actually the main or central subjects targeted in this particular discourse, as they are most deprived of and therefore in need of rights, being targeted and blamed for their not being able to meet and fulfill their duties and obligations by providing their children with their basic needs and not being able to raise their children in a way that is viewed and accepted as proper and appropriate.
By simply and solely looking at rights and children’s need for rights, we are completely ignoring the larger structure that creates their need for rights in the first place. The reality of these children, their families, and communities is a lack of opportunity and a lack of access to opportunity, resources, and life. The state must mobilize resources. What is needed instead is serious social, structural, and educational reform. This has yet to be addressed and included in the country’s efforts and in the global discourse on rights (del Vecchio 2008). Structural violence and social suffering are all entrenched and embedded in the larger social structure and are part of larger social processes. Therefore any “solution,” if that is even a realistic way of looking at their situation, or any situation for that matter, would require change at the larger structural level as opposed to simply targeting one “problem,” which treats that “problem” as totally detached and separate from other issues. Their “need” for rights is a symptom of larger structural problems and inequalities, which is why we need to “treat” the larger social structure and not the children, their families, and communities. Rights is merely talk and does not resolve or even begin to touch the root of the issue, which again, is serious structural issues and inequality. Rights do not fix the structural problem, especially as these rights are not always realized, at least not for everyone. Human rights are actually another structural problem for some. When we look at and point at one single solution to children’s rights we fail to look at the interactions between larger social processes that create their need for rights in the first place.

The phenomenon of street children and child labor is most often viewed and referred to as a problem of personal pathology, family dysfunction and breakdown,
female-headed households, stepfathers, and a general “culture of poverty,” thus failing to recognize the larger structural inequalities that have marginalized these children and their families and have ultimately created their street situation (Naverson 1989 and Marquez 1999). A rights-based approach will not address the very deep historical social problems that exist in Brazil or anywhere for that matter. This approach will be effective only if and when it gives rise to an equal examination of larger structural forces of power, privilege, marginalization, and suffering.

I am not saying that I am in support of or condone child labor or am against children’s rights. Instead, I hope to challenge previous ways of thinking and raise the question of what happens when children, their families, and their communities, seem to resist or not meet international standards and definitions of childhood and what is defined as the “best” interests of the child (Rosen 2008). But to be clear, they are not resisting. They are merely providing for themselves that which the state fails to provide them with. By going to the street and through their work, they are only attempting to claim the rights that the international community claims they should have.
Chapter 8: Conclusion and Recommendations

Moro no Hatsuta  I live in Hatsuta
E tenho orgulho de falar  And I’m proud to say
Ali é minha favela  This is my favela
Ali é o meu lugar  This is my place
Tem muitos problemas  There are a lot of problems
que toda favela tem  that all favelas have
Luz, gambia, esgota aberta  Illegal/stolen electricity, open sewage
E sem contar que as  Not to mention the
criancas que vao pro farol  kids that work at the stoplights
sao primeira humilhada  who have to be humiliated
para depois ganhar um real  before they earn a real
Nao e isso que nos queremos  This isn’t what we want
Nos queremos estudar  We want to go to school
Pro passo de ano  Until we pass/finish the years
e depois trabalhar  and then work

The above funk song (funk is a type of dance music that is mostly popular among lower classes in Brazil and is highly criticized, especially for its content of drug trafficking, gangs, and sexual degradation of women) was written by two female child street laborers, Susana (13) and her cousin, Maria (10), both of whom were working with malabares and living in Hatusta during my time in the field.

This song is a good place to start this final chapter and end this dissertation, as it is a piece in which these children are, although indirectly, participating in the larger international discourse on child labor and children’s rights and are clearly stating their intentions, desires, and struggles. In this way, their song serves as an expression of child and adolescent agency (Bernat 1999). Based on the lyrics of their Hatsuta funk song, these children and adolescents do not want to work. Virtually all of the child street laborers I spoke to said that they would rather be doing something other than work, like riding a bike or playing soccer. However, given their options, or lack there of, the street
is their most viable, and sometimes their only option (Filho & Neder 2001 and O’Haire 2011).

This dissertation is a comprehensive analysis of the lived experience of poverty, violence, marginalization, and rights, or the complete lack thereof, among street and working children and adolescents in Guarulhos, Brazil. It also includes an examination of their attempts to escape these conditions. While this work explores the adult debates that are centered on these children and adolescents, it privileges their perspective. Stories are told by them and in their words as much as possible. Children and adolescents are valuable and necessary informants and in the case of this dissertation project, they are the experts. They provide us with important and a more detailed and complete understanding as well as a different perspective on larger social, cultural, political, and economic processes (Kovats-Bernat 2006). In this way, this dissertation demonstrates that children are active agents (Hecht 1998).

This dissertation has used testimonial and ethnographic data to demonstrate how a combination of extreme poverty, scarcity, violence, abandonment, marginalization, and exclusion shape the lives of these children and adolescents, ultimately creating their street situation. While I have discussed the processes of social exclusion and the social and economic factors that shape and influence their lives, particularly their street situation, I have also highlighted their lived experience, subjectivities, and agency.

At the core of this dissertation is the question of child agency, as constrained as it is, and child subjectivity amid poverty, violence, and marginalization. Expressions of child and adolescent agency are apparent in their going to the street, their experiences on
the street, and in their leaving the street (Bernat 1999). Throughout I have examined the socio-economic factors that contribute to their street situation, ultimately bringing them to the street, the material, social, and cultural worlds of these children while on the street, how these worlds and networks serve as a means of adventure, protection, family, companionship, and survival, and the dangers that these children are exposed to and experience while on the street. The social and economic networks that these children and adolescents create while on the street have been discussed in order to demonstrate that these children are in fact social, cultural, political, and economic actors. These children create functioning political economies amongst themselves that are not under the control and supervision of adults (Kovats-Bernat 2006). To address larger structural issues, I explored Brazil’s deeply rooted and historical inequality, high rates of rural to urban or north to south migration, rapid overpopulation and urban growth, housing and employment shortages, and how these have impacted people’s ability to access basic resources and survive (O’ Haire 2011). I also provided a larger picture of the children’s lives, giving a sense of the social and economic conditions in which they and their families live.

These children are blatantly and violently deprived of and denied freedom, security, and rights, which is essentially what brings them to the street in the first place. For these reasons, it is on the street that they are seeking out that which they lack, e.g. freedom, autonomy, friendship, escape from family conflict and violence, security, protection, and resources. These children are able to meet many of their unmet needs on the street (Ennew & Swart-Kruger 2003).
The street becomes the children’s own personal space where they eat, socialize, play, love, and for some sleep and live. As children adapt to the street and learn the political economy of the street, they realize that the street offers resources, both material and social, that often supports them more than their homes can. Some of these children earn close to and sometimes even more than the national minimum wage through their street labor. I often heard street educators from PMMR joking about how they were going to start selling candy at a stoplight, as it was more lucrative than their own jobs as street educators. These children also often make significantly more than what their families receive in terms of government benefits. These serve as powerful examples of how children are active economic agents. It also demonstrates the importance of child labor, particularly in developing economies and for vulnerable and struggling households. These children are painfully aware of their lack of opportunity and of the fact that home and their families are not always able to provide for them (Hecht 1998).

In addition to their economic gains, the street also provides these children with other material gains. On the street, these children are able to access and utilize restrooms and other luxuries that many do not have at home. They also often eat better on the street than they are able to at home, and therefore in some cases have a more nutritious diet on the street than they would at home (Gross et al. 1996, Scanlon et al. 1998, Hecht 1998 and Kovats-Bernat 2006). In addition to providing these very basic material needs for survival, the street also provides these children with non-material gains. These children experience a sense of freedom and autonomy on the street that they never experienced previously. On the street, they are free from adult constraints, the daily temptations and
dangers of the drug traffickers and police that run their neighborhoods, overcrowded spaces, discrimination and shame for living where they live, as well as rejection, exclusion, humiliation, and failure that they experience at school.

These children have no space of their own for leisure or play and they create this space on the streets of spacious urban centers (Rizzini & Butler 2003). By taking to the street, whether to work or to live, they are appropriating public space and making it their own private space. In this space, they are also able to generate income, therefore gaining even more freedom and autonomy. However, these public spaces that become their new personal territory, “turf,” or ponto in which they make their own money, also introduce a variety of problems. Not only are these children competing with one another over public spaces and economic opportunity, but they are also often reproducing hierarchies of power and control over space and money, which is demonstrative of the ways in which they have internalized and reproduced the discrimination, hierarchies, and exploitation that exist in Brazilian society (Ferreira 1980, Beazley 2003, Rizzini & Butler 2003, Rizzini & Thapliyal 2007 and Kovats-Bernat 2006).

To be clear, these children and adolescents are not necessarily creating new spaces but instead are navigating already existing spaces that are available to them. In these spaces, they are attempting to build their worlds and their lives. They are trying to navigate and find their way in the world. Unfortunately, their attempts are often what keep them in their non-spaces, further marginalizing them, as the spaces they are appropriating are zones of social abandonment (Biehl 2005 and Berlant 2011).
Brazil has a long history of inequality (Jeffrey 1997). The social, economic, and political exclusion, deprivation, and marginalization that these children, their families, and communities live in is the result of deep historical structural characteristics (Filho & Neder 2001). Violence against these children continues, both direct and indirect, in visible e.g. their poverty, high rates of disappearances, and police violence, and not so visible forms, e.g. illiteracy. These social indicators are telling of a certain childhood in Brazil (Rizzini 1994).

Their street situation is the result of their poverty, which stems from deeply rooted historical structural inequalities. Poverty is clearly a major factor that brings these children to the street, whether to live or to work. There are other pressures beyond the need to earn money, as gathered from the testimonies of the children themselves. Some reported family violence and conflict and substance abuse as the reason for leaving home because they could no longer tolerate the conditions, or lack thereof, at home (Hansson 2003). Although these other factors do not appear to be economic, they all link back to economics. While poverty without a doubt produces increased stresses, familial issues are not a direct result of poverty, as rich families also experience conflict and violence in the home (O’Haire 2011). However, as Markinhus stated in Chapter 3, rich children, unlike poor children, have redes de proteção (safety nets). As Everson stated in Chapter 3, “If they had resources and other options, they would not be out on the street. They would not be seeking the street.” In this way, economic factors are the primary reasons for their going to the street.
Instead of child labor laws, Brazil is in need of serious and deep change to social and economic policy in order to confront its historical issues of inequality, which strongly persist throughout the country and maintains the poverty of these children and their families. The structural violence that these children experience is the result of working social, political, and economic structures (MacGregor & Rubio 1994). These children are raised in a country that has historically guaranteed rights to and privileged a small minority. Although structural violence comes from the structures of society, it is not faceless. The rules and norms of the structure are learned and carried on by each and every one of us, and therefore we are all a part of its constant reproduction. We are all shaped by while also at the same time shape and contribute to the structure and therefore the violence (MacGregor & Rubio 1994). In this way, the street situation of these children requires that we look at those who come into contact with them every single day, the larger social body, as they are part of the problem and therefore part of the solution (Rizzini et al. 2007).

While a goal of this project is to propose or develop recommendations for policy, I hope even more that it offers a critique of current policies and approaches to policy and human rights. A rights-based approach, child labor laws and policies, and the larger international discourse on children’s rights and childhood rely on a blame the victim type discourse, language, and explanations for poverty and the street situation of these children and adolescents (Bourgois 1996). This blame the victim type approach is only possible “by ignoring history, the effects of inherited wealth, class differences, and power differentials in the market” (Patterson 2005:377). Policy and human rights-based
approaches typically want to “treat” these children. As Hecht states, through these approaches and efforts these children are, “Reduced to something to be cured, street children become objects in a distant debate among adults…” (Hecht 1998:188). It is extremely erroneous, problematic, and “harmful to reduce street children to a problem” (Hecht 1998:188). This is not to say that change is not needed, but instead urges that we re-direct our efforts elsewhere. The phenomenon of street children and child labor is a social, political, and economic issue. It is not street and working children that are the problem and in need of treatment, but instead the conditions that create their need to go to the street in the first place.

The phenomenon of street children and child labor reveals a government and society that is unwilling to care for and ensure the rights of its children, at least its poor children, who continue to be viewed and treated as non-citizens, non-persons, and criminals, resulting in their either being invisible or acceptable targets for violence (Bernat 1999). This is what Nancy Scheper-Hughes refers to as the routinization of and indifference toward everyday violence. Her argument reveals how policy, politics, and institutions are responsible for the social and material conditions, or lack thereof, among impoverished regions and communities throughout the country. These apparatuses are largely responsible in that they not only produce and reproduce human suffering among particular groups of people, but they also allow it and actively contribute to it (Scheper-Hughes 1984, 1985, 1989, 1992 and Scheper-Hughes & Hoffman 1997).

Serious systemic neglect and discrimination against these children, their families, and communities continues in Brazil, and is what Scheper-Hughes (1992) refers to as
“the violence of everyday life.” Instead of a rights-based framework, we need to aim our energy and efforts at serious social, educational, and structural reform if we are to deal with the root of the issue, which is that of serious inequality of power, privilege, poverty, and marginalization (Rizzini & Thapliyal 2007). Poverty and economic and material scarcity are some of the greatest threats to the rights of any human being (Martinez 1996 and Bernat 1999). The criminalization of street children and child street laborers and their status as risks, social threats, and social ills, as they are living outside of that which is viewed and accepted as the social norm and that which is appropriate and proper, further deepens their being denied any kind of rights that they are aware that others are able to enjoy (Bernat 1999:129). This public (mis)perception makes them acceptable targets for routine violence. These children and youth are therefore constantly harassed by police and are disproportionately arrested, incarcerated, beaten, disappeared, and assassinated (Kovats-Bernat 2006).

Not only are these children and their families held responsible for their poverty, their lack of education, their working at a young age, and their street situation, but they are also held responsible for the social ills and violence in society and the country (Hecht 1998). In a world in which they are criminalized, marginalized, and deprived of basic resources, dignified living conditions, education, rights, and ultimately what we call childhood, these children are seeking out a childhood and their rights on the street. In this way, their identification with, recognition, and realization of their complete and utter lack of rights gives rise to a particular form of subjectivity and agency (Bernat 1999).
The lives of these children and adolescents are in stark contrast and completely go against the global ideal and project of childhood and rights (Hecht 1998). Policy then comes from a distant and privileged ideal, which is problematic. These children are clearly not experiencing "childhood" as defined by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Brazil’s 1988 Constitution, and Brazil’s Child and Adolescent Statute (ECA). We must keep in mind that not everyone defines childhood in the same way or has the luxury of experiencing childhood in this way (Hunte 2009).

Throughout the literature, children are most often portrayed as under the control of adults, usually their parents, and are therefore not recognized as decision-makers in their lives. In this way, they are depicted as powerless and without any agency of their own. This is particularly the case among poor children (Levison 2000). Most research is based on assumptions and judgments about children and childhood rather than actual data from the children themselves (Woodhead 1990). Children’s assumed lack of power has led policy makers to overlook the importance of their labor, ultimately resulting in an overall support of current policies that punish and blame the children and their families, putting them in even more at risk and vulnerable situations, therefore further marginalizing them. Without any kind of context, historical examination, and grounded understanding of the issue, many erroneously accept already existing laws and policies and believe in what has been promoted as children’s rights and the best interests of the child. We need to be more careful and realistic when talking about what is best for children (Levison 2000). We need to look at the situation as it is and not as we would like it to be.
Many children work because their families need it, they themselves like making their own money, and they enjoy the freedom and independence their work brings them, both economically and personally, as well as the access and social status that their work and their earnings from their work brings them (Levison 2000). Children, particularly poor children, need to be recognized and respected as social, cultural, political, and economic agents. They are making decisions and taking action in their lives, at least to a certain degree, given their constraints. These children, by taking to the street, whether to live or to work, are claiming the rights that have been “guaranteed” to them. Their street situation is in many ways a rights claiming process through which they are expressing their agency in the face of social, political, and economic marginalization.

The street is the most attractive and viable option for children and adolescents who are denied rights and excluded from the possibility of rights and therefore to what is deemed to be an “appropriate” childhood (Rizzini & Butler 2003). Rather than problematize their working and living on the street, we need to problematize their lack of conditions and situations of extreme deprivation, scarcity, and violence as well as society’s marginalizing, discriminating, and excluding these children (Rizzini & Butler 2003). Our critiques need to be targeted at the failures of the state and the public education system and not the children and their families (Rizzini & Butler 2003). Policy need not be aimed at treating and rehabilitating street children and child street laborers. These children are not the site or source of the problem. They themselves are not the problem (Hecht 1998).
Rather than entering into an examination and discussion of the social and economic costs of children’s labor and education or lack there of, I think it is more important to look at the forces that create the need for their labor and to look at why it is children go to the street to live and work in the first place (Hunte 2009). Because of the political economic reality and situation in Brazil, many children have to work. While policy and the children themselves recognize that the parents, not the children, should be working and providing for the family, this is not the reality. As Rizzini and Butler (2003) state, we need to shift our way of thinking “from the family as incapable of looking after its children, to the family not being allowed to carry out this task because of the lack of resources and material conditions” (Rizzini & Butler 2003:14).

This brings us back to human rights and the difficulty in implementing those rights, particularly among those who are living in sub-human conditions and working in the informal economy of the street (Rizzini & Butler 2003). What is written on paper is quite different from what actually occurs in everyday life. The government and community need to take more action and responsibility. Instead of referring to these children as “robbed” of their childhood because they are “forced” to provide for their families and themselves, we instead need to understand these children as abandoned because their families have been abandoned by the state. The denial and deprivation of decent living conditions and education robs poor families and therefore their children of their lives and futures, not their work. These children are taking to the street and working for the childhood and rights that have been developed by the international community.
With school occupying only a few hours of their day, if they even go, and their homes not having sufficient resources or the physical space for them to play, the street is an attractive option. These children in many ways see the street as their only option, as it offers them with the possibility and opportunity of escape and protection, if for example there is violence or conflict within the home, freedom from the marginalization and discrimination they experience in their communities and at school, economic freedom and independence, as well as leisure, friendship, and adventure (Ennew & Swart-Kruger 2003 and Rizzini & Butler 2003). The street is a valuable and attractive resource and space (Kovats-Bernat 2003). These children have few, if any, accessible diversions other than the street. If we are to claim the street as inappropriate and off-limits, we then only strengthen the already existing social apartheid in Brazil by further confining these children to their communities, thus exacerbating their already extreme situation of poverty and marginalization (Scheper-Hughes & Hoffman 1998 and Hecht 1998:198 & 2002).

These children and adolescents are not passive victims, nor are they protagonists and fully active agents, but instead are creating, or trying to create, different ways of surviving amid their extremely difficult and deeply rooted historical conditions and circumstances of poverty and marginalization (Hansson 2003). There is no simple and easy quick fix or solution. However, we can and must begin with a better and more realistic understanding of the causes and consequences of children and adolescents living and working on the street if we are to move forward. We need to end this problematic and erroneous blame the victim type thinking and mentality when talking about poverty,
child labor, and street children (Bourgois 1996). The phenomenon of street and working children is one of the “more cruel and unjust expressions of poverty and inequality” (Rizzini & Butler 2003).

The major challenge for Brazil is to follow through with its laws and put them into practice. International law is only in writing. Not much has changed in terms of public policy. The situation remains the same and these children and adolescents continue to be abandoned. The government needs to step in and do more beyond merely providing small stipends to poor families. They need to help and work more closely with the NGOs that work with these children, their families, and communities. These children need to be shown that they actually do have opportunity. They need to be given the chance to dream about something and shown that they do have access to a life beyond heaping piles of garbage, sewage, rats, pooping in bags, selling candy, and shining shoes.

The major goal should be aimed at serious structural economic and education reform. A more equal and just redistribution of wealth is greatly needed in Brazil, which is a country with one of the greatest inequalities worldwide. Also needed is a more mobilized and conscientious society. Only when all of society is mobilized can actual progress and change occur. Everyone in society must be aware that they reproduce and contribute to the situation of these children and their families by neglecting the situation. Finally, also needed is inclusion of the poor in decision-making and policy that affects them.

There is a noticeable absence of programs that work with street children who are leaving the streets. Therefore, there is a need for programs that work with these children
and adolescents, particularly those who are on the cusp of becoming or have already become adults, to support them and their transition to non-street life and into adulthood. The government only protects these children, and does not do a good job of that, when they are under 18 years of age.

Once off of the street, there is a need for programs that continue working with these children, adolescents, and young adults throughout their re-adjustment process, providing them with support during that transition period. Leaving the street, drugs, and addiction is a very difficult and fragile process and more needs to be invested in terms of programs and resources. These youngsters, once they become adults, have minimal to no support. Upon their turning 18, or shortly thereafter, they often find themselves in prison and without any rights or protection at all.

In order to be able to provide three different school sessions, morning, afternoon and early evening, daily attendance for public school has been reduced to three and half hours a day. My suggestion would be that children have longer school days. The length of time spent in school is a problem for various reasons (Filho & Neder 2001). More time spent in school would not only help keep those who go to school occupied and off of the street, but it would also provide children with more learning time, which would most likely result in increased involvement and investment in overall education and an improvement in the education system and therefore student performance. It would also free up families who cannot access or afford childcare, therefore creating a space and opening for them to be able to work, as they would not have to stay at home to care for their children. However, this would require providing more vocational and employment
opportunities for parents and caretakers so that they can generate more income (Filho & Neder 2001 and Lieten 2010). Efforts must be directed at strengthening the socio-economic and educational conditions and positions of these families, which would ultimately make child labor less necessary.

Because public schools in Brazil are extremely inefficient and utterly fail these children in many ways, a mere extension of the school day and increase in school hours will not be enough. The causes of their educational failures are far more deeply rooted than any extended school day can fix (Rizzini, Barker & Cassaniga 1999). This extension would also have to include serious educational reform. There needs to be serious changes and overall improvements in the public school system, educational reality, and quality and training of teachers (Filho & Neder 2001). Schools and teachers must be better equipped and more knowledgeable of the specific needs and circumstances of all children.

Educational opportunities need to be made available to working children. If the state and society are unwilling to provide these children with what they are entitled to in terms of rights and basic needs, then maybe poor children should be allowed to combine schooling and some work, as it may be the only way for them to meet their and their families basic needs. According to Samantha (13): “You just have to go to school everyday during the week and on Saturday come to the stoplight. You can work without missing class.” Samantha suggests that children go to school during the week and work on Saturdays so that their work does not interfere with their education, as the international community and policymakers are so concerned about.
The large majority of the child street laborers with whom I spoke were on the street and working because they chose to, because they wanted to. They go to the street to work because they either want to make money, have nothing to do and nowhere to do it, or want to socialize, interact, and play with friends, or a combination of these (Rizzini, Barker & Cassaniga 1999 and Huggins & Rodrigues 2004). In many cases, economic and family need are also factors and compel these children to work, as they are aware of the struggles and needs of their households and either want to help or feel responsible or compelled to work in order to help their families (Offit 2008 and Hunte 2009).

Work provides these children with the opportunity to be involved in the production of value while at the same time maintaining agency and control over their lives (Offit 2008). Although these children are living in incredibly difficult circumstances with a number of structural constraints, they are struggling to improve their lives and situations and in some cases the lives and situations of their families (Montgomery 2001:124). These children are active agents and are often making decisions about their lives that go far beyond that of socialization, marginalization, and exploitation, as is so often stated (Offit 2008). Given the scarcity of options and opportunities open and available to them and their families, it is in this way and under these very particular and constrained circumstances that they have “chosen” to live and work on the street (Montgomery 2001:90). The street and their work is in many ways their only available option. These children are simply utilizing the resources that are available to them and in this way they are making active and informed choices among incredibly limited options (Montgomery 2001:158). However, their going to the street,
whether to live or work, only creates more obstacles and barriers to their fulfilling or achieving any kind of life and future (Berlant 2011).

Going to the street, whether to live or to work, can be an escape from violence and conflict in the home, an adventure, or both of these, but it also always presents these children with new and others forms of violence and danger. It addition to the violence and dangers that they are exposed to on the street, their going to the street also further denies or limits their chances and the possibility of future opportunities and improving their lives, if they had any to begin with (Huggins & Rodrigues 2004 and Richter 1991). However, and important to keep in mind is that their “choice” to work is not a free one (Bourgois 1996). Instead, they work because their circumstances and the larger structure “force” them to do so (Filho & Neder 2001). These children are born, raised, and locked into living conditions that limit opportunity, upward mobility, and agency. Their going to the street then, whether to live or work, is the result of powerful structural forces that shape their lives and deny or seriously limit their opportunities e.g. paralyzing poverty, minimal to no access to education, absence of employment opportunities, discrimination and marginalization, and growing issues with violence and drugs (Huggins & Rodrigues 2004).

A lot of research treats and talks about street children and child laborers as homogenous. However, there is tremendous variation and differences in terms of gender, activities, and location and they should be treated and recognized as different so that they can be analyzed separately as their particularities require different needs, approaches, and policies (Kassouf 2005). Any examination of or discussion of child labor and street
children must be context specific and child specific. A context specific examination would offer some insight into the specific needs and types of policies that might be effective if this issue is to be properly addressed (Gustafsson-Wright & Pyne 2002).

However, the major reason for the phenomenon of street children and child labor is the result and expression of a cruel, unjust, and unequal structure (Rizzini & Butler 2003). These children are also surrounded by a highly and rapidly increasing capitalistic consumer culture, especially in Sao Paulo, the wealthiest city in South America, which is yet another realm from which they are violently excluded (Moura 1991 and Hecht 1998). In this way, one reason for their going to the street, at least for those who go to work, is the desire to earn one’s own money so that they can engage in particular types of consumption and participate as consumers, as their parents are not able to meet these wants (Rizzini & Butler 2003). Through their work, they are able to access material consumer goods and therefore social status as a result of those consumer goods that they would not have access to otherwise (Zaluar 1994 and Rizzini & Butler 2003).

Any examination of street and working children must begin with an examination of the structural and historical forces that create their conditions and realities. Their street situation is their attempt at creating a childhood and accessing the rights that they are denied and deprived of (Huggins & Rodrigues 2004). The street provides those who are seriously deprived and constrained a greater sense of personal freedom and autonomy (Scharf et al. 1986, Smith 1987-1988, Keen 1989 and Hansson 2003). The international debate around whether or not children should work needs to be based on a more realistic understanding of the situations and realities of these children.
These children and their families are completely without what have been termed family and community support networks, which include adequate facilities and support systems, adequate housing conditions and a decent wage, spaces for after school programs and extracurricular activities and support, services and programs offered by the state for families and communities, making the street an attractive space where their material, social, and emotional needs can be met (Rizzini et al. 2007). It is only by tackling these root issues with preventative measures and programs, by giving attractive alternatives, that the street will become a less attractive space.

Poverty needs to be understood as multi-dimensional and as more than a mere lack of income. Instead, it includes a lack of social, cultural, political, and human rights. Economic growth alone will not improve the situation of these children. Improvements need to be made in education and everyday social life. Economic growth must also include a more just and equal distribution of resources in order to improve access to basic human needs and increase social justice. These children and their families are born into a complete deprivation of resources, power, choice, voice in decision making that directly affects their lives, the basic right to live in dignity, and freedom.

We need to ensure all children with basic access to adequate, dignified, and humane living conditions, education, health care, nutrition, water, sanitation, as well as freedom from violence, marginalization, and discrimination. Their poverty prevents them from autonomy, constrains their agency, and has made the street their only available option. Rights need to be fulfilled and ensured not only by the government, but also by everyone in society. How can we even begin to say that these children cannot live and
work on the street if we are unable to ensure and guarantee basic resources, humane living conditions, and basic human acknowledgment to them and their families?

Brazil is in need of serious changes is public policy to shrink the huge gap that has existed for all too long between the rich and the poor. Although the economy is growing, income distribution continues to be extremely unequal. Economic growth that does not include a reduction in economic inequality is not sustainable. There is a serious need for change in the structure with improved opportunity for formal employment, better and more investment in social service programs, and improved education (Brown 2011 and McLarnan 2012). Providing families with access to mental health and substance abuse support programs and services is also almost non-existent and greatly needed.

Street life can provide immediate and direct benefits to those who live and work there and are in search of solutions to a variety of their problems. On the street, these children end up finding economic opportunity, a sense of community and belonging, social support, escape, safety, and protection from violence and danger, a sense of autonomy, freedom, adventure, and independence, with a sense of control and power over oneself and one’s own life, both personally and economically (Karabanow 2004). Their going to the street, whether to live or to work, is a rights claiming process. In this way, the public city streets become the personal space of these children where they seek out their childhood and rights that the international community claims they should have.

The legislation that is developed and intended to help working children, the schools that all too often fail to educate them, and the national and international social,
political, economic, and historical forces that shape the lives and worlds of these children, and ultimately exclude and marginalize them, are what bring them to the street (Biehl, Good & Kleinman 2007 and Offit 2008). Any solution must be aimed at structural changes and modifications if we are to improve the living conditions and life chances of those who live in and are locked in poverty. Brazil is in need of profound and radical social, political, and economic change in order to deal with and treat the structure and current policies that marginalize these children and their families, criminalize them, and create their need for the street. Serious changes in economic and social policies of the country are necessary in order to confront the extreme inequitable distribution of wealth that maintains a majority of families being unable to care for their own children in ways that we have deemed “right” and “proper.” The lives of these children and adolescents and their street situation is a direct result of current policies that fail them and their families (Rizzini 1994).

This work is not an answer or an end in and of itself. Instead, it is something to be built upon. I hope this work adds to that which has already been done on the issue. I also hope that it presents the need for further inquiry into the lives of these children. What is particularly absent and therefore needed is an in-depth examination of females who live and work on the street in order to have a better understanding of the dynamics of gender on the street. Also needed is a look at why the reduction in the number of children living and working on the street? Their seeming reduction could instead be the result of their migrating to other locations, which would then call for an examination of the migration patterns of these children. Finally, more longitudinal studies and follow-up
with this particular population are needed. While this dissertation project was not longitudinal, it does provide insight into the lives and longer-term prospects of a small few who abandoned street life and street activities after having lived and worked on the street as children and adolescents. It demonstrates what that process of leaving the street is like, their struggles after leaving, and what their lives and occupations as adults look like (Rizzini 1994 and Huggins & Rodrigues 2004).

There is no quick fix or easy solution. However, we can have a better and more realistic understanding of street children and child street laborers and I hope that this dissertation has been, to some degree, a contribution to that end. These children and their voices, telling their stories, serve as the basis and foundation of this dissertation. They are the experts. I hope that I have not spoken for these children, but have allowed them to speak for themselves and to be the tellers of their stories and lives. I also hope that the reader not only is better able to understand the lives of these children, but that the children, adolescents, and young adults themselves with whom I spoke, as a result of this work, are able to better understand, make sense of, and find some meaning in their lives.

Social structure has become the central focus while completely overlooking the children’s subjectivities. The anthropological literature focuses on the identifying characteristics of a street lifestyle as opposed to the children themselves and their actual lived experiences. This may be the result of children in general not being viewed as human subjects or being viewed as incomplete or unmade –becoming vs. being. These children are not treated as human subjects but instead are transformed into objects of concern. There is a need in anthropology to develop more complex theories of the
subject, particularly the child as subject. I hope that his work has been a contribution to that end.

Anthropology has extremely limited data that often only discusses the powerlessness and victimization of street children and child street laborers. Again, research on the issue tends to focus on structural factors. Not everything is the result of political-economic structure, as such denies agency. These children and none of us for that matter are totally free from nor totally determined by this structure. When child agency is discussed, there are never any children to be heard. In this work, I hope that I have provided a closer look into the lives of these children and adolescents who have been talked about for so long and are at the center of our discourse on human and children’s rights, but have also at the same time been invisible and silenced by these discourses, research, and theories for so long. Their voices, lives, subjectivities, and agency, as a result of our theoretical focus on and concern with the structure, have been overlooked, denied, and ignored. Although there are many constraints in their lives, I believe that amid adversity and all odds they are making and creating their lives and experiences on their own terms (Kovats-Bernat 2006). I hope that this project has gotten at those terms.

The anthropology of children and childhood is the perfect opportunity for a more on the ground anthropology, providing anthropologists with new and fresh perspectives on poverty and violence as well as subjectivity and agency. Anthropologists need to look at childhood outside of the normative bounds of the mother, adults, the family, and home. We need to explore what childhood looks like outside of adult and institutional control.
Children are not the passive victims that adults and the literature have made them out to be. Street children and child street laborers have demonstrated their resilience and their ability to work, live, and survive on the street. I am not stating that these children are not victimized, as they clearly and all too commonly are. However, their responses to such challenges and to their routine and daily criminalization and victimization is in need of much more attention and recognition. Their ability and will to survive in the difficult circumstances in which they live and work is truly remarkable. However, we must not forget that even in their ability and will to survive, they are suffering (Kovats-Bernat 2006).

**Did you ever see anyone shot by a gun without bleeding?**
I love that line. That’s gotta be one of the principles behind reality. Accepting things that are hard to comprehend, and leaving them that way. And bleeding. Shooting and bleeding (Murakami 2001).

I wish I could say that these were my own words, as they are so perfectly and eloquently stated. The above statement speaks directly to what this work is all about, which is trying to make sense of that which is incomprehensible. These children, their families, and communities have essentially been shot and are continuously shot, day after day after day after day. While I have focused on and talked about the agency of these children and have argued against their being victims, especially to larger structural political-economic forces, I also at the same time do not want to mask or cover up their blood and suffering with words like agency. Because I argue that they have agency does not mean that they do not suffer. These children, their families, and communities are bleeding and I hope that words such as agency and choice have not wiped their blood away. We must never forgot that they are bleeding. Shooting and bleeding.
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Appendices

Appendix A

Additional Life Histories and Interviews From Chapter 3 About What Brings Children and Adolescents to the Street to Work or Live

Street Children

Amanda (27)

Amanda and her three children from a previous marriage live with her boyfriend and his two children. Amanda and all of her family members and relatives live in the same comunidade, which is far from the city center in a fairly remote and rural area. The living conditions of Amanda and her family are extremely precarious. Amanda works on the street parking/guarding cars and has been doing so for the last 13 years. Her life history was carried out on the street in her place of work. Before I started recording, Amanda just started talking, mostly about drugs, particularly crack. She also asked if I had seen her cousin, Jaqueline, and told me that she was worried about her for many reasons. First, Jaqueline has already disappeared. People disappearing is an all too common occurrence. One of Amanda’s close friend’s was also brutally murdered about one year ago, so there is fear from that. Amanda also told me that the new drug, oxi, had made its way into Vila Galvao, also known as Parmalat¹, which is the crackland of Guarulhos and is where Jaqueline and many other children and adolescents living on the street in Guarulhos spend much of their time.

Amanda: When I got involved with crack, I was 13 years old when I used the first time.
AB: And how did you get involved?
Amanda: Because I was angry at my stepfather. We never got along. He was a user. My mom was a user too. Both of them used. And he beat my mom. It was ugly at home and he beat us too and so it didn’t go right and I was angry at him and I left home. My dad died when I was nine and then after two years my mom met him. I lived with them for two years. I didn’t like it. I never got along with him. He always fought with my mom so I left home and I lived on the street for one year and a half and that’s how I got involved with crack. And my mom and him used, and they fought, and he hurt her. Really hurt her. The last time he hurt her, my

¹ Parmalat is a comunidade in Guarulhos, where a lot of people die from either drug overdose, are assassinated due to drug related issues or for merely being present in the comunidade, as drug trafficking in this particular community is very strong.
mom was pregnant and he beat her and I almost killed him. I told my mom that she either separates from him or he’ll die. My brothers would leave in the middle of the night out of fear. They would go to the street to sleep out of fear of what he might do to them… My brothers still smoke crack… My mom had a daughter and then separated from him. My mom was thought to have syphilis but went on raising the child with problems.

Crack is also something that is very prevalent in Amanda’s family, with her mother, stepfather, and brothers all being users. At the time of the interview, her stepfather had been dead for six months. He fell off of a horse, hit his head and died.

Similar to her cousin, Jaqueline, a combination of factors, including extreme poverty, drug abuse and addiction, family tragedy, such as death of her biological father at a young age, which is also often an economic shock to poor households, the introduction of her stepfather with whom she did not get along, violence and abuse within the home, and her own addiction to crack are what brought Amanda and her brothers to the street.

**Michele (21)**

Michele was born in Sao Paulo and moved to Guarulhos approximately six years ago. This interview took place at a plaza where a group of homeless adults hang out by day, cooking, talking, drinking cachaca (sugar cane rum), napping, and using drugs, including smoking crack. We were unable to carry out the interview elsewhere because Michele had too many bags that she was unable to carry around or leave unattended.

Michele and everyone else at the plaza all seemed to be under the influence of something, which made it difficult to carry out an interview and make out much of what she was saying. She always had a plastic bag on her filled with a variety of different colored nail polish, so there were times I would stop to chat with her, as she painted my nails. Street manicures. She had a boyfriend at the time of the interview who she called her *marido* (husband). They met in the homeless shelter where they sleep and at the time of the interview, they had been together for two months. Michele is particularly private about her life. She herself said that she does not like people knowing her business, so she was not very detailed and open in her interview.
The first time Michele left home was when she was 15 years old. She was living with her mother and stepfather at the time. She left home because she was fighting with her stepfather. She stopped going to school in her freshman year of high school when she was 15, which is when she left home. Before leaving for the streets, Michele said she spent her days at home and at church. Her family is Evangelical. After a fight with her stepfather, she left home with a bag of clothes and never returned. On her second day on the street, she met a group of people who also lived on the street and stayed with them. According to Michele, people live on the street, “Because they use drugs or they don’t get along with their family. Someone who doesn’t want anything from life, that’s why they want to stay on the street.”

Anderson (18)

At the time of his interview, Anderson had recently turned 18. Shortly after turning 18, he had a son, but wanted nothing to do with the woman who is the mother of his son. He loves the English language and North American culture and music, particularly Beyonce. The first time I met Anderson, he asked me to sing a Beyonce song. Unfamiliar with Beyonce’s music, I sang the only song that I knew, which was “All the Single Ladies.” I was extremely off beat and knew very few lyrics. I am sure I was extremely disappointing. I hope Anderson appreciated my efforts.

Anderson has been on the street since he was 12 years old. “I was 12 years old and I got lost. I was on my way to school and I met up with people from the street and I stayed up to today.” Anderson is an exception among those of the street, as he does not drink, smoke, or use drugs. According to Anderson, “I’m on the street because I want to be. Because I feel better here. I think it’s cool man. There’s more freedom. You can do
whatever you want. Nobody tells you what to do. But that’s what it is auntie, I’m on the street because I want to be.”

Similar to Michele, Anderson also spends his day on the street and his nights in a shelter. Although he says he is on the streets because he wants to be, I also understand that he has issues at home with his mother. His biological father passed away some time ago, and PMMR staff have told me that Anderson blames his mother for his father’s death. He is also a very large young man. He is over 6 feet tall and weighs well over 240 pounds. Given the size of his home and the number of people living in it, there is literally no space for a person of Anderson’s size.

**Joao Pedro (21)**

“I was the one who went looking for it all.”

At the time of his life history, Joao Pedro was living with his father and two younger siblings. However, towards the end of my stay, his younger sister stopped going to school and left home. She spent most of her time hanging out with the drug traffickers in their neighborhood and there was suspicion that she was involved with prostitution. Joao Pedro said he does not get along with his father. “He was never a dad for me.” His life history was cut short because Vitor showed up to PMMR, where we carried out the life history, high on oxi and almost died.

**Joao Pedro:** I started going to the street when I was nine.

**AB:** What brought you to the street at nine years of age?

**Joao Pedro:** Curiosity to know what it’s like. I was studying and then I met this guy who started taking me to Sao Paulo to various places. And then he took me to the center and taught me how to steal. He taught me how to rob stores… I stole because I wanted chocolate. I stole chocolate.

Joao Pedro also spoke about the high quality school supplies that his classmates at school had. Because he could not afford these high quality supplies, he would steal them “to call attention and feel better.” Joao Pedro in many ways was seeking recognition,
acknowledgement, and acceptance, and found this with friends and through illicit activities on the street.

It was really the next place that brought Joao Pedro to the street. It all seemed to start at Habib’s, which is a popular fast food Arabic restaurant in Brazil.

It was 1999. I started at Habib’s. I would watch over cars (for money), buy esfiha’s, and play video games all day. Then my mom started looking for me. She would find me and take me back home but then the next day I was on the street again. Then I started sleeping on the street.

Again, similar to many others of the street, Joao Pedro already had a taste of and experiences on the street prior to going to live on it. Joao Pedro also met someone who introduced him to the world of the street. Going to the street for Joao Pedro was also a slow gradual process, first spending his days and then a night or two on the street. It was a progression that occurred over time and through experiences on the street and with people he met on the street. His adaptation to the street resulted in a slow and gradual separation from his family and his life at home (Aptekar 1988, Marquez 1999 and Rizzini & Butler 2003).

When talking about his past and what brought him to the street, Joao Pedro spoke about how he wanted to escape and run from himself and how he wanted to be more but really was not anything. However, Joao Pedro did not go into what it was that he was trying to run from. Joao Pedro did say, “I didn’t have a structure man. And a weak mind too. I was weak minded… I already had active behavior.” Joao Pedro and Everson would always comment on his being hyperactive. He also mentioned not having the family structure, the right friends or mindset.
When asked what comes first, the street or drugs, Joao Pedro said: “Honestly, the first thing that comes is behavior to tell you the truth. Behavior. And then after behavior comes curiosity. And then after curiosity, that’s it. It’s a process of regression. You regress.” This piece on behavior that Joao Pedro raises is interesting, as the large majority of those of the street mentioned their particular personalities, behaviors, and ways, something in them and about them, as part of what brought them to the street.

*Child Street Laborers*

**Lucio (12) and Marcos (10)**

Amanda’s cousins, Lucio and Marcos, live with their mother and father in the same *comunidade* as Amanda. Their father recently started working with recycling. Lucio and Marcos go to work with Amanda parking and guarding cars on days that they do not have school.

Amanda’s children do not work.

My son doesn’t want to work on the street. He doesn’t have the rhythm or objective to work on the street. He’s never had it. He’s a homebody. He wants to be a police officer and likes to study and do research on the computer. I’ve never brought him here to come and work with me on the street because a child’s place is in the home and at school. The life that I wasn’t able to have, I want to give to them. Sometimes he comes here when he has an appointment, but if he sees a car stopping, he doesn’t want to practice and see what it is that his mom is doing to see how he can make his own money when he’s older. But if he needed to or liked it, if he were a kid like Lucio or Marcos who already like to come here and work. They like coming here and they also like being able to buy something for themselves, which is good because you learn to depend on yourself.

Many of these children go to the street because one or more of their family members, friends, or neighbors has contact with the street and knowledge of and experience with street labor. Similar to Offit (2008), virtually all of the children and adolescents I spoke were introduced to the street and street labor through a family member, neighbor, or friend who has previous experience, knowledge, and materials for a
particular type of street labor. Informal street labor is what many of the people in the lives of these children are doing. This is what many of the children in their communities are doing and therefore it is what is most accessible to them.

Lucio and Marcos started working on the street parking/guarding cars by going with Amanda and her boyfriend, who also work on the street parking/guarding cars. Their older brothers used to work too. They had their own space parking cars. Each of them had their own space. It was just the family that worked. As Amanda mentions, it was in part that of socialization, or being socialized to work through observing, accompanying, and learning from an older family member how to go about making one’s own money that brought Lucio and Marcos to the street. By learning how to make their own money, as Amanda mentions, they also learn to depend on themselves. Similar to their parents and other members of their families, these children are following the employment patterns of the working poor (Susser 1996, Aptekar 1998:6 and Kilbride et al. 2000).

Amanda, and many others, also made reference to personality as one of many factors responsible for bringing children to the street. It is something in them and about them and their personality. Some children just have it in them, the curiosity and the desire to know and therefore they go to the street (Vogel & Mello 1991). Some children like working while others do not.

**Leticia (12)**

*You make money to help the person who is sick at home.*

Leticia was born and raised in Guarulhos. She lives with her grandmother, her three uncles, one of whom is in prison, and her three sisters who are ten, six, and one and a half. Her aunt and grandmother work at the
Saturday fair close to their home watching cars. Her mother lives with her boyfriend, who Leticia refers to as her stepfather.

The first time Leticia went to the street to work was when she was eight years old. She went, “Because my mom and my grandma were having difficulties. My grandma was sick and in the hospital.” Leticia also has a baby sister that needs milk and other things to be taken care of. With the grandmother sick and not able to work and the mother away at her boyfriend’s house, Leticia and her sister, Maria (10), needed to work. “I noticed my grandmother needed help and the girls asked me to go to the stoplight and I was like, let’s go. It’s because you have to make money to help the person who is sick at home.” Her grandmother getting sick is an example of one of the many economic shocks that poor families experience, which often requires children to work (Wright et al. 1992, Duryea et al. 2003, Kovats-Bernat 2006 and Offit 2008). Leticia going to work to help her household during an economic crisis is an example of how these children and adolescents can and often do serve as valuable economic assets to their families and in their homes.

**Benjamin (16)**

“It distracts me from my problems. I occupy myself with something.”

Benjamin was 16 years old at the time of the interview. He was born in Guarulhos, where he still lives with his father and his 14-year-old brother. His father works but he does not know what he does. His brother is not working at the moment, although he has worked in the past. I only started seeing Benjamin in the last few months of my time in the field. He had been expelled from school for setting the trashcan in his classroom on fire. Shortly after being expelled from school, Benjamin started working in the center shining shoes. One of his friends, who let him borrow a shoeshine box, called him to work with him. At the time of the interview, Benjamin had been shining shoes for about two months.
When asked why he works, Benjamin said, “It distracts me from my problems. I occupy myself with something.” I then asked him if there was something else he would rather do to which he responded, “Studying.” He said that he thinks school is important now, only after being expelled from school. “It sucks being at home doing nothing.” Benjamin also said that if help was not needed at home, he would not be working. So the combination of familial need and not having anything to do or occupy his time with was what brought Benjamin to the street to work.

Rodrigo (13)
“My dad taught me. He shined shoes when he was young.”

Rodrigo was 13 at the time of the interview and turned 14 a couple of weeks after. He was born in Maceio, which is in the northeast of Brazil, and moved with his family to Guarulhos when he was a baby. He lives with his mom, dad, and two brothers who are 10 and 16. His younger brother has never worked. His older brother also shines shoes. Shining shoes is the only job Rodrigo has ever had.

“It’s going to be four years now on the 22\textsuperscript{nd} of August.” August 22\textsuperscript{nd} is Rodrigo’s birthday. He started shining shoes on his 10\textsuperscript{th} birthday. He asked his father to make a shoe shine box for him for his birthday because he wanted to help at home.

According to Rodrigo, children work because: “There are some with need and they go and work. They get a box… I just like working everyday like this on the street instead of playing soccer everyday, because I make money.” This is interesting especially because Rodrigo told me that his dream is to be a soccer player. However, he also told me that if he were not working, it would have a negative impact on his family.
Rodrigo learned how to shine shoes from his father. “My dad taught me. He got a shoe and shined it. I watched him and then when it was my turn I did it right.” His father also worked shining shoes when he was younger.

Samantha (13)
“I like to go because then I have my own money and I can buy things with my money… We come to play, but first we have to make money.”

Samantha lives in comunidade Hatsuta. She was born in Bahia, located in the northeast of Brazil, where her parents are from, moved to Guarulhos when she was three, went back to Bahia, and returned to Guarulhos when she was nine.

Samantha lives with her older sister who is 18 years old. At the time of the interview she had been living with her sister for about two months. This is not the first time she has lived with her sister. She has gone back and forth between her mother’s and sister’s home, both of whom live in Hatsuta and neither is working. Samantha’s mother receives Bolsa Família for Samantha, but she keeps the money for herself. “She keeps it because she needs it. Because she lives alone and my brother is in prison too and she needs it to buy things for him and things for the house.” So with her mother and her sister not working, and the money from Bolsa Família that is meant for Samantha, but is instead kept by her mother for her mother, Samantha has no financial resources and therefore goes to the street in search of economic opportunity.

Samantha started working at the stoplight soon after she arrived to Guarulhos the second time. She was nine years old.

The first time I went to beg for money. I went with my cousins. And then I started going to the center, begging for money and selling candy. And then they had this thing malabares and we started doing it and we started coming to the center. I went because I wanted to. I went because I wanted to know what it was like. We come to the stoplight and we have
fun doing it. We play and everything. It’s good to do *malabares*. The boys where we live started doing it and we learned and started doing it… When I lived with my mom, I gave her money. I made five *reais* and I gave it to her. But when I went to live with my sister, my sister doesn’t ask me for money because my brother in law, even though they’re separated, he helps her and everything. Only sometimes when she doesn’t want to ask him for money, sometimes I give her money, but she doesn’t ask for all my money.

What first brought Samantha to the street was her mother, to whom she would have to give all of her earnings. Now that she lives with her sister and has more freedom and independence, Samantha, similar to many of the child street laborers I spoke to, works to provide for her own economic wants and needs (Offit 2008). Samantha now works because, “I like to go because then I have my own money and I can buy things with my money. I buy cream for my hair. When I want to go out, I have money to go out.” Many of these children and adolescents work because, “You have money in your pocket every month.” Independent child street laborers, through their work on the street, are not only and always contributing to and providing for their household economies, but they are also contributing to their own wants and needs.

Samantha’s younger sister, Elizabeth (10), was adopted by a family that lives in the interior of Sao Paulo. She lived with her adoptive family up until about one year before I had arrived to the field. After her adoptive mother died, Elizabeth was sent back to her biological mother’s home in *comunidade Hatsuta*. The entire year and a half that Elizabeth was living with her mother, she was not enrolled in school. She spent most of her days working with *malabares* on the street. I was informed on a number of occasions during my time in the field of Elizabeth running away from home. The last time she ran
away, she went to the tutelary council to report her biological mother who was abusing her and not feeding her when she did not bring enough money home.

Elizabeth serves as an example of dependent child street laborers who are exploited by their families. However, she is also an example of how proximity and availability of labor, such as place of residence or with whom one lives, can have an influence on whether or not a child works. According to Elizabeth, children in the interior of Sao Paulo where her adoptive family lives, unlike children in Guarulhos and Sao Paulo, do not work. Also, children who live in comunidades that are located closer to the city center may also be more prone to work, as they have more access to economic opportunity.

Josue (10)

Josue lives in an extremely precarious community and household. Like many of the children I spoke to, his home is a shack made out of scraps of wood. His community is in a fairly far off, remote location, at least from the center, where he takes a bus alone almost every single day to work and hang out. Josue has no sanitation at home, so his family, unable to use their own toilet, has to poop in a bag. The conditions in his home are much of what bring him to the street. He lives with his mother and two sisters who are three and six. His mother said that she prefers him on the street and working as opposed to having free time to get involved with other things like drug trafficking and crime. He has a father and a stepfather, but is unsure of their whereabouts. Josue asked me if I would take him home every single time I saw him. He told me that if I took him home, he would go to school everyday. I would just have to give him five reais.

Josue started working selling candy when he was ten years. When asked why he started working, he said, “Because I didn’t have anything to do.” He said that although he helps his mother, he works because he wants to. He also likes to go to the street to play and buy things for himself. Every time I saw him, he was either carrying a large
sum of money, typically between 50 and 100 reais, or had a new pair of tennis shoes in his backpack or a new cellular phone that he bought for fifty reais and was trying to re-sell for seventy-five reais.

I often walked Josue to work, as he always asked me to whenever we bumped into one another on the street. I miss those walks. One day, as we were walking up to the big sidewalk where he sells candy, Josue was shocked to discover that I never worked as a child.

*AB:* How long will it take you to sell all of that candy?
*Josue:* About two hours.
*AB:* Two hours! That’s fast.
*Josue:* How long did you think it would take me?
*AB:* I don’t know. I’ve never sold candy before. That’s why I asked.
*Josue:* What?! You never sold candy when you were a kid?!
*AB:* No. Never.
*Josue:* Well then what did you do when you were a kid?!

Josue could not imagine a childhood without working and needing to work. He could not imagine any other reality. In his world, this is what children do. Street labor is what these children grow up seeing other children, including their own brothers, sisters, cousins, aunts, uncles, mothers, fathers, friends, and neighbors doing. This is the norm for them.
Appendix B

Additional Life Histories and Interviews From Chapter 6 About Their Leaving the Street… or Not

Child Street Laborers

Elizabeth (10) whose mother forced her to work and threatened to physically beat her and not feed her for not bringing home enough money, left her mother’s home in comunidade Hatsuta towards the end of my time in the field. After running away from home and reporting her mother to the tutelary council, she was sent back to the interior of Sao Paulo to live once again with her adoptive family. Elizabeth stated that she was going to go to school again, as she had been out of school the entire year that she was living with her biological mother. She also said that she would not be working, as child street labor is not an issue in the interior where her adoptive family lives. In this way, place of residence, in addition to with whom one lives with, plays an important role in whether or not children work.

Marcelo (15) who started working at the age of nine selling candy at a stoplight, stopped working at his most recent job shining shoes because he did not like carrying around the heavy shoeshine box. He also stopped working because school started and he said that he wanted to focus on school. Marcelo was the only participant to report school as a reason for leaving work.

Leticia (12) started working when she was 8 years old because her grandmother was sick. Leticia stopped working when she was 11 years old, “Because I got sick and I had to stay at home.” She was sick with sinusitis and bronchitis. She said she does not want to work anymore and will not work anymore. “I don’t want to work anymore
because if you’re working on the street the rapists come and get us.” Leticia is the one that keeps her nails long for protection so she can scratch a man’s face if he tries to get her.

Samantha (13) who is Elizabeth’s older sister was 9 when she first started working at a stoplight selling candy. She currently works with malabares and will definitely continue working on the street. “For me, I would prefer to work in whatever place, but I can’t because no one will hire me because I’m still a minor, so for now I’ll be at the stoplight.” Due to her age, Samantha’s work options are restricted. Given that her mother was not working and was using the money that she receives from Bolsa Familia that is meant for Samantha for herself, and that her sister with whom she lives is also not working, Samantha will continue to work so that she will be able to purchase her hair cream and other things that she wants and needs.

Street Children

Jaqueline (23)

Jaqueline who said, “Nobody’s on the street because they want to be. They’re on the street because something happened to them in their lives, in their family,” is still living on the street and continues to be extremely addicted to alcohol, crack, and other drugs. Her family history and drug addiction are what keep her there. She went to the street to live when she was 12 years old. She turned 23 while I was in the field. During my nine months in Brazil, Jaqueline, as far as I am aware, got pregnant two times. She continues to prostitute herself in exchange for crack and the pregnancies are believed to be the result of prostitution. She either lost the babies through miscarriage or aborted
them herself, as abortion is illegal in Brazil. Jaqueline has had six children in total, all of whom are in the care of either family members or were adopted. Many of her children were born with various health problems.

**Alexa (25)**

Alexa has been living on the street since she was 10 years old. I do not know what it is that brought her to the street, as I know very little about her life. I do know that she has been to prison two times. The first time she was there for three years. Everyone was certain that she was going to get out and change her life, but she ended up going back to the street and drugs. She was put in prison once during my time in the field, but was only there for one week. Alexa is addicted to crack and other drugs and spends much of her time in *Parmalat*. She hangs out on the street by day and sleeps in a shelter by night. Similar to Michele, who I will introduce next, Alexa received services from PMMR when she was a minor. She often told me that she was sad and needed someone to talk to, but not just anybody. Not someone she did not know, especially not a psychologist for whom she would have to draw a picture. During most of our conversations, all of which took place on the street, Alexa was drinking *cachaca* (sugar cane rum) from a plastic bottle and often appeared to be high on crack.

Alexa has three children all of whom are in the care of family members. Her 11-year-old daughter lives with her aunt, her seven-year-old son lives with her mother, and her one and a half year old son lives with the fathers’ mother in *comunidade Hatsuta*. Alexa received news that her youngest child had been bitten by a rat in the wooden shack where he lives with his grandmother. Alexa immediately went after her son and brought
him with her to the street. I saw her son the day after she brought him to the street and he
did in fact have rat bites on his leg.

**Michele (21)**

Michele (21) first went to the street when she was 15 years old. She reported
fighting with her stepfather as her reason for leaving home. She lived on the street for
two years. Michele left the street when she was 17 years old because she bought a
*barraco*, or shack, in *comunidade Hatsuta* for her and her children.

Michele is back and living on the street again at the age of 21 because the *barraco*
(wooden shack) that she bought for herself in *comunidade Hatsuta* when she was 17
years old and leaving the street collapsed and fell. This is very common in *Hatsuta* and
re-building a *barraco* is difficult, as it requires wood and other materials, which are
costly. When asked what it is like living on the street this time around Michele said:

“*Oh, the same as always. Things don’t change. The only thing is that I don’t have
anywhere to wash my clothes. That’s it. But I have a place to bathe. I have food to eat.
I’ve already lived on the street. I don’t think it’s strange.*”

This time around, at 21 years of age, Michele is not on the street by choice.

I’m not here because I want to be. I’m here because necessity forced me.
Because I want to be with my children, I want to have my home, I want to
make my food, I want to make my cakes, wash my clothes, clean my
home. I want all those things.

At the time of the interview Michele had been back and living on the street for
three months. However, this time around she is sleeping in a homeless shelter in
Guarulhos by night and spends her days on the street. Michele has four children ages six,
five, three, and one year four months. One lives with Michele’s mother, another lives
with their father, one lives with their godmother, and another lives in a shelter. At the
time of her interview, Michele had a marido that she met at the homeless shelter where
she sleeps and had been with him for two months. She does not like people knowing her
business and just tells everyone that she is living in the city center. She hopes to get her
barraco fixed and take her marido home.

Vitor (18)

I met Vitor shortly before he turned 18. The first time I met him he stopped by
the project early one morning wearing only one flip-flop and wanting to take a shower.
Once showered, he was back to the street. He showed up later that afternoon at the
project while I was carrying out a life history with Joao Pedro. Vitor was high on oxi.
Although incredibly difficult to understand because he was so high, I was able to make
out him calling us motherfuckers, telling us that God was in his dick, and demanding that
we let him in the project so that he could kill us. He was let in by a PMMR staff member
and was carried out an hour or two later by paramedics naked, covered in blood, and tied
down to a cot. As a result of breaking all of PMMR’s windows with his bare hands,
Vitor received several severe gashes to his body and forearm, almost cutting through his
veins. Vitor’s near death experience, which was maybe an “attempt” at death, may have
been his way of creating a situation or an event in which he would matter to someone. At
least that is what happened with me. In his near death, Vitor permanently marked my
memory and my life.

The next thing I heard about Vitor was that he was in prison. Towards the end of
my stay in the field, almost immediately upon turning 18 years old, he was arrested for
petty theft. I imagine Vitor is probably still in prison. If not, I am certain that he is back on the street, if not dead. Due to his psychological issues and history, Vitor should not have ever gone to prison, but hey, as everyone says: “That’s Brazil.”

Vitor’s older brother, who followed Vitor to the street, was also arrested and put in prison during the time that I was in the field. It was his second time in prison. The first time he went in everyone thought he was going to get out and change his life, but he ended up going back to the street and drugs. The second time he went to prison he was arrested for stealing and was shot in the face, where he now has a hole. His friends believe that he will get out and go back to the street and drugs again.