

PRIMARY PILOT MARKET RESEARCH
AFRICAN AND HISPANIC AMERICAN YOUTH

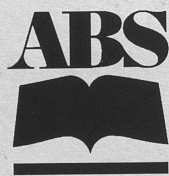
OCTOBER 1994

Prepared for
THE AMERICAN BIBLE SOCIETY

by
National Program Department

Charles H. Smith, Heritage Unit

assisted by
Adams-Berryman Consultants, Inc.





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our charge was to gain insights into the attitudes and prevailing feelings about the environment surrounding the lives of youth at-risk; to identify appropriate messages that speak to their needs; to identify effective communication strategies for delivering God's Word as authentic, relevant, and intimate; to ascertain what formats, media and channels are appropriate for the audience; and recommend follow-up steps for a synergistic approach to planning outreach to heritage communities.

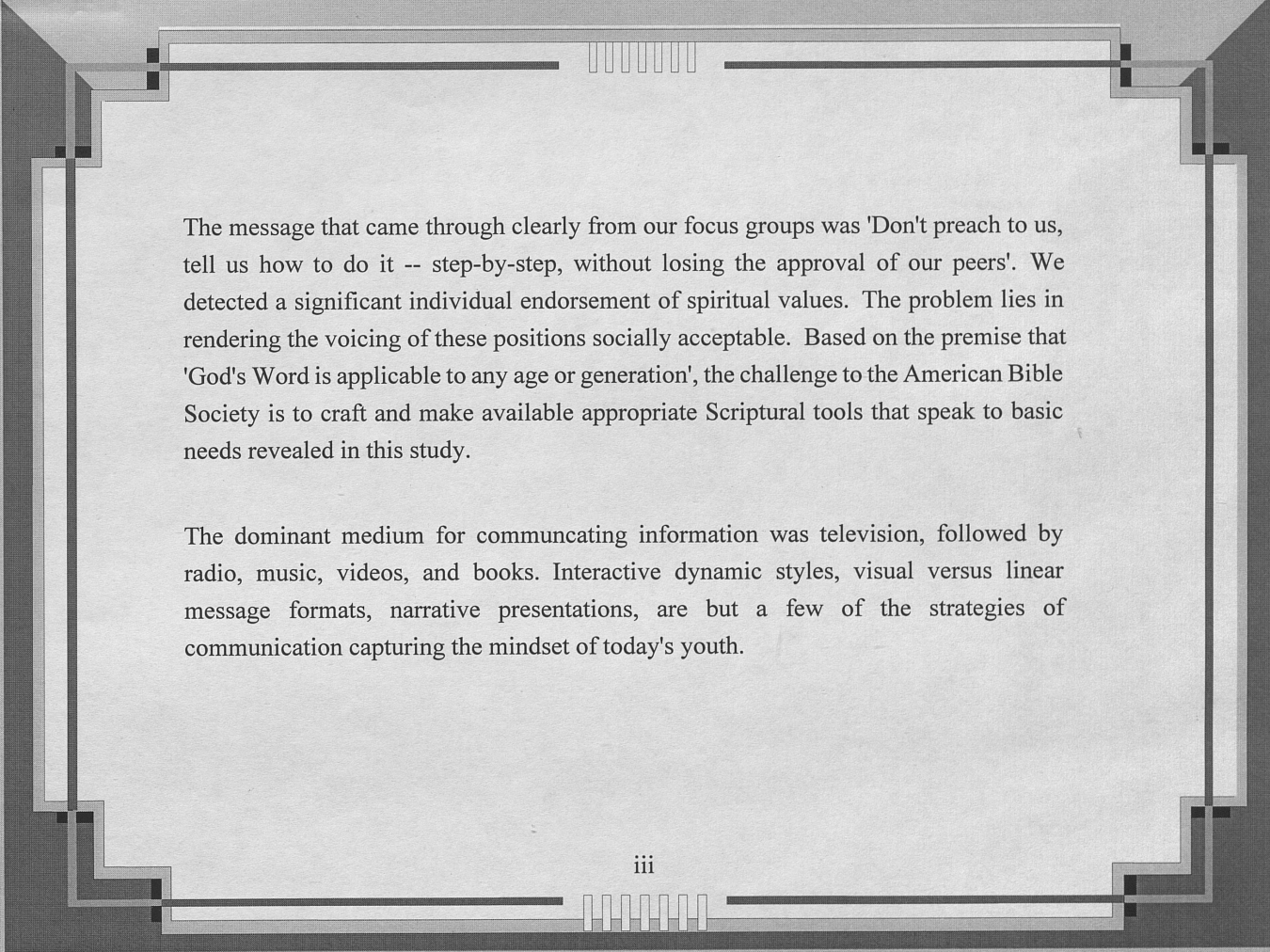
What we found in the course of three months of primary and secondary research, field studies, and focus groups, is that youth are very lonely and feel detached from the mainstream culture. Youth experience such a contrast between the idealized world and their own reality, between espoused values and their own actions, between their knowledge of negative forces around them and their acquiescence to those forces result in disappointment and self-blame. This blame is exacerbated by fear of the future and hopelessness, especially with those youth without any discernible faith system. Youth who found locus for decisionmaking in their belief system (from the same at-risk circumstances), refused lapses of moral behavior and pessimism.



A chilling finding was the extent of pain and anxiety caused by violence. Guns and death conversation is common vernacular. Therefore, 'survival' takes precedence over planning for the future.

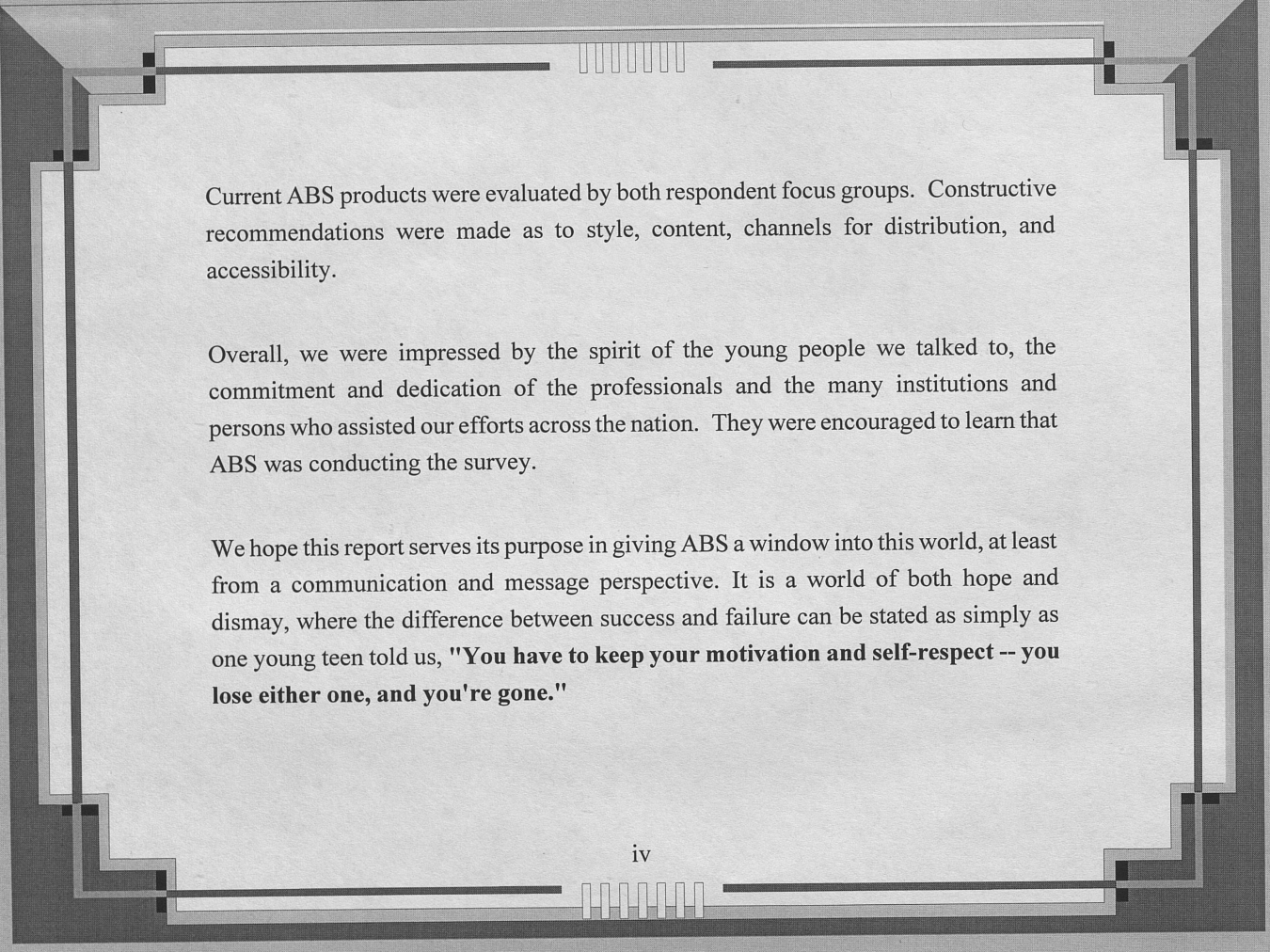
Interviews with teenagers yielded rich, personal, but oftentimes painful stories of defunct relationships. Neither roles, relationships, nor age define these adolescence. Relationships with their parents are shifting. Relationships with peers takes on new meaning with the transfer of limit-setting from the family to the youth, where success is measured in terms of peer approval and not self-identification.

Interviews with professional youth prevention/intervention agents provides perspectives from their vantage point. Communities are besieged with a 'frenzy of defeat' attitude, youth are looking for families (they need love and lasting relationships), youth's perception of reality is darkened by hopelessness, gang involvement is on the rise, and behavioral messages promoted by churches and the media are suspect.



The message that came through clearly from our focus groups was 'Don't preach to us, tell us how to do it -- step-by-step, without losing the approval of our peers'. We detected a significant individual endorsement of spiritual values. The problem lies in rendering the voicing of these positions socially acceptable. Based on the premise that 'God's Word is applicable to any age or generation', the challenge to the American Bible Society is to craft and make available appropriate Scriptural tools that speak to basic needs revealed in this study.

The dominant medium for communicating information was television, followed by radio, music, videos, and books. Interactive dynamic styles, visual versus linear message formats, narrative presentations, are but a few of the strategies of communication capturing the mindset of today's youth.



Current ABS products were evaluated by both respondent focus groups. Constructive recommendations were made as to style, content, channels for distribution, and accessibility.

Overall, we were impressed by the spirit of the young people we talked to, the commitment and dedication of the professionals and the many institutions and persons who assisted our efforts across the nation. They were encouraged to learn that ABS was conducting the survey.

We hope this report serves its purpose in giving ABS a window into this world, at least from a communication and message perspective. It is a world of both hope and dismay, where the difference between success and failure can be stated as simply as one young teen told us, **"You have to keep your motivation and self-respect -- you lose either one, and you're gone."**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

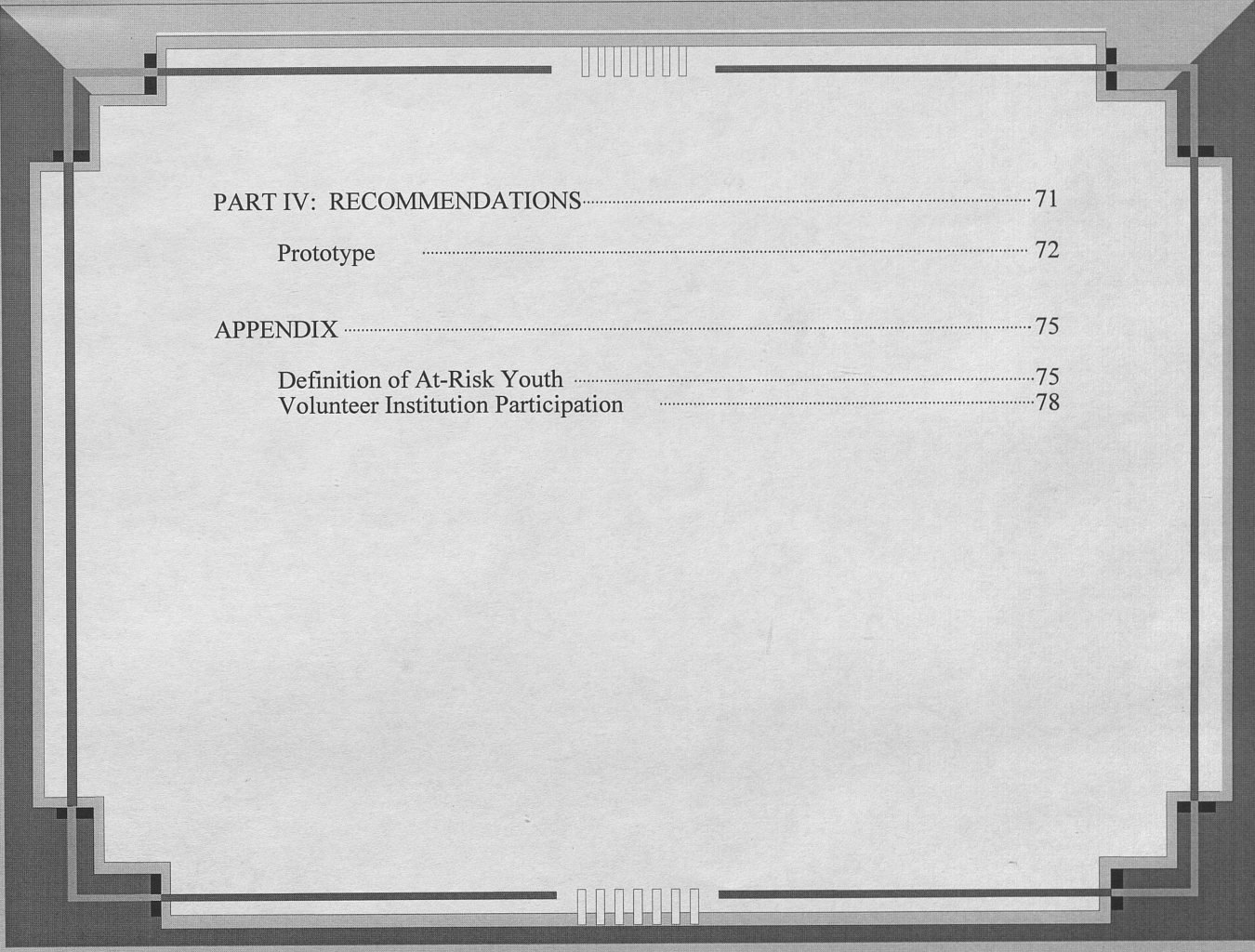
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	i
METHODOLOGY	1
FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS	2
DEMOGRAPHICS	5
BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES	7
PART I: YOUTH RESPONDENTS REVEAL CRITICAL ELEMENTS OF CONCERN	11
Five Dominant Concerns Prevailed	12
Loneliness	13
Parent/Child Relationships	18
Disappointment In Own Actions and Coping Strategies	21
Pain and Fear Caused By Death/Guns	23
Peer Persuasion	26
Inside: Decisionmaking	29
Youth - The Church	31
The Bible	33
Black Males: Ages 9 - 12	35
Unwed Teenage Mothers	38
Second Generation Youth Concerns	41

PART II: PROFESSIONAL PRACTITIONER'S PERSPECTIVE ON YOUTH45

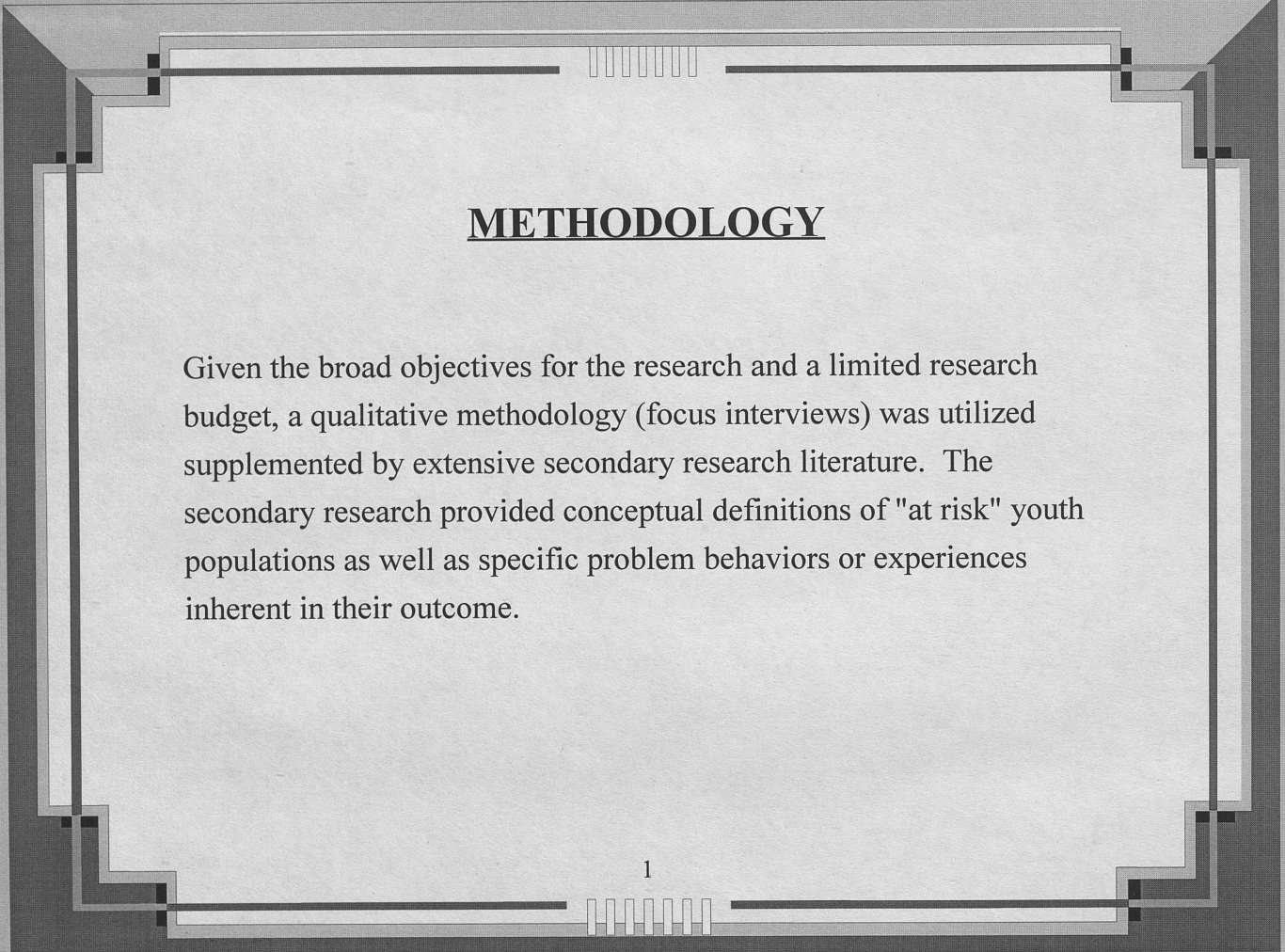
Perspective On The Community: 'Frenzy of Defeat' Attitude.....	48
Perspective On Youths' Basic Needs: Love, Involvement, Belonging, Hope	49
Perspective on Youth Behavior: Choices That Limit Well-Being.....	50
Perspective On The Church: Churches In Search of Relevance	52
Perspective On Where To Begin (In The Home, In The Livingroom)	55

PART III: YOUTH CRITIQUE ABS PRODUCTS 57

On Availability/Access	57
Recommendations	58
Product Review (Specific Portions)	59
CEV Critique	60
On CEV's Cover	61
On CEV's Clarity.....	62
Product Concepts.....	63
The Need	63
Visuals	65
The CEV	66
Relevant Tools.....	66
Engaging Projects.....	67
Videos and Interactive Mediums.....	68
Bible Stories	69



PART IV: RECOMMENDATIONS.....	71
Prototype	72
APPENDIX	75
Definition of At-Risk Youth	75
Volunteer Institution Participation	78



METHODOLOGY

Given the broad objectives for the research and a limited research budget, a qualitative methodology (focus interviews) was utilized supplemented by extensive secondary research literature. The secondary research provided conceptual definitions of "at risk" youth populations as well as specific problem behaviors or experiences inherent in their outcome.

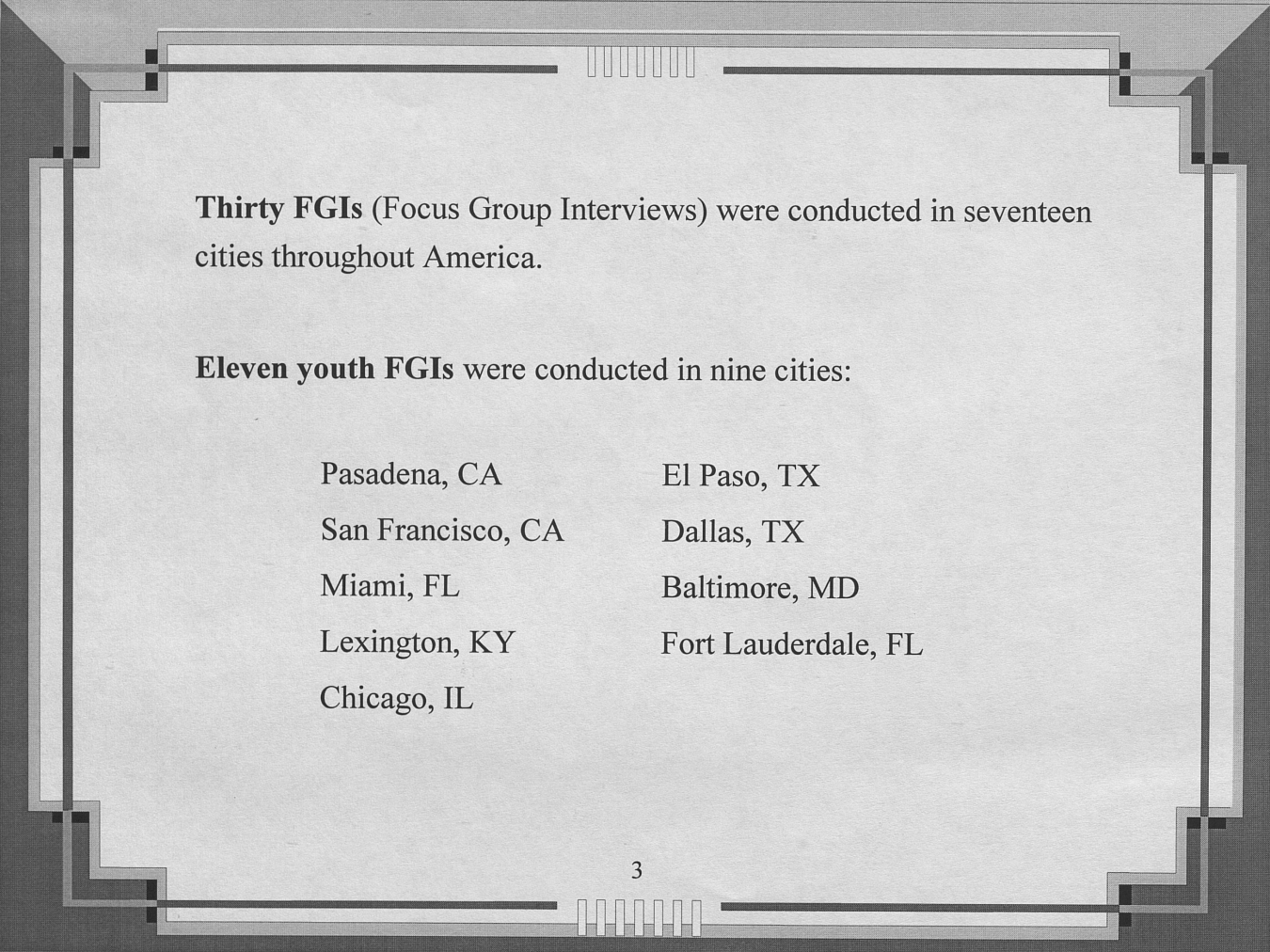


FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

There are four major subgroups who are centrally important to effective communication and marketing of ABS programs and products:

- Male children between the ages of 9 - 12 (Total: 14)
- Unwed teenage mothers with their child/children living with them at home (Total: 14)
- Youth between ages 13 - 18 (Total: 42)
- Youth counselors, prevention/intervention agents dedicated to youth work (Total: 20)

Using mostly open-ended questions to glean the desired information, the average focus session lasted 90 to 120 minutes.



Thirty FGIs (Focus Group Interviews) were conducted in seventeen cities throughout America.

Eleven youth FGIs were conducted in nine cities:

Pasadena, CA

El Paso, TX

San Francisco, CA

Dallas, TX

Miami, FL

Baltimore, MD

Lexington, KY

Fort Lauderdale, FL

Chicago, IL

Twenty FGIs were conducted in 14 cities (youth professionals, pastors, parents, and educators directly involved with youth).

Chicago, IL

Fort Lauderdale, FL

Hollywood, FL

Miami, FL

Atlanta, GA

Norfolk, VA

Lexington, KY

Denver, CO

San Francisco, CA

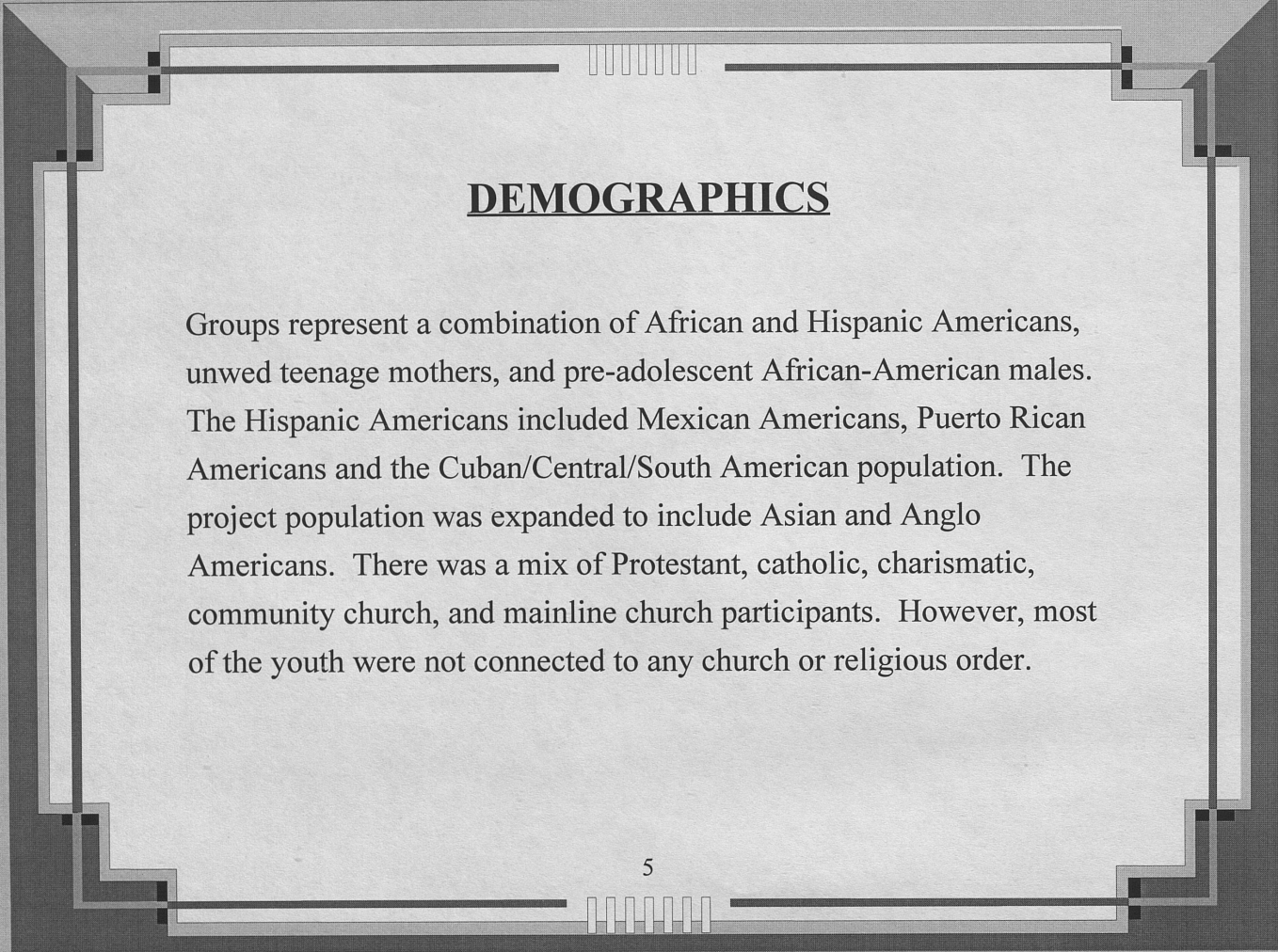
Pasadena, CA

San Antonio, TX

Dallas, TX

Brooklyn, NY

Queens, NY



DEMOGRAPHICS

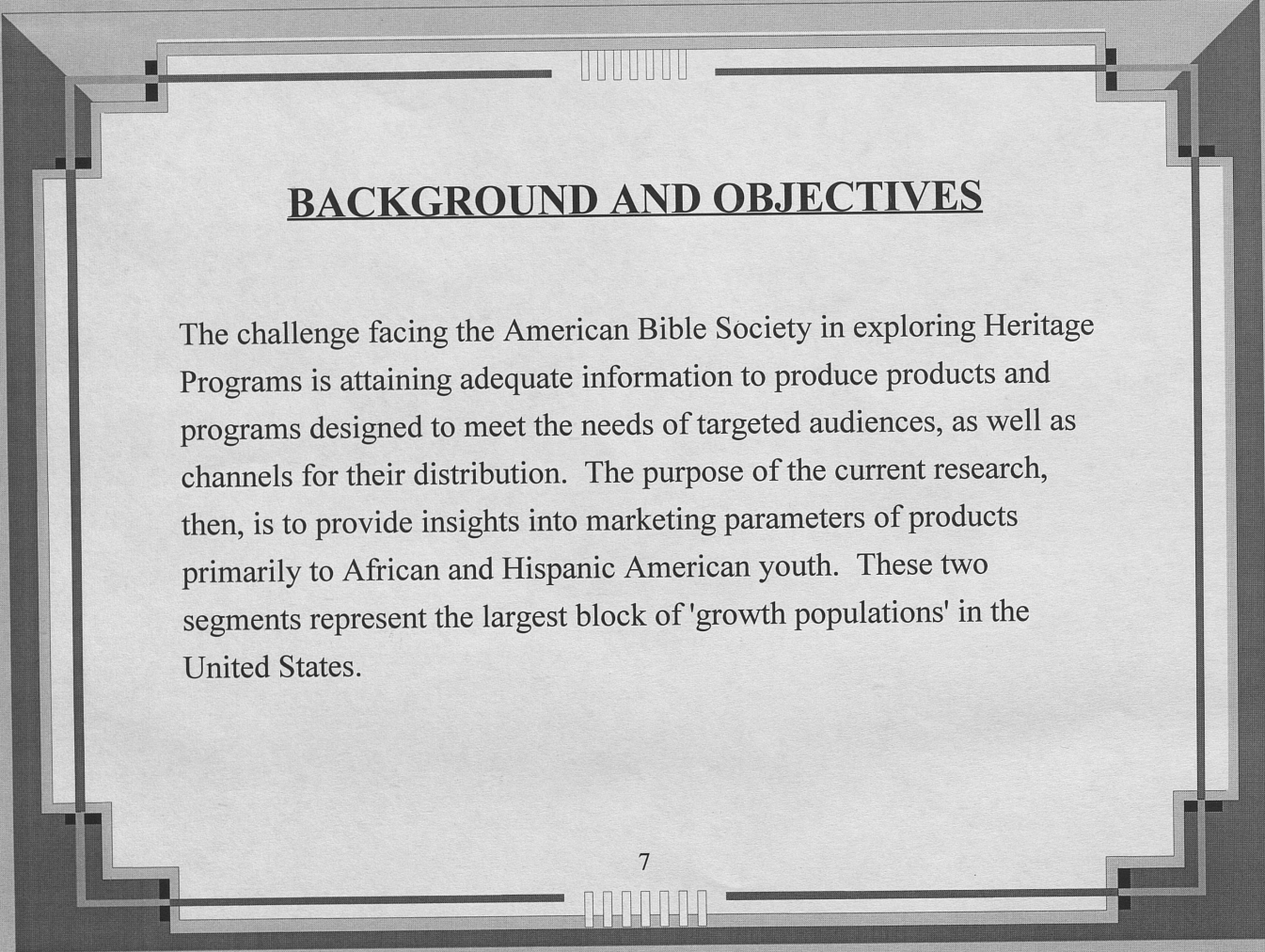
Groups represent a combination of African and Hispanic Americans, unwed teenage mothers, and pre-adolescent African-American males. The Hispanic Americans included Mexican Americans, Puerto Rican Americans and the Cuban/Central/South American population. The project population was expanded to include Asian and Anglo Americans. There was a mix of Protestant, catholic, charismatic, community church, and mainline church participants. However, most of the youth were not connected to any church or religious order.

The overall commonalty among the population was neighborhood. All of the respondents came from what may be labeled as urban or inner city characterized by low income, a high incidence of single parent homes, public housing, and crime.

This research was naturalistic in that researchers entered the world of the respondents as it existed and obtained data without any deliberate invention designed to alter the setting or confirm assumptions.

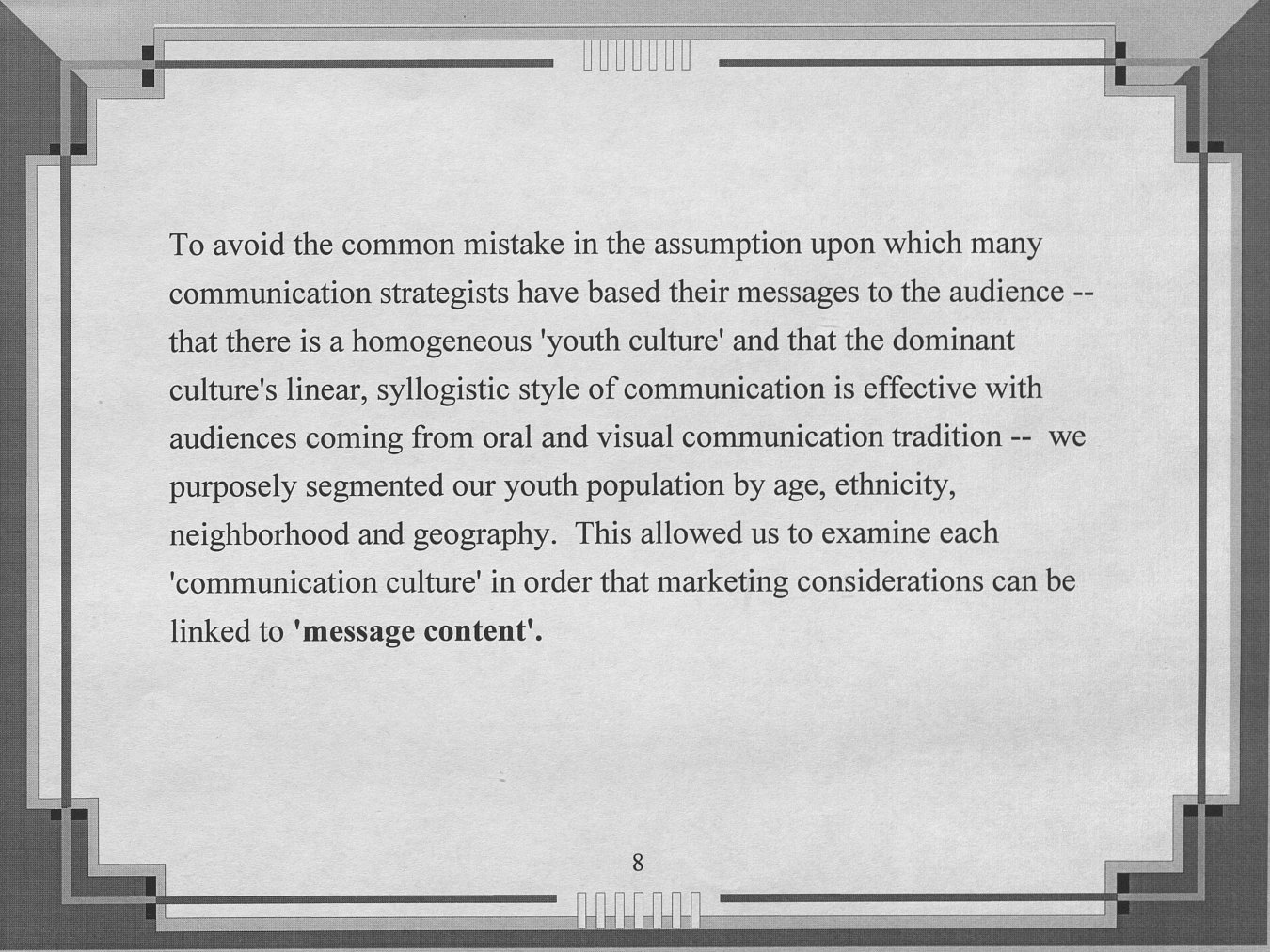
Extensive literature in the study of urban youth was used to provide a frame of constructs in identifying "at risk" indicators. Although there are various definitions of 'risk' appearing in literature, risk implies probability, not certainty.

The following working definition provided a framework for identifying the need which provides ABS windows into this world and opportunities to communicate the Word of God in an authentic, relevant and intimate manner. (See At-Risk Appendix)

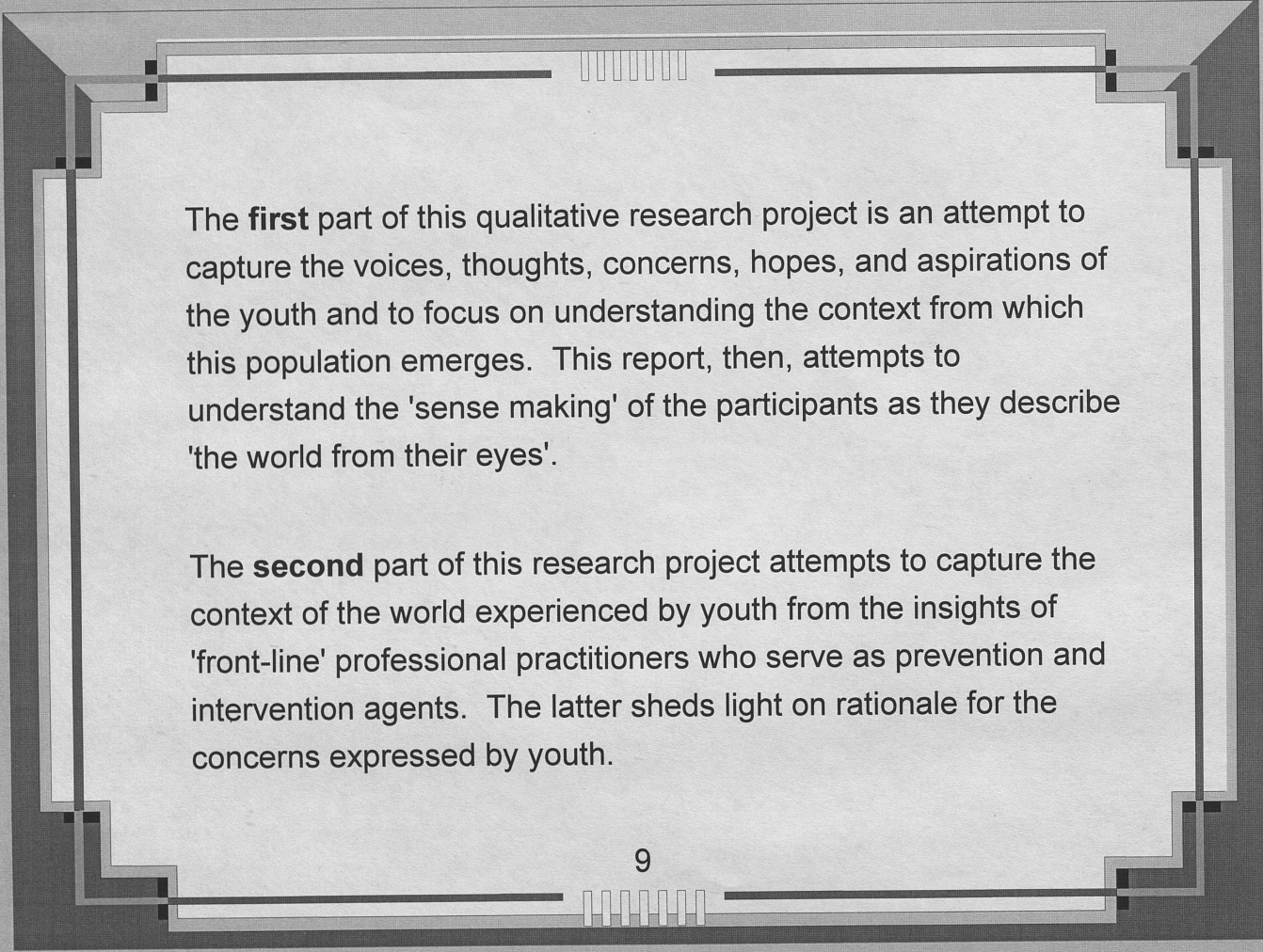


BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

The challenge facing the American Bible Society in exploring Heritage Programs is attaining adequate information to produce products and programs designed to meet the needs of targeted audiences, as well as channels for their distribution. The purpose of the current research, then, is to provide insights into marketing parameters of products primarily to African and Hispanic American youth. These two segments represent the largest block of 'growth populations' in the United States.



To avoid the common mistake in the assumption upon which many communication strategists have based their messages to the audience -- that there is a homogeneous 'youth culture' and that the dominant culture's linear, syllogistic style of communication is effective with audiences coming from oral and visual communication tradition -- we purposely segmented our youth population by age, ethnicity, neighborhood and geography. This allowed us to examine each 'communication culture' in order that marketing considerations can be linked to **'message content'**.



The **first** part of this qualitative research project is an attempt to capture the voices, thoughts, concerns, hopes, and aspirations of the youth and to focus on understanding the context from which this population emerges. This report, then, attempts to understand the 'sense making' of the participants as they describe 'the world from their eyes'.

The **second** part of this research project attempts to capture the context of the world experienced by youth from the insights of 'front-line' professional practitioners who serve as prevention and intervention agents. The latter sheds light on rationale for the concerns expressed by youth.

The **third** part in this research project provide respondents' responses to:

- Current ABS Portion Products
- Comparison between KJV and CEV
- Medium, channels and communication strategies.

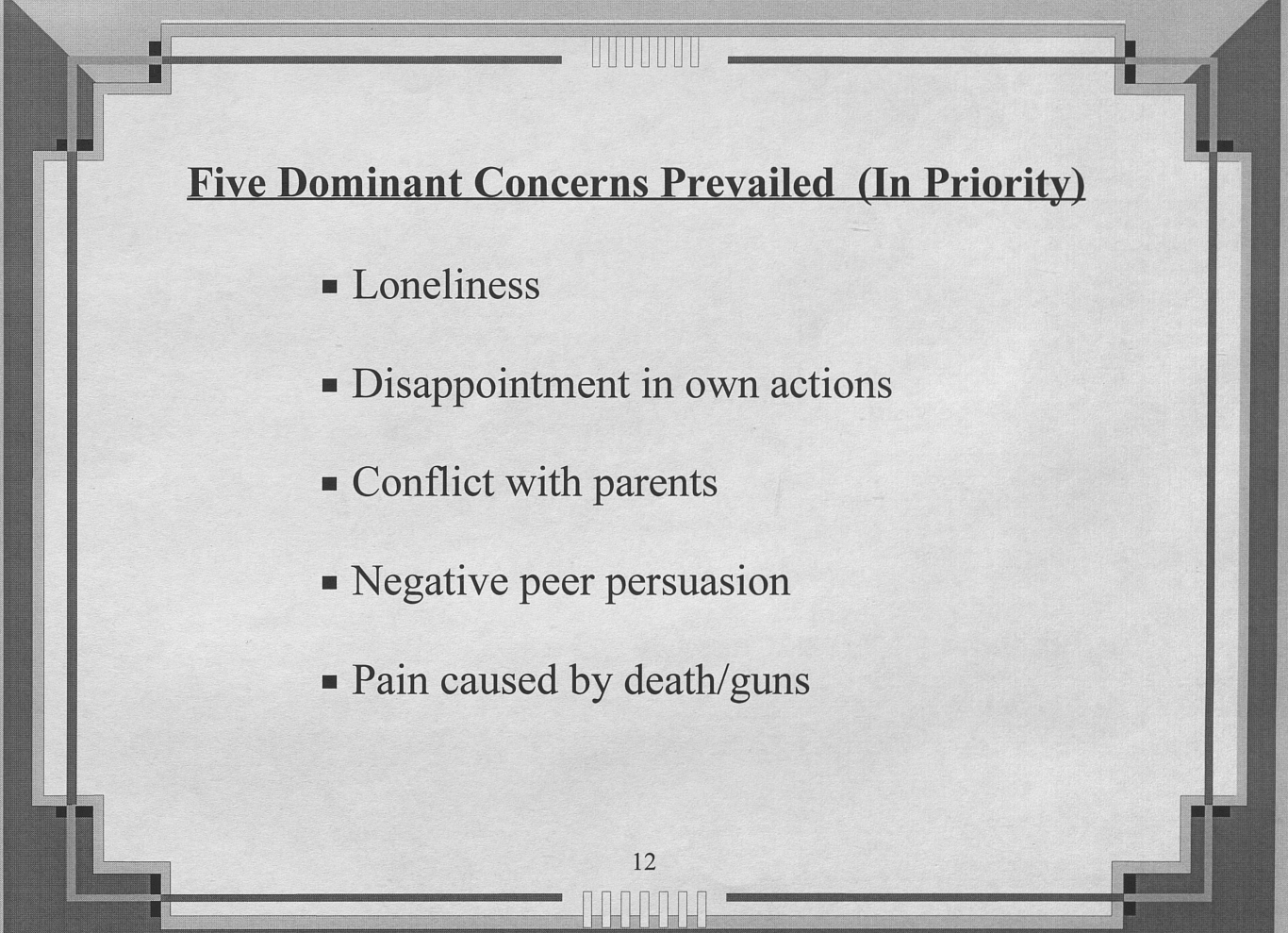
The **fourth** part of this research project will offer recommendations for ABS's consideration as it seeks to present the Word of God as authentic, relevant, and intimate to a generation labeled "Generation X" (Charisma 1994).

While these research findings are not all-inclusive, they do shed light abundantly on the world of youth in America from the northeast coast, the south, the midwest, the southwest and the west coast. Some generalizations are made based on the trends revealed in responses given by respondents. These trends make it possible to make sound recommendations for the content of products and suggested communication strategies to reach the target audience.

PART I

YOUTH RESPONDENTS REVEAL
CRITICAL ELEMENTS OF CONCERN

The youth were asked to surface some of their greatest concerns, pressures, pains, hopes and fears. They were asked how they coped and what forces played a role when serious decisions had to be made; who they trusted and what mediums of communication could get their attention. They were asked if any passage or book of the Bible had a real impact on their thinking, and their views of the established church. These open-ended questions and follow-up questions provided invaluable insights into the real lives of youth. Amazing trends emerged from free flowing comments within a permissive environment. The following findings, though not conclusive, provide definite insights into the thoughts, pains, hopes and fears of today's urban youth.



Five Dominant Concerns Prevailed (In Priority)

- Loneliness
- Disappointment in own actions
- Conflict with parents
- Negative peer persuasion
- Pain caused by death/guns

Loneliness

Based on the focus group interviews, the most prevalent concern surfaced by youth directly and indirectly was the frustration triggered by being lonely. They reveal a complex web of personal and social problems with few options. Meaningful relationships with family and peers turn into a nightmare. There is pressure to remain aloof or detached from imposed cultural values. All this stress serves to disconnect and isolate.

"Seeing my parents get divorced made me feel lonely." DALLAS, TX

"I think that it's hard for me to except being a teenager and everything when I see my different peers acting up or whatever. . like they're into drugs, they're fighting, they're robbing houses, they're gang busting, and all this kind of stuff. I think that there is a reason why everyone is doing it, you know. There is a reason why the teenagers are doing it."

SAN FRANCISCO, CA

"I'm 17. The past three years I was in a gang. I praise the Lord and thank Him -- He took me out of that. What happens is that parents don't pay attention to their kids. That's how they get involved in gangs. You have problems at home and turn to your friends for someone to talk to. That's how the guys and girls get into gangs. They have problems and they don't have attention from their parents. They don't even get to talk to them at the dinnertable."

EL PASO, TX

"I would have to say 'Lonely' attracts me because once in a while everybody feels lonely."

DALLAS, TX

"People not being able to understand me -- like family, relatives, or friends or anybody understanding who I really am, but wanting to see someone else, not just plain old me."

DALLAS, TX

"Growing up, I never did know my father. All the rest of my sisters knew their father. But, I'm the only one, I never did know my father. Ain't know nothing. He came around when I was seventeen. I'm now 21 so he's going to try to work his way back into my life. But, I don't call him father, daddy, nothing else you know. I call him by his name, David."

LEXINGTON, KY

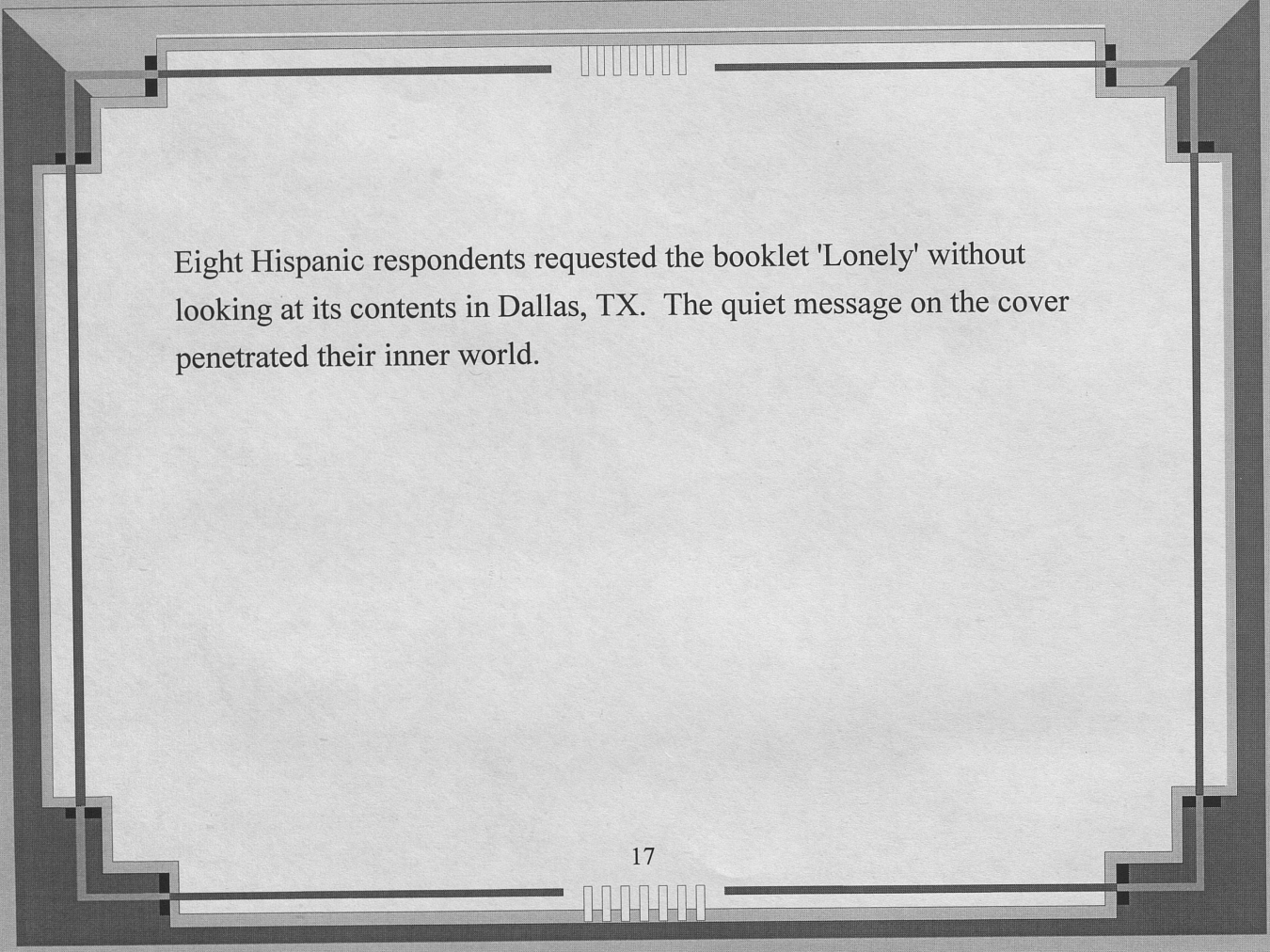
"Lonely. . . Because sometimes in life, something might occur in life and I feel lonely. So, that will catch my eye and make me want to read it."

BALTIMORE, MD

"So, I took care of him [her child]. I got two jobs. . . they weren't big jobs. I had worked at McDonalds and Downtown Locker Room and I was trying my best to take care of him. If I wasn't working, I was home taking care of him and it just gets real hard. Not hard. I mean I dealt with it. It was something to get used to. It was frustrating knowing that you didn't have the child by yourself. But, in the end I had to take care of him, anyway. And that's real frustrating."

BALTIMORE, MD

At the end of several focus interviews, colorful ABS booklets were displayed. Youth were requested to comment on what's appealing, the subject matter, format and cover design. After a brief input by respondents, the booklets would be given them upon request -- a first come, first serve basis. The only booklet requested by all eight teenage mothers in Baltimore was 'Lonely'.

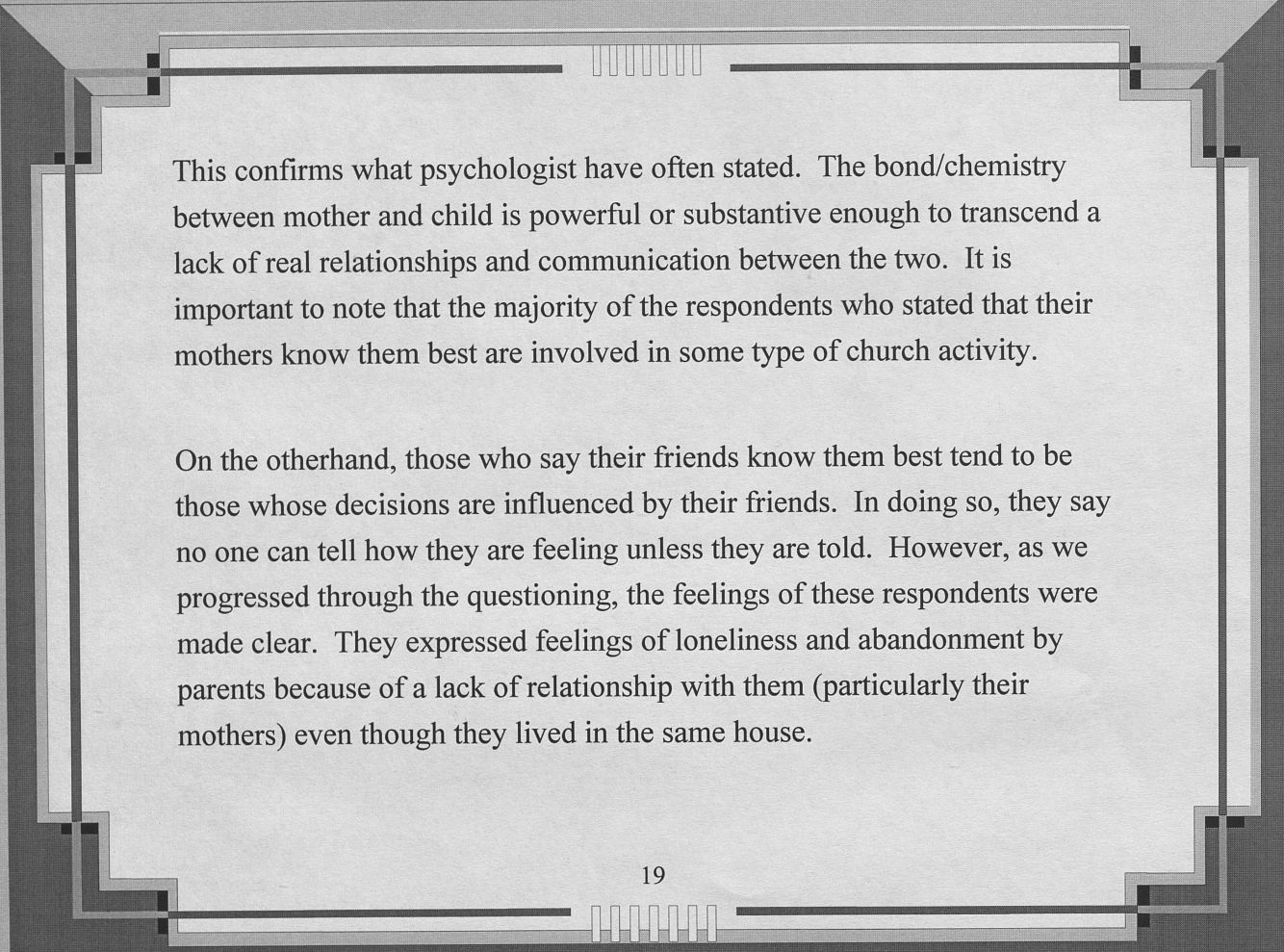


Eight Hispanic respondents requested the booklet 'Lonely' without looking at its contents in Dallas, TX. The quiet message on the cover penetrated their inner world.

Parent/Child Relationships

Respondents were asked: "Who, in their daily lives, could 'read them' or know what is going on, right or wrong?" Although several respondents revealed masterful 'masking' techniques, dominant influences emerged.

There are two dominating influences in the lives of the respondents -- their mothers and their friends. While the majority of the respondents expressed a lack of relationship with their mothers, it's interesting to note that many of the same respondents indicated that it is their mothers who can determine the feelings of the youth without being told.



This confirms what psychologists have often stated. The bond/chemistry between mother and child is powerful or substantive enough to transcend a lack of real relationships and communication between the two. It is important to note that the majority of the respondents who stated that their mothers know them best are involved in some type of church activity.

On the otherhand, those who say their friends know them best tend to be those whose decisions are influenced by their friends. In doing so, they say no one can tell how they are feeling unless they are told. However, as we progressed through the questioning, the feelings of these respondents were made clear. They expressed feelings of loneliness and abandonment by parents because of a lack of relationship with them (particularly their mothers) even though they lived in the same house.

"Arguing a lot with your parents. Especially with my mom makes me feel lonely."

PASADENA, CA

"I want to have a relationship with my son, because I don't have a relationship with my mother -- never did, never will."

BALTIMORE, MD

"'Families Under Stress' attracts me because I have a lot of stress in my family even though it's just me and my mom. We don't get along too well."

PASADENA, CA

"Trying to talk things over with your parents, but it's kind of hard talking with them because they try to make it so hard for you that you can't deal with it."

CHICAGO, IL

"It starts because maybe mom and dad argue about something and you start saying 'How come my parents argue?' Right now, my family is unemployed, and that's why you have problems and you don't get to talk to your parents a lot."

EL PASO, TX

Disappointment In Own Actions and Coping Strategies

Respondents experience a sharp contrast between the idealized world and their own reality, between espoused values and their own actions, between their knowledge of negative forces around them and their acquiescence resulting in disappointment and self-blame. This blame is exacerbated by fear of the future and hopelessness, especially for those youth without any discernible faith system. Youth who found locus of decisionmaking in their belief system (from the same at-risk circumstances) refused lapses of moral behavior and pessimism. One amazing development was the absence of any effort to transfer blame for their circumstances.

"I want my child to be responsible, respectful, but I most of all want her to have a lot of respect for herself. I want her to finish school and go to college. I don't want her to make the same mistake that both my mother and I made in getting pregnant early."

BALTIMORE, MD

"My most difficult experience is letting school push me out and forcing me to get my GED instead of finishing and trying to get my diploma. I feel that really I let them do it. I don't blame it on the white people. I'm the one that did it. I don't blame it on them. It's too late to go back, but at least go on and get my GED and try to get my life back together."

LEXINGTON, KY

"Really, I don't have no way to get out of it. I don't have no support from the father [of her child]. If I really need someone, all I have to do is ask my aunt. But, sometimes I don't want to pull her into it because I was the one that got into it."

BALTIMORE, MD

Pain and Fear Caused ByDeath/Guns

Many of the youth respondents have seen the needless death of a friend, family member or community resident. Although efforts were made to suppress the images, vivid memories surfaced.

"I try to forget I saw that dead person."

LEXINGTON, KY

"I think that the most difficult thing for me is just living in a world where other people are dying and I know that if I just do one thing wrong, I will end up like them."

SAN FRANCISCO, CA

". . .Knowing people that have gotten shot up and are arrested now; having close friends that I spend most of my life with are dead."

DALLAS, TX

"I'm still coping with the fact that they've died, but I kind of got over it a little bit. I'm just trying to keep my life clean and make sure nothing happens to me and my friends."

PASADENA, CA

"They shot this lady and this man. . . and then I was scared when I came home . . . dead body and stuff . . . on the ground . . . it was there for a couple weeks."

FORT LAUDERDALE, FL

Unwed mothers have a verbal exchange in Miami, Florida which reveals the impact of inner city life where a child is being reared:

#3: I want my son to be a gangster because he's already bad. I know this because he's going to learn from my brothers and he already sits around waiting to be with them and. . .

#5: Can I ask you a question? That's your child, your responsibility, right? You want him to be a gangster because of where you're living right? Because you see dope and gold. It don't last for long. . . they end up in jail. You shouldn't want him to be like that. You should want him to strive to be a lawyer or a president or something. He may be the first black president. You don't say you want him to be a gangster. That's not good.

#4: "If he does become a gangster, that means he won't have any respect for you personally and if you let him in your house -- your house might get shot up or whatever. And, being a gangster, they don't even live long and the money doesn't last. So, I feel sorry for you and your gangster.

#5: The stuff you see around your house -- materialistic stuff -- it's not good, it just seems good because you're young. But as you grow up and get older as we have, you will see that it's not all good and it's not cool. And guess what! . . . All the gangsters are dead! You see gangsters on TV. The boys you see around you aren't gangsters -- that's just guns!

Peer Persuasion

Respondents expressed positive and negative impact from a reshuffling of their peer groups. In many situations, the peer group becomes a haven to vent their anger toward their own parent(s). Others have practically no family system for adolescent development, so the peer group becomes an alternate family. However, the tendency for peer groups to evolve into gangs is self-evident in the following quotes.

"I think kids go out to get what they're missing at home. If they're missing love, they go looking for a friend or the most close person they have. If they're close to someone who's messing with drugs, then that's where they'll go."

EL PASO, TX

"So, you talk to one of your friends and that's how you get involved in drugs and gangs. The gang is always going to back you up, or that's what they say. But that's not true. They say they'll always be with you and give you whatever you need or something." EL PASO, TX

"Determining what I wanted to do as far as my life. . . after I had messed up in high school and got kicked out. What was I going to do, where was I going to go? And, how was I going to do that? That was very difficult because first of all, you've got peer pressure.

"Well, you should do this, man. . . Nah, you should do this. . ." And instead of looking out for yourself, you're still responding to other people. I think that was the most difficult to me."
LEXINGTON,
KY

"The most difficult thing for me is having friends who have expectations of you and since I'm a Christian, having them say that they want me to fill their own expectations, I can't because I'm a Christian. . ."

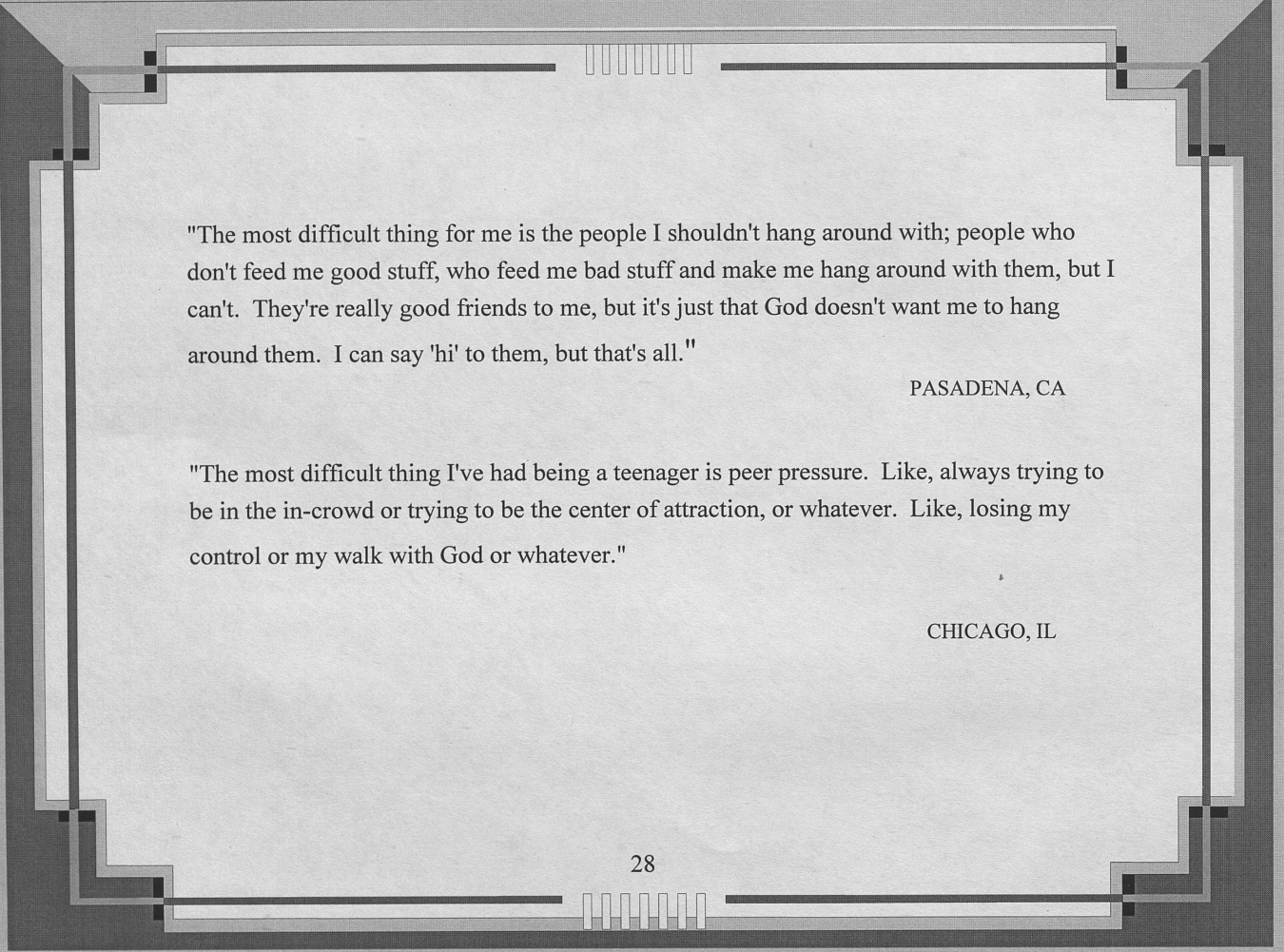
SAN FRANCISCO, CA



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our charge was to gain insights into the attitudes and prevailing feelings about the environment surrounding the lives of youth at-risk; to identify appropriate messages that speak to their needs; to identify effective communication strategies for delivering God's Word as authentic, relevant, and intimate; to ascertain what formats, media and channels are appropriate for the audience; and recommend follow-up steps for a synergistic approach to planning outreach to heritage communities.

What we found in the course of three months of primary and secondary research, field studies, and focus groups, is that youth are very lonely and feel detached from the mainstream culture. Youth experience such a contrast between the idealized world and their own reality, between espoused values and their own actions, between their knowledge of negative forces around them and their acquiescence to those forces result in disappointment and self-blame. This blame is exacerbated by fear of the future and hopelessness, especially with those youth without any discernible faith system. Youth who found locus for decisionmaking in their belief system (from the same at-risk circumstances), refused lapses of moral behavior and pessimism.



"The most difficult thing for me is the people I shouldn't hang around with; people who don't feed me good stuff, who feed me bad stuff and make me hang around with them, but I can't. They're really good friends to me, but it's just that God doesn't want me to hang around them. I can say 'hi' to them, but that's all."

PASADENA, CA

"The most difficult thing I've had being a teenager is peer pressure. Like, always trying to be in the in-crowd or trying to be the center of attraction, or whatever. Like, losing my control or my walk with God or whatever."

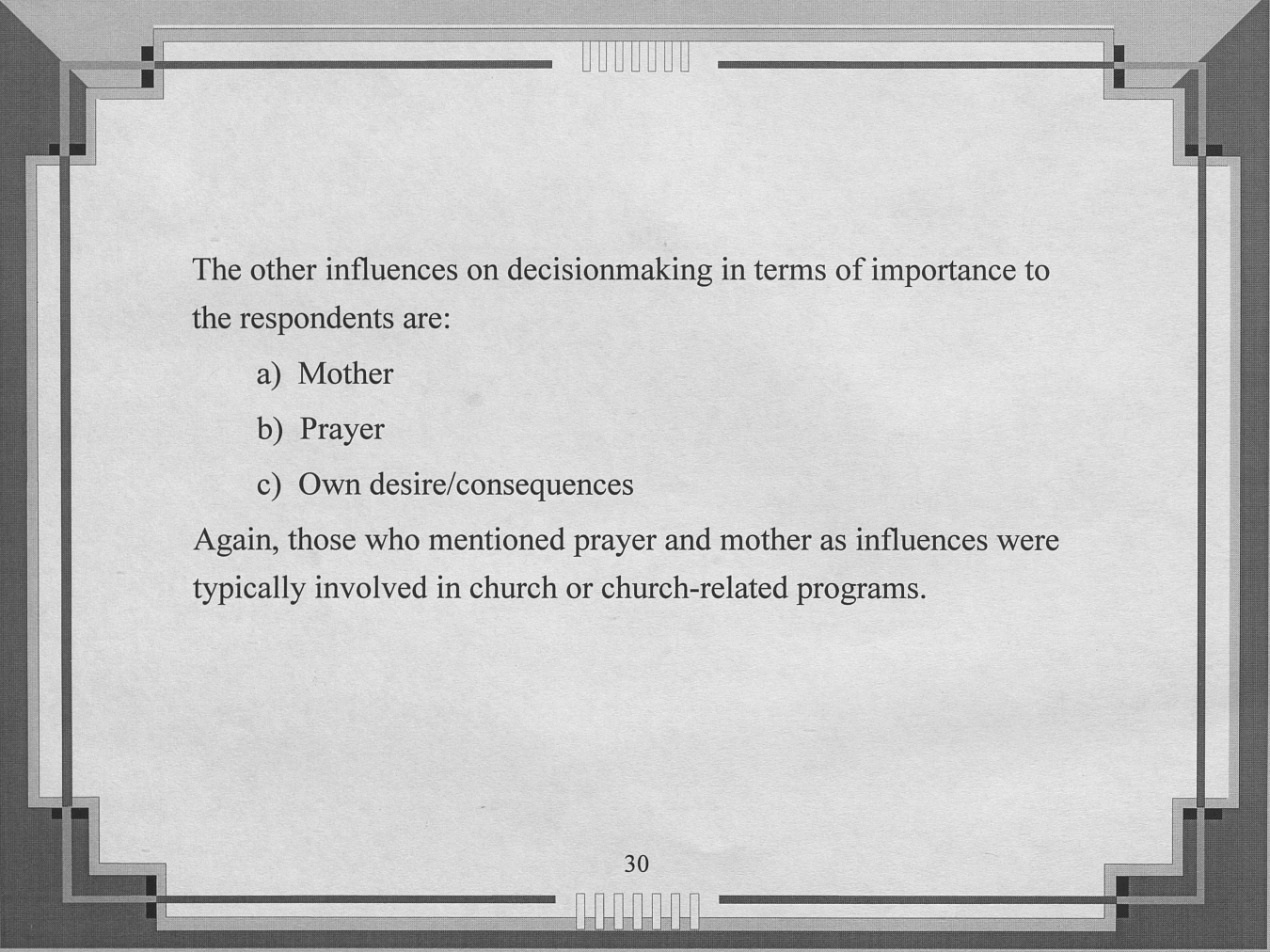
CHICAGO, IL

Inside: Decisionmaking

The greatest influence on the decisionmaking processes of the participants were friends. This influence can, perhaps, be viewed interchangeably with "peer pressure" to reflect its impact on the decisions that the respondents make. Though they overwhelmingly receive advice from friends and act upon this advice, they separate it from peer pressure. However, they have indicated that the preference is to receive decisionmaking advice from peers.

"I tell my friends more than I tell my mother because in a way, they understand. . . My friends have more knowledge of the situation and are more of an influence."

LEXINGTON, KY



The other influences on decisionmaking in terms of importance to the respondents are:

- a) Mother
- b) Prayer
- c) Own desire/consequences

Again, those who mentioned prayer and mother as influences were typically involved in church or church-related programs.

Youth - The Church

The respondents addressed two categories in their responses to the impact of the church on their lives.

The first category dealt with the positive impact of the church in their lives and community. In this category, they were able to list a total of nine positive influences on the church in their lives. However, most were mentioned twice only. Two descriptions of the church were stated more frequently than others:

- The church is a safe haven -- a home away from home
- The church favorably changed the behavior of some youth.
"The church tries to teach you to do the right thing instead of the wrong thing." "It helps you learn right from wrong. It tells you that you reap what you sow."

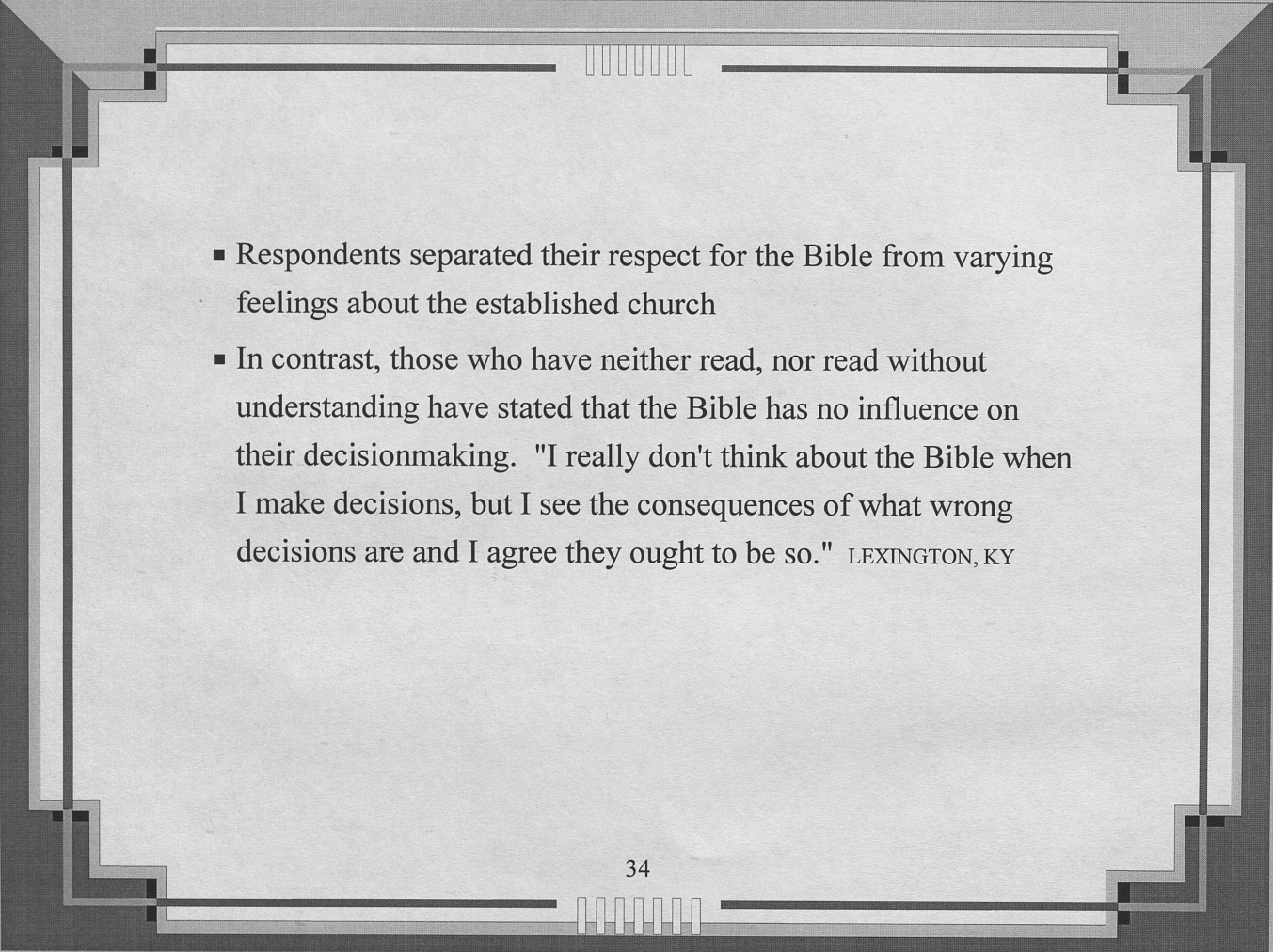
The second category of responses is the concerns the respondents have about the church. The main concerns have been listed; however, two were dominant:

- Church members and ministers set bad examples by demonstrating behavior that is contrary to Christian ethics and standards
- Church programs do not reach them

The most prevalent concern of the respondents was the behavior of ministers and parishioners. Their comments indicated a lack of positive examples from these persons and a lack of respect for them. However, it was noted that the respondents were able to separate or make a distinction between the members and the church as Christ established it and that it ought to be a haven for people.

The Bible

- The respondents who were familiar with the Bible indicated that it is the basis for establishing morals and principles for living. They also indicated that it's the consequences of sin that are presented in the Bible that cause them to try to uphold the moral standards of the Bible
- The most frequent scripture quoted was John 3:16
- The most respected book was Revelations
- The most misunderstood scripture was in Genesis: Why did Adam and Eve's disobedience make me a sinner.

- 
- 
- 
- Respondents separated their respect for the Bible from varying feelings about the established church
 - In contrast, those who have neither read, nor read without understanding have stated that the Bible has no influence on their decisionmaking. "I really don't think about the Bible when I make decisions, but I see the consequences of what wrong decisions are and I agree they ought to be so." LEXINGTON, KY

Black Males: Ages 9 - 12

Respondents in these focus groups evidenced many of the signs of youth-at-risk; particularly with difficulty in school, marginal family support and the ever-present threat of violence. At an early age, many of these boys were gang members and had witnessed death firsthand with family members, friends and neighbors. The primary influence in their decision to do the 'right thing' was governed by fear of tragic consequences and punishment for doing the 'wrong thing' or breaking the rules.

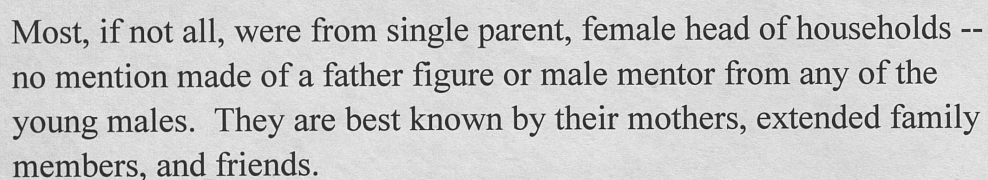
"I don't like schoolwork"

"I don't like school because I don't like the teacher"

"When I get into fights"

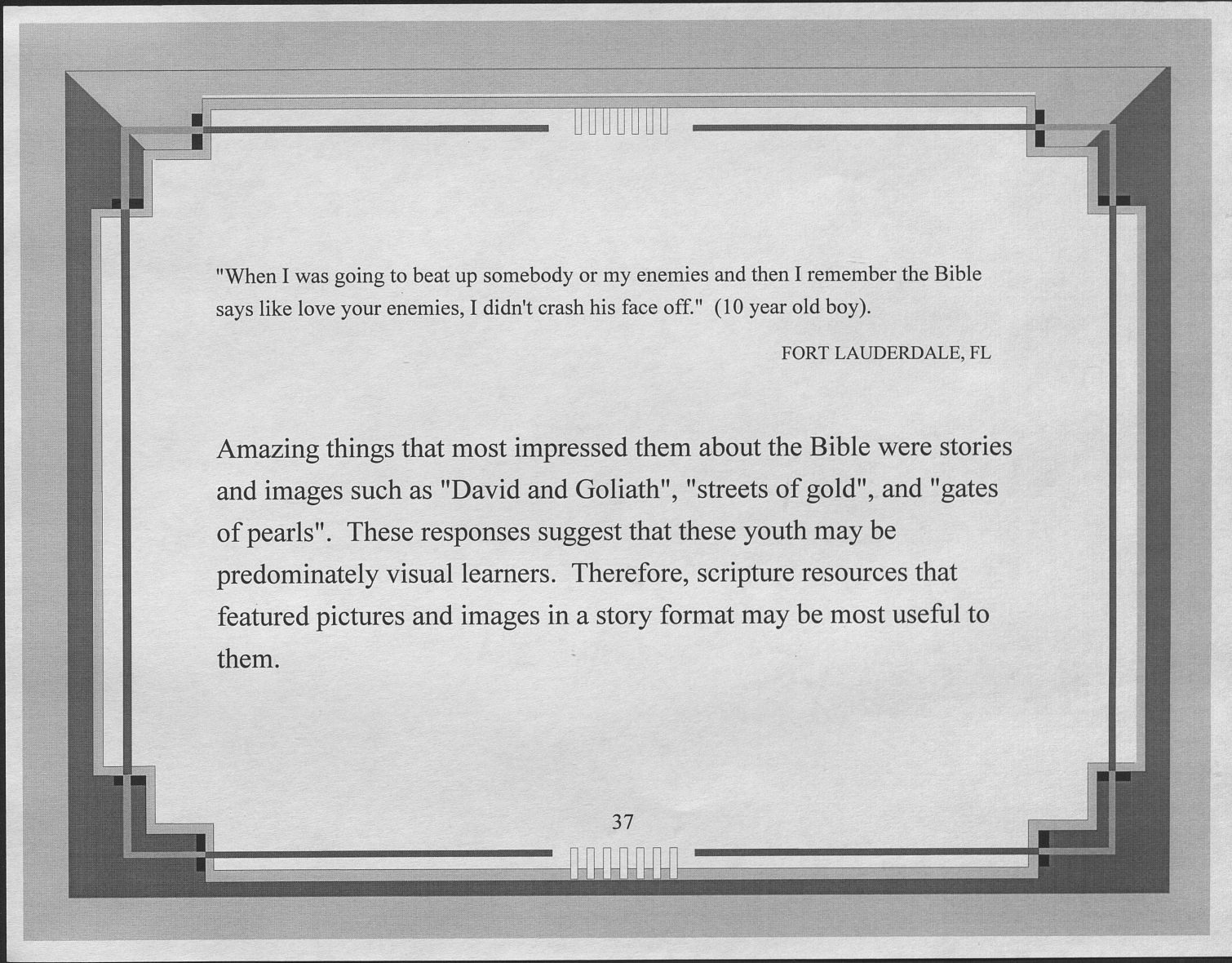
"I just didn't like how he treated my Mom. . . how he cheated on her..

LEXINGTON, KY



Most, if not all, were from single parent, female head of households -- no mention made of a father figure or male mentor from any of the young males. They are best known by their mothers, extended family members, and friends.

The Bible seemed familiar to them by rote learning or from the readings by others. It may not be safe to assume a high rate of literacy among the youth. Their reluctance to answer questions about the Bible (demonstrating their understanding of its content and messages) seemed more due to a lack of reading skills than of shyness. This would also be reflected in the application of Bible teachings to their daily decisionmaking and conduct.



"When I was going to beat up somebody or my enemies and then I remember the Bible says like love your enemies, I didn't crash his face off." (10 year old boy).

FORT LAUDERDALE, FL

Amazing things that most impressed them about the Bible were stories and images such as "David and Goliath", "streets of gold", and "gates of pearls". These responses suggest that these youth may be predominately visual learners. Therefore, scripture resources that featured pictures and images in a story format may be most useful to them.

Unwed Teenage Mothers

Respondents evidenced recessed identity formation. They vicariously focused all energies and resources towards their children while sublimating the pain of stunted emotional development. Their pain often surfaced, though craftily masked.

"So, I took care of him [her child]. I got two jobs. . . they weren't big jobs. I had worked at McDonalds and Downtown Locker Room and I was trying my best to take care of him. I would come home real late at night from work and he was still awake. My mother had to get a break because she would watch him, or my cousin. And, I got to come home and watch him. It was real frustrating, even though it wasn't his fault, but I was trying to do what was right, like get a job and take care of him. But, it seemed like it was still hard. Because my mother did all she could do. I mean, she watched him, but I still needed a break. It never seemed like I got one for a long time. If I wasn't working, I was home taking care of him and it just gets real hard. Not hard -- I mean I dealt with it. It was something to get used to. It was frustrating knowing that you didn't have the child all by yourself. But, in the end, I had to take care of him, anyway. And that's real frustrating."

BALTIMORE, MD

The code word used by the overwhelming majority of the teenage mothers in describing the lessons she wants her child to learn is 'respect' -- respect for others, for women and girls, for what is right, and for mothers. The young mothers repeatedly stated they want their child to be shown that which has not been shown to them.

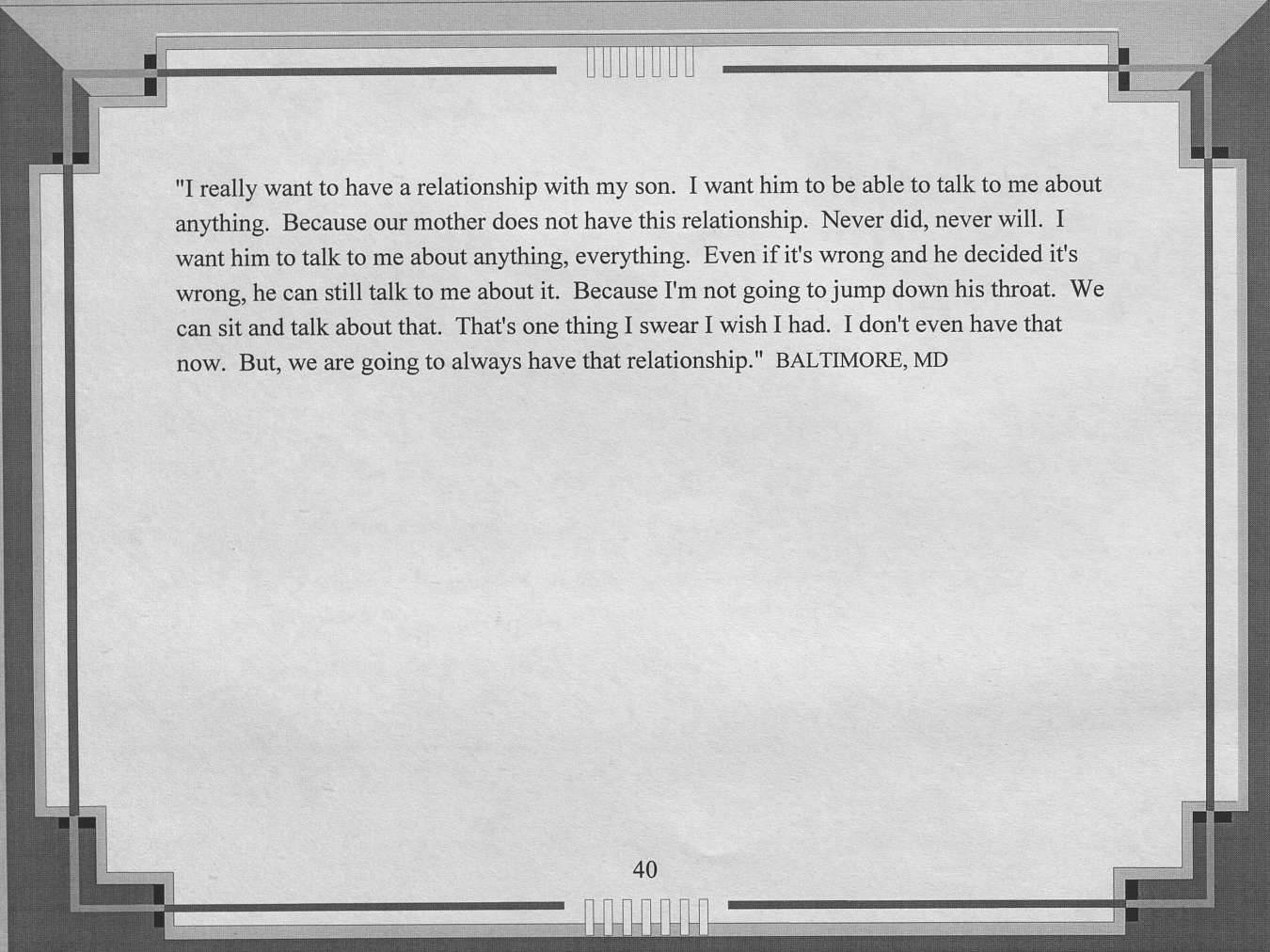
"I'm going to teach my daughter to have respect and that a teenage mother is not the right thing to do, and to get her education instead of going out having sex."

BALTIMORE, MD

"I want to teach my kids to have respect for me, have respect for others, and to go to school and don't be out there beating on no women and other things like that."

MIAMI, FL

The most pressing desire evidenced was the need for relationship, connectedness and intimacy without the pain of abandonment and violation.



"I really want to have a relationship with my son. I want him to be able to talk to me about anything. Because our mother does not have this relationship. Never did, never will. I want him to talk to me about anything, everything. Even if it's wrong and he decided it's wrong, he can still talk to me about it. Because I'm not going to jump down his throat. We can sit and talk about that. That's one thing I swear I wish I had. I don't even have that now. But, we are going to always have that relationship." BALTIMORE, MD

Second Generation Youth Concerns

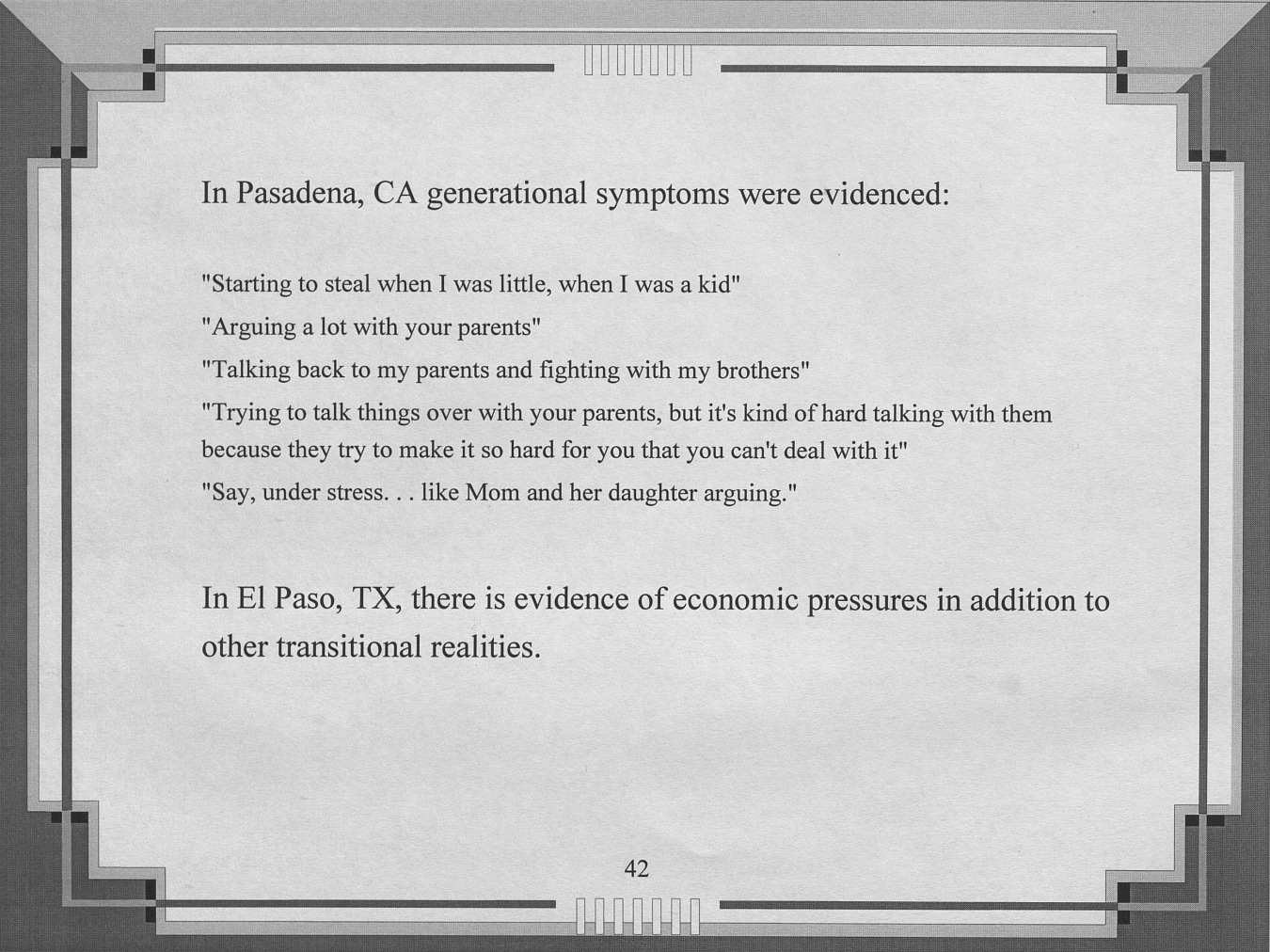
All three Hispanic focus groups revealed acculturation differences between generations exacerbated by intergenerational conflict. Evidence of this conflict surfaced immediately with painful testimonies of disappointment, failure, and parent/child conflict statements.

"People not being able to understand me"

"When I found out I wasn't what my parents had hoped for"

"What's disappointing to me -- I try to prove to my parents I can do something right and I end up hurting them; that disappoints me".

DALLAS, TX



In Pasadena, CA generational symptoms were evidenced:

"Starting to steal when I was little, when I was a kid"

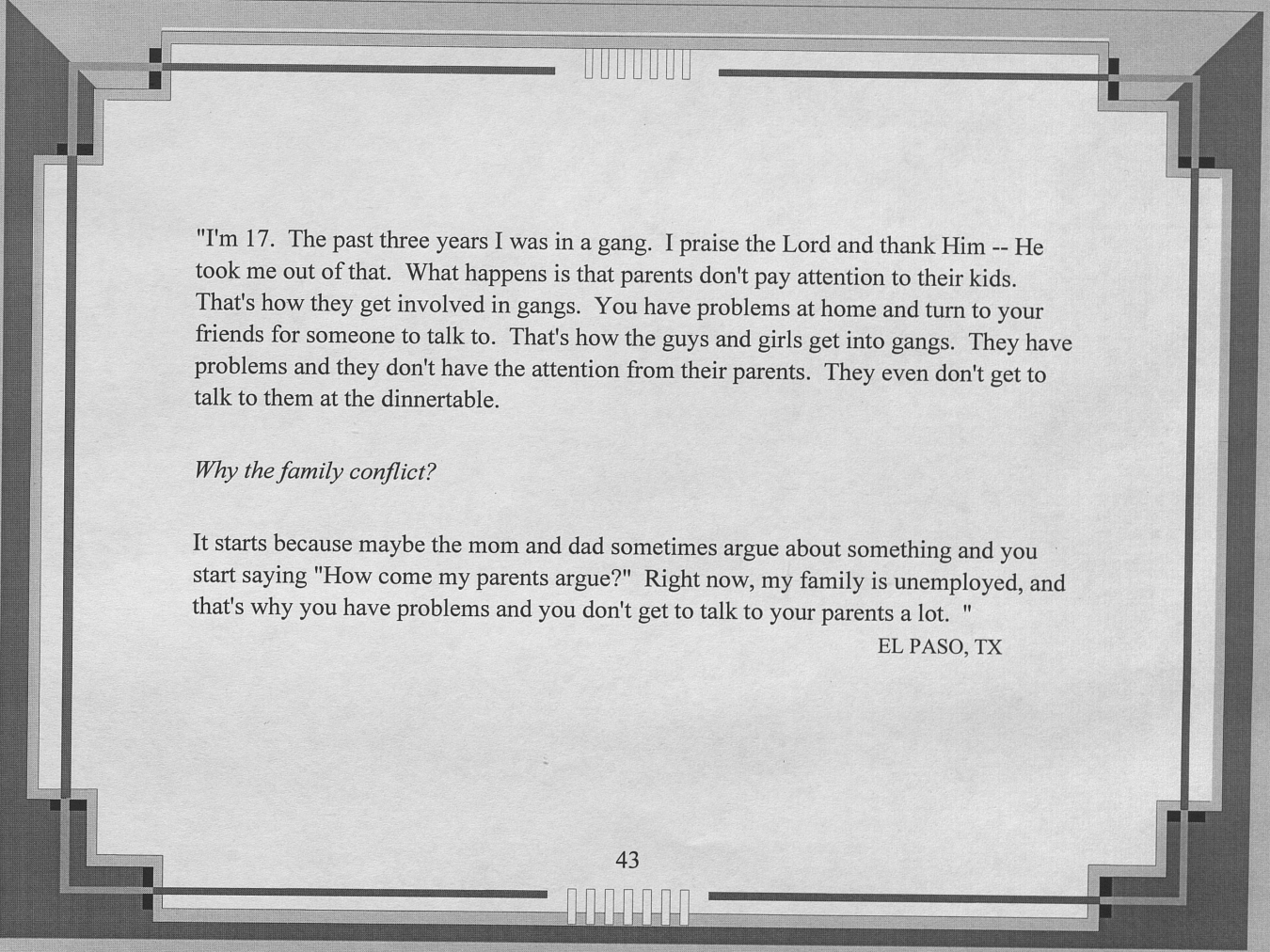
"Arguing a lot with your parents"

"Talking back to my parents and fighting with my brothers"

"Trying to talk things over with your parents, but it's kind of hard talking with them because they try to make it so hard for you that you can't deal with it"

"Say, under stress. . . like Mom and her daughter arguing."

In El Paso, TX, there is evidence of economic pressures in addition to other transitional realities.



"I'm 17. The past three years I was in a gang. I praise the Lord and thank Him -- He took me out of that. What happens is that parents don't pay attention to their kids. That's how they get involved in gangs. You have problems at home and turn to your friends for someone to talk to. That's how the guys and girls get into gangs. They have problems and they don't have the attention from their parents. They even don't get to talk to them at the dinnertable.

Why the family conflict?

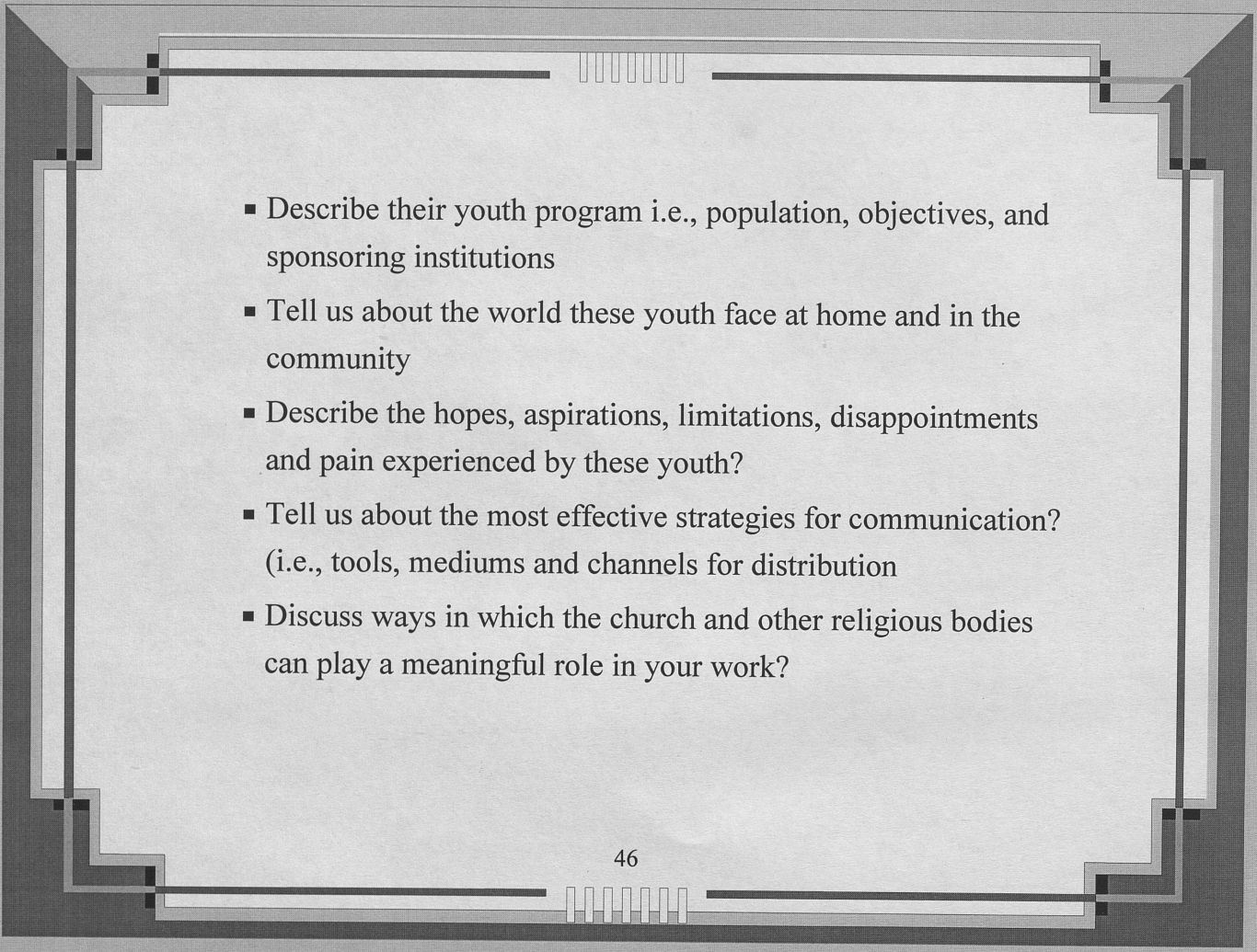
It starts because maybe the mom and dad sometimes argue about something and you start saying "How come my parents argue?" Right now, my family is unemployed, and that's why you have problems and you don't get to talk to your parents a lot. "

EL PASO, TX

Youth professionals indicate language and family traditional customs exacerbate the generational differences. These concerns extend to other second generational immigrant populations. Focus interviews with professionals working with other immigrant populations, especially Caribbean, reveal conflicts with old customs and values and the new generation. A Brooklyn, New York social worker (explains a Haitian runaway -- a 16 year old boy who violates his father's curfew. His father was inflexible, and while the son is under peer pressure, he is not at-risk at this point).

PART II
PROFESSIONAL PRACTITIONER'S
PERSPECTIVE ON YOUTH
(Counselors, Clergy, Social Workers, Youth Ministers)

Twenty-one focus interviews were conducted across America with professional practitioners. These people have daily hands-on experience -- from the Greater Miami Urban League to World Impact Inc. in San Francisco, CA. Amazingly, their responses resounded with a common refrain (thus a clear picture) of the youth environment, its causes and effects, and opportunities for change surfaced. Respondents were asked to:

- 
- Describe their youth program i.e., population, objectives, and sponsoring institutions
 - Tell us about the world these youth face at home and in the community
 - Describe the hopes, aspirations, limitations, disappointments and pain experienced by these youth?
 - Tell us about the most effective strategies for communication? (i.e., tools, mediums and channels for distribution
 - Discuss ways in which the church and other religious bodies can play a meaningful role in your work?

The following findings represent a consensus along with ethnic and geographic nuances. Some of the professionals worked with hard core criminal type youth that were not a subgroup of our youth respondents. However, this representation does provide a broader perspective.

Respondents were engaged in programs that covered pre-teen, teenage, young adults, and community programs targeting family units. Sponsorship was with public, private, sectarian and community-based organizations. Although many successful results were reported from their efforts, their focus was on the overwhelming challenges facing the kids 'that day'. A clearer perspective can be gleaned by listening to the practitioners. The following findings weighed against youth respondents findings, and paints a clear picture of cause and effect.



Perspective On The Community: 'Frenzy of Defeat' Attitude

"What I see is that this particular neighborhood and community represents and depicts much of what is taking place everywhere else around the country in terms of a '**frenzy of defeat**' attitude -- I mean, in every aspect, beginning with the home environment to the school environment."

"What we are here to do at this particular complex at Village Oaks and the community at large is to reach into that home and to stir it up in such a way, beginning with the one in charge -- the parents -- and let them know that someone cares, someone is concerned, and that there is a level of respect for them. This allows them to know that they themselves are still to be responsible, still accountable."

"If I had to describe the threshold of pain, it would be '**suffocation**'. When I say suffocation, it's like going through the process of needing air not being able to get that air or that oxygen into your lungs to breathe and allow your body to function. That's what I see -- many individuals, many families experiencing that. It may be the result of their lack of education; it may be a result of a lack of direction in the family setting."
DALLAS, TX



Perspective On Youths' Basic Needs: **Love, Involvement, Belonging, Hope**

"What happens is that people interview you who come from the middle class and I'll even see their white middle class point of view in their writings. They have different sets of values. So, I say that we need people to have a good understanding and grip on what's happening to the urban youth -- people like what you are doing now -- researching. But, more than researching too, really spending time with people and kids to begin to put some stuff together. . . things that relate to where they are. We've got to understand why these kids are joining gangs. **They're looking for 'families' -- they need love, involvement, belonging and their families aren't giving them that.**"

SAN FRANCISCO, CA

"Therefore, for them to say, 'I don't know what I want to do' to me, it's valid. Hope is no reality for them. Their perception of reality is darkened because of a lack of trust. Who can they trust?

The biggest thing for them is the fear of never being able to trust people. Because they lack this trust of others, they don't trust their own judgments. People have let them down in the past. When you ask them questions about their future, they lack focus, and prefer to live in the moment. They resist speaking about the past few years, only about today. When you try to steer their thinking, they make wisecracks."

QUEENS, NY

|||||

Perspective On Youth Behavior:
Choices That Limit Well-Being
Violence/Gangs - 'New Families'

"For some, violence/gangs become the new families. Many children are exposed to violence probably from birth. There's violence in the household, violence over the TV set, and violence right outside the front door in the neighborhood. It just keeps going and so one of the things that you know you have to begin dealing with is that the parents are the first teachers of the children."

MIAMI, FL

"Yes, I think there are family conflicts. I view them as kids who have been thrown into this world with no structure and their own folks do little for them. The streets are calling out to them, their parents are saying one thing and living another thing, and there's peer pressure. They are really confused."

BROOKLYN, NY

"Eighty-one percent (81%) of the elementary school children are latchkey. This neighborhood is crammed with canteens (beer joints)."

HOUSTON, TX

"Many of these kids are being brainwashed by crafty gang leaders who recognize their vulnerability. These leaders succeed in 'detaching' these youths from rational-based values by injecting code words permitting them to easily turn off main street values."

NORFOLK, VA

"They start recruiting these kids to be in gangs from the time they're in the fourth grade -- third and fourth. So, we've been told that if you don't reach those kids, you can say good-bye."

SAN ANTONIO, TX

"So why are they joining gangs? We have got to find a Biblical approach to relate to them. We are dealing with dysfunctional families; abusive families. Those kinds of things. And those kids need to deal with peer pressure -- not the kind of 'peer pressure' you read about in Christian bookstores. Their peer pressure is Johnny trying to get Mary into his car or Andy trying to get Frank to drink some beer. Peer pressure here is joining a gang, smoking crack, girls feeling as if they have to be sexually active to be accepted -- heavy issues that are real to these kids, but maybe not to the suburban kids."

"The problem is a lot of companies are afraid to deal with these issues. A lot of churches blockade these kinds of things because they feel it's too much for them to hear and it's offensive to people. They say they can't write that kind of stuff down."

SAN FRANCISCO, CA

" The gang member's home has the sin of enabling and perpetuating moral decay. The mother is key. Gangs establish their own laws to govern their nations -- laws referenced to selling drugs."

NORFOLK, VA

Respondents view the dysfunctional family and negative peer pressure as major detractors to youth well-being. Gangs and violence seek vulnerable youth.

Perspective On The Church:

Churches In Search Of Relevance

Respondents took the established church to task for being out of touch with urban youth, for allowing form and tradition to supersede substance, and where buildings take priority over ministries. The following clips adequately reflect their honest assessment.

"Most of these kids out here at-risk know or believe the church doesn't really care about them. We can send them off to a football or basketball game, but we will not bring them to church. What is it? We don't invite them because of their shoes, dress or class? So they don't have clothes like our kids; so they only have jeans, what's wrong with that? Bring them into church. You see, this is the kind of stuff destroying the black community. I say it all the time in this church [Shiloh Baptist Church], "Don't go outside looking for the problem -- look right here!"

LEXINGTON, KY

"With few exceptions, churches generally don't have programs in the communities they are located in."

CHICAGO, IL

"The youth here go to Penetecostal and Charismatic churches, if they go at all. It's a circus for many of them. It's a place where people try to make you be something that you are not. Crazy folk come to church to jump all around. To them, church is not cool. When they go, it is always with grandmother. When I sit down to interview them, I ask them about church. They say they don't like it; that the preacher takes all the money. These comments are also reflected by other inner city youth."

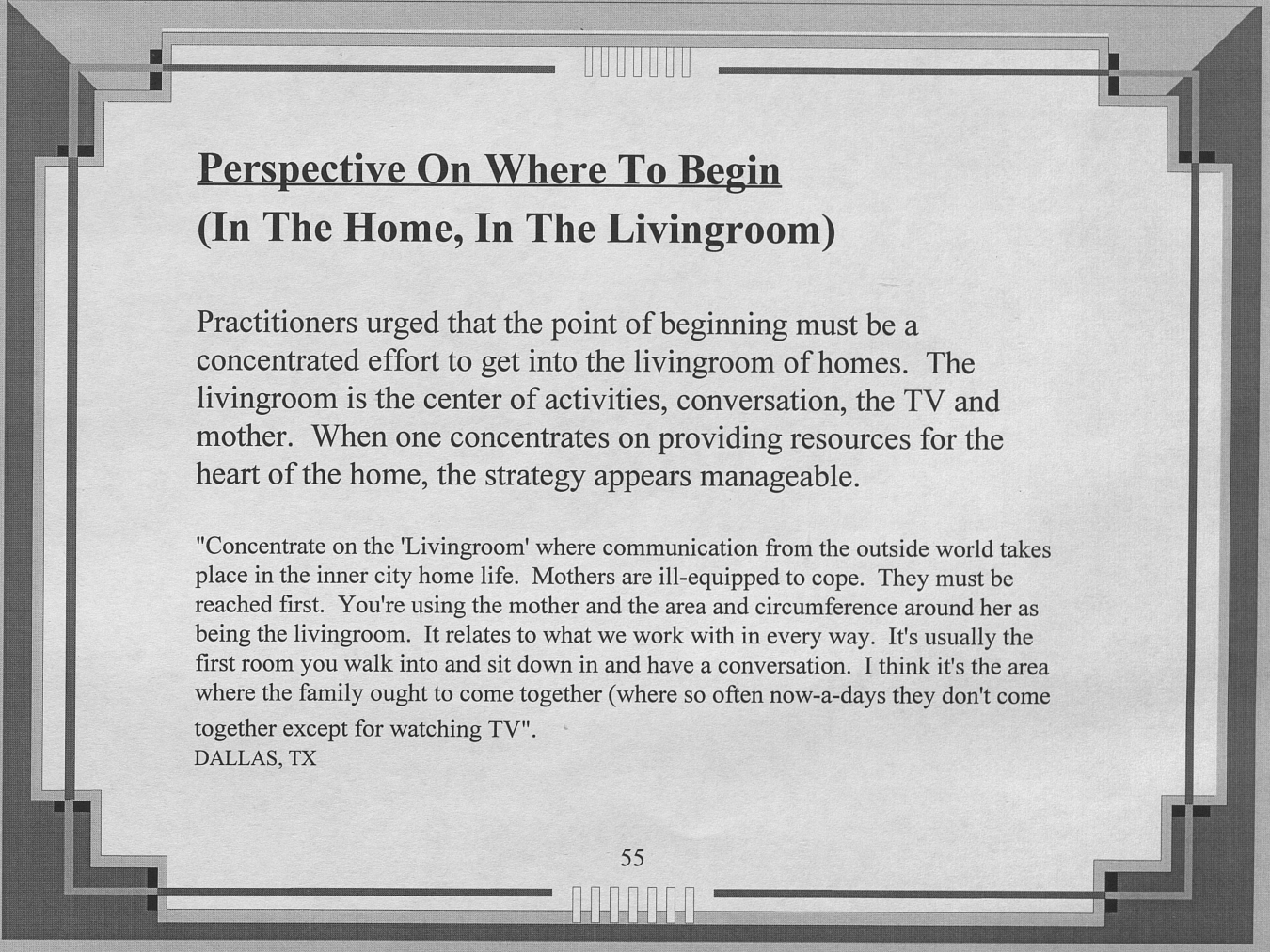
QUEENS, NY

"I think for the most part, most churches are ill-equipped to deal with it. I think that many of the problems that we see in our community we have to be very open-minded about, in terms of our approach to dealing with them. Yet, the moral fiber has decayed and is nonexistent for the most part. To go after these issues we have to do as the Bible says and begin to work with these populations, because you cannot beat them into submission and say this is the way it ought to be. I think that we sort of lost touch to what is really going on from the church's perspective. The church is here and everybody else is over there and we have forgotten about going there. We have to watch our own minds to do as Jesus did. He mingled with everybody and he was able to draw them and I think in terms of the approach that the church is going to have to take in order to be 'relevant' is that we have got to begin to understand where people are, and then bring them to where they need to be."

FORT LAUDERDALE, FL

"Could the black church make a difference if they wanted to?"

"The church in particular is structured not to do evangelism. It is not an issue of spirituality or commitment, it is just plain structure. The black church's structure prohibits effective unconditional evangelism. The church pretends and moves through historical church motions, which are detached from the at-risk population. They avoid the frontline." NORFOLK, VA



Perspective On Where To Begin **(In The Home, In The Livingroom)**

Practitioners urged that the point of beginning must be a concentrated effort to get into the livingroom of homes. The livingroom is the center of activities, conversation, the TV and mother. When one concentrates on providing resources for the heart of the home, the strategy appears manageable.

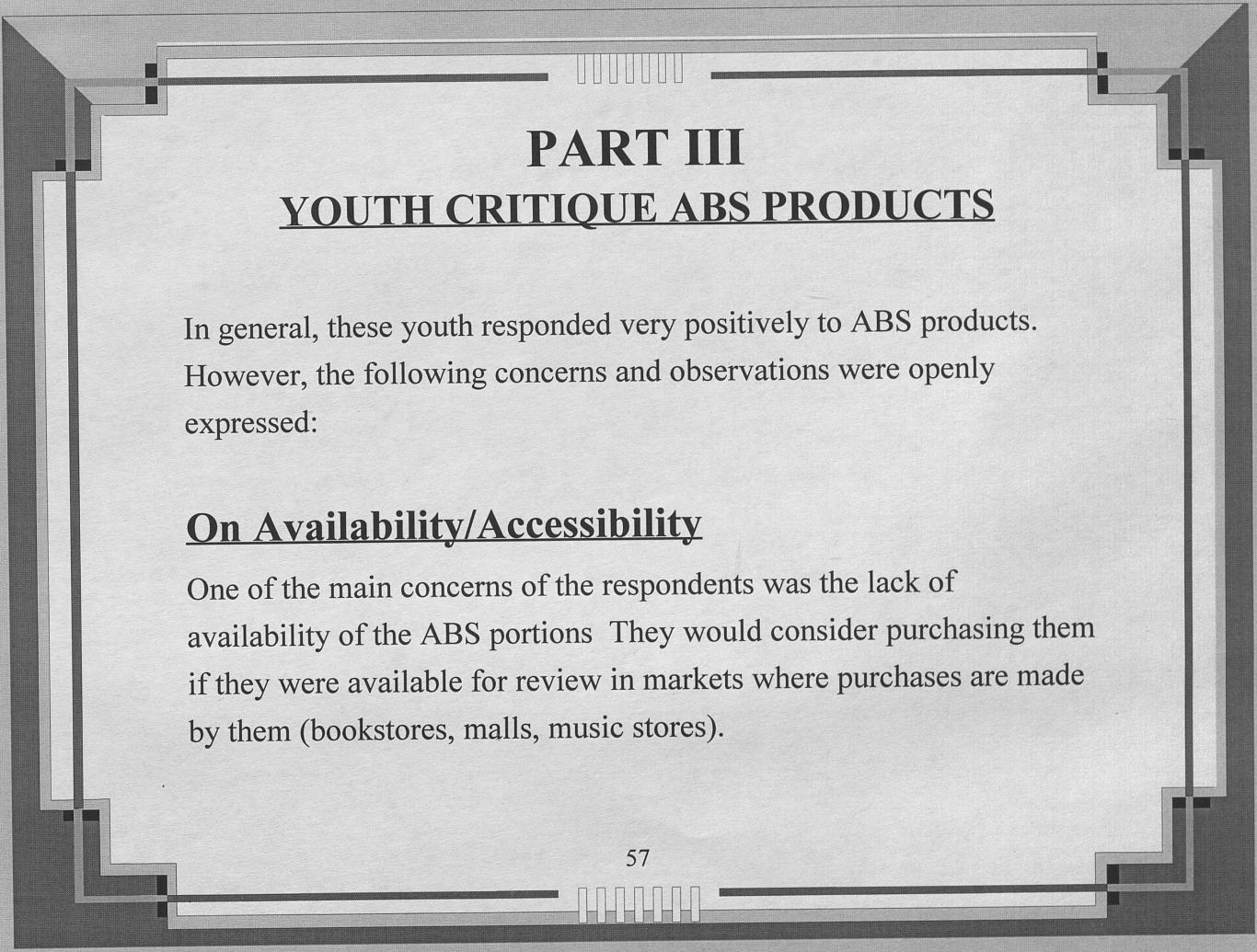
"Concentrate on the 'Livingroom' where communication from the outside world takes place in the inner city home life. Mothers are ill-equipped to cope. They must be reached first. You're using the mother and the area and circumference around her as being the livingroom. It relates to what we work with in every way. It's usually the first room you walk into and sit down in and have a conversation. I think it's the area where the family ought to come together (where so often now-a-days they don't come together except for watching TV".

DALLAS, TX

"So, we're hoping to do some ministries. We want to target young parents of very young children. Because I ask myself this question: Where did I make the difference? Well, somehow you've got to make a difference in that child's life, but you also have to make a difference in the parent's life. It's like the chicken and the egg. . . where do you begin?

I personally feel we should target young mothers, young children. A lot of our low income houses in the city are 90% single mothers with children. This is where I want to come back and say again, how do we give a compassionate and caring message and not be judgmental but still tell God's plan for us, because he wants us to be happy."

DENVER, CO



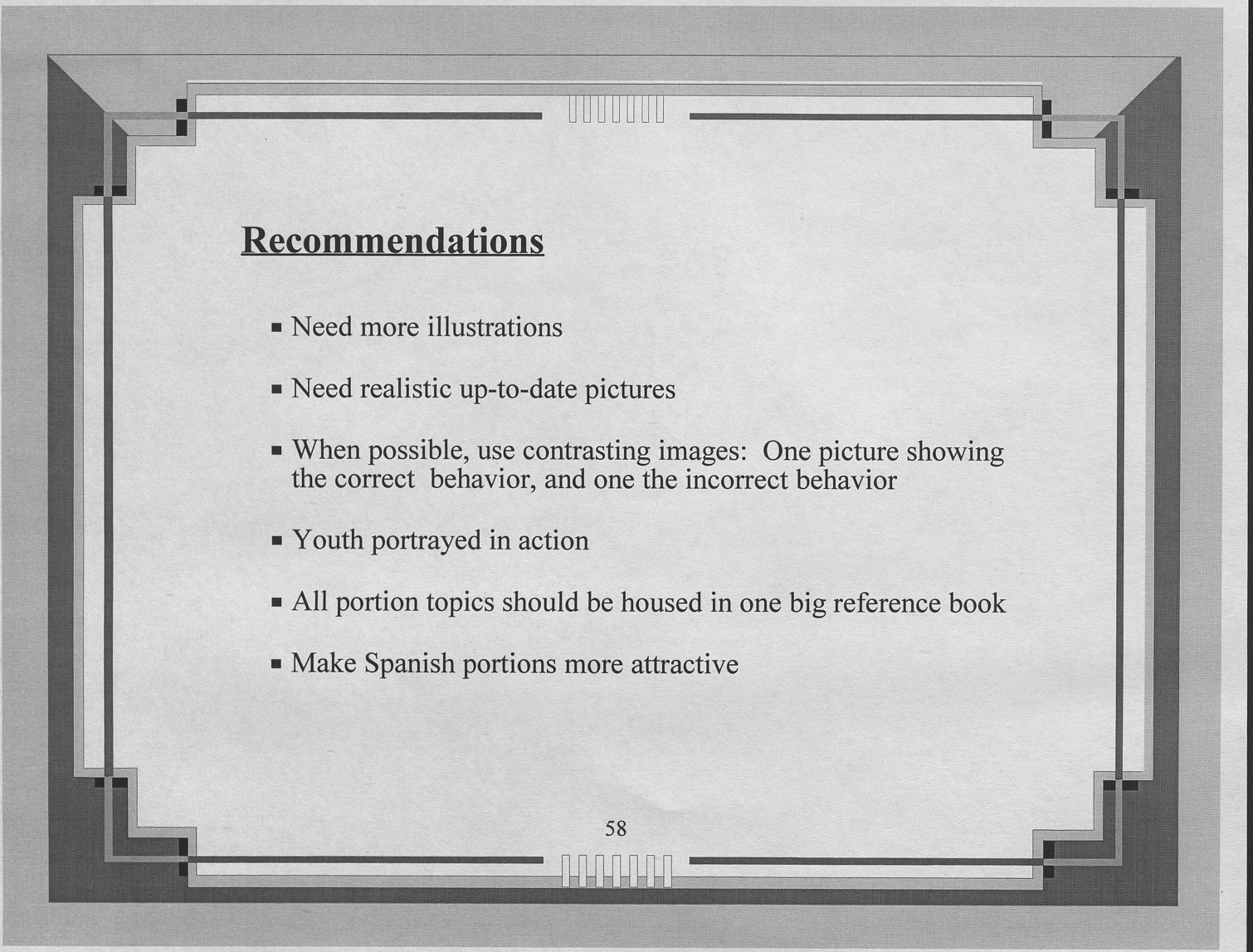
PART III

YOUTH CRITIQUE ABS PRODUCTS

In general, these youth responded very positively to ABS products. However, the following concerns and observations were openly expressed:

On Availability/Accessibility

One of the main concerns of the respondents was the lack of availability of the ABS portions. They would consider purchasing them if they were available for review in markets where purchases are made by them (bookstores, malls, music stores).



Recommendations

- Need more illustrations
- Need realistic up-to-date pictures
- When possible, use contrasting images: One picture showing the correct behavior, and one the incorrect behavior
- Youth portrayed in action
- All portion topics should be housed in one big reference book
- Make Spanish portions more attractive

Product Review (Specific Portions)

- **Peer Pressure:** Its abstract cover is ugly; it's needed by youth
- **Lonely:** Good topic because it relates to everyone; please address the causes of loneliness
- **Families Under Stress:** Needs a section about making time for family; has an unattractive cover -- maybe should have a picture of a father and daughter arguing
- **Be The Best You Can Be:** Cover looks interesting and causes you to pick it up; it's classy; put stories in it
- **I Am Somebody:** Needs a summary at the end of each chapter
- **Let's Pray:** Cover is too plain
- **Promises:** Too 'girlish' a cover; use graffiti-style of artwork to attract today's youth

CEV Critique

Respondents were given a verse in KJV to read and respond to its meaning. The same verse was given in CEV. Here are samples:

KJV

- For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them
(Proverbs 1:32)
- Put away from thee a froward mouth and perverse lips put far from thee
(Proverbs 4:42)

CEV

- Sin and self-satisfaction bring destruction and death to stupid fools
(Proverbs 1:32)
- Never tell lies or be deceitful in what you say
(Proverbs 4:24)

Most of the respondents preferred the CEV over other Bible translations. They found the simpler language easy to follow and understand. Many who said they had not read the Bible or had made attempts and became disengaged was because of the complexity of the language, and said they would read the CEV. The only concern the respondents had in regards to the CEV was its cover.

On CEV's Cover

"Why in black? That doesn't catch people's attention and make them feel happy and it doesn't make them feel anything. Why black? Of all the colors out there, why black? That's why I don't really like the book. I mean, I like black as clothes and stuff, but this caught my eye because it seems happier ['God Loves You']. It talks more by itself than this one did. So, why don't you make this [CEV] like this? In the CEV, it doesn't show anything."
DALLAS, TX

"These colors are for older people."

"They're for conservative people. Teenagers pay attention to everything."

DALLAS, TX

On CEV's Clarity

"That's cool and everything; but of course, now, if I'm sitting up in church and the sermon, he [the preacher] wasn't preaching or anything, he was just reading strictly from the Bible, "Yea, though I shall seeketh not for what thy saith". . . Of course, I'm not going to understand it. I'm going to be cocked up in the corner going to sleep somewhere. But, if you break it down like this and everything [points to the CEV] that'll make us understand it".

LEXINGTON, KY

Product Concepts

Respondents offered product concept tools in response to meeting the unmet spiritual needs of teenagers. It was established without exception that we do not have adequate tools for today's inner city youth/families. The following recommendations were reinforced constantly.

The Need

"I think that one thing you'll find out by talking to people that have been in urban ministries before is that they do their own stuff. You find that across the board. You grab what you can grab and modify it. You make it irrelevant. Every so often, you find something with

so-called urban connotations and it's written by some middle class publishing company. You look at it and it's laughable. They stereotype. It's insulting how they come across and I think you find things and you modify them into the needs of the kids".

SAN FRANCISCO, CA

Finally, value-based scripture resources emphasizing character development was recommended as a deterrent in stopping the violence that hazards life in the inner city. It was further suggested that this is another market niche that ABS may be able to fill.

Visuals

Respondent's request for visual communication was a complete consensus. When youth were asked to relate one of their favorite Bible passages as stories, they were visual ones:

'Streets of Gold'

'Gates of Pearl'

'Turning people into pillows of salt'

'Adam and Eve eating the apple'.

A big reason for their need for visuals is because of its immediacy. These kids require instant comprehension. Other respondents call for posters that truly connect with the language of the intended audience.

The CEV

Respondents who had access to the CEV were universal in their praise of the CEV translation. The following comments provide a summary:

"I am excited with the CEV New Testament. Its timing is perfect for this generation's primer of God's Word. I have in my possession a hand-written letter from a woman sharing how the CEV met a need in the life of some Hollywood producers. Produce as many products as you can using the CEV! I have found it to be excellent in my personal ministry!" HOUSTON, TX

"I have very good luck with my CEV -- in fact almost every one of my children have asked for a CEV Bible." FORT LAUDERDALE, FL

Relevant Tools

How would you design tools to complement this ministry?

"I'm glad you asked that question. The biggest problem with Christian material is that it is either outdated or not relevant to the population. What the kids need is 'relevance' -- that is making the gospel so clear to the home situation. The fact that:

- 
- > Mom is on welfare
 - > Dad is an unknown
 - > Big brother is out selling drugs
 - > Sister has to shoplift to bring food home
 - > I don't read very well
 - > I have been abused as a child.

I think the materials now are an outcome from a "fairytale world". Everything is so rosy, and for these kids, they realize that that is not their world.

I personally believe that's why the gangster rap is so popular, because it speaks a message of real life to more of them than you realize. The person who is rapping gives their abridged interpretation of life".

QUEENS, NY

Engaging Projects

"Develop 'mission impossible' assignment projects to keep youth engaged in creative ways -- projects that will force them to experience the lesson. (Example: carrying a 5-pound bag of sugar daily to vicariously assume the load of a pregnant woman)." HOUSTON, TX

"So, now we have to look at the alternative medium. First of all, can the child read? Yes. You need participation. Like they have the *Hooked on Phonics*. We can teach kids to read the way they use the *Hooked on Phonics*. So, the same way they used the *Hooked on Phonics*, you can use the same medium to teach the Word of God. You can create the morals. Remember Dick and Jane? There's Adam and Eve -- it can be the same concept."

DENVER, CO

Videos and Interactive Mediums

"Communication strategies should devise 'interactive mediums' such as drama or hands-on leads."

PASADENA, CA

"Concentrate in interactive videos/computers."

CHICAGO, IL

"Use 8-minute framed videos -- the American public is conditioned to a break every eight minutes."

HOUSTON, TX

What channels of communication are most effective in reaching the population?

"Without doubt, the video format is the most effective. Everybody has a VCR. However, the second would be the computer interactive programs such as those currently in production at ABS."

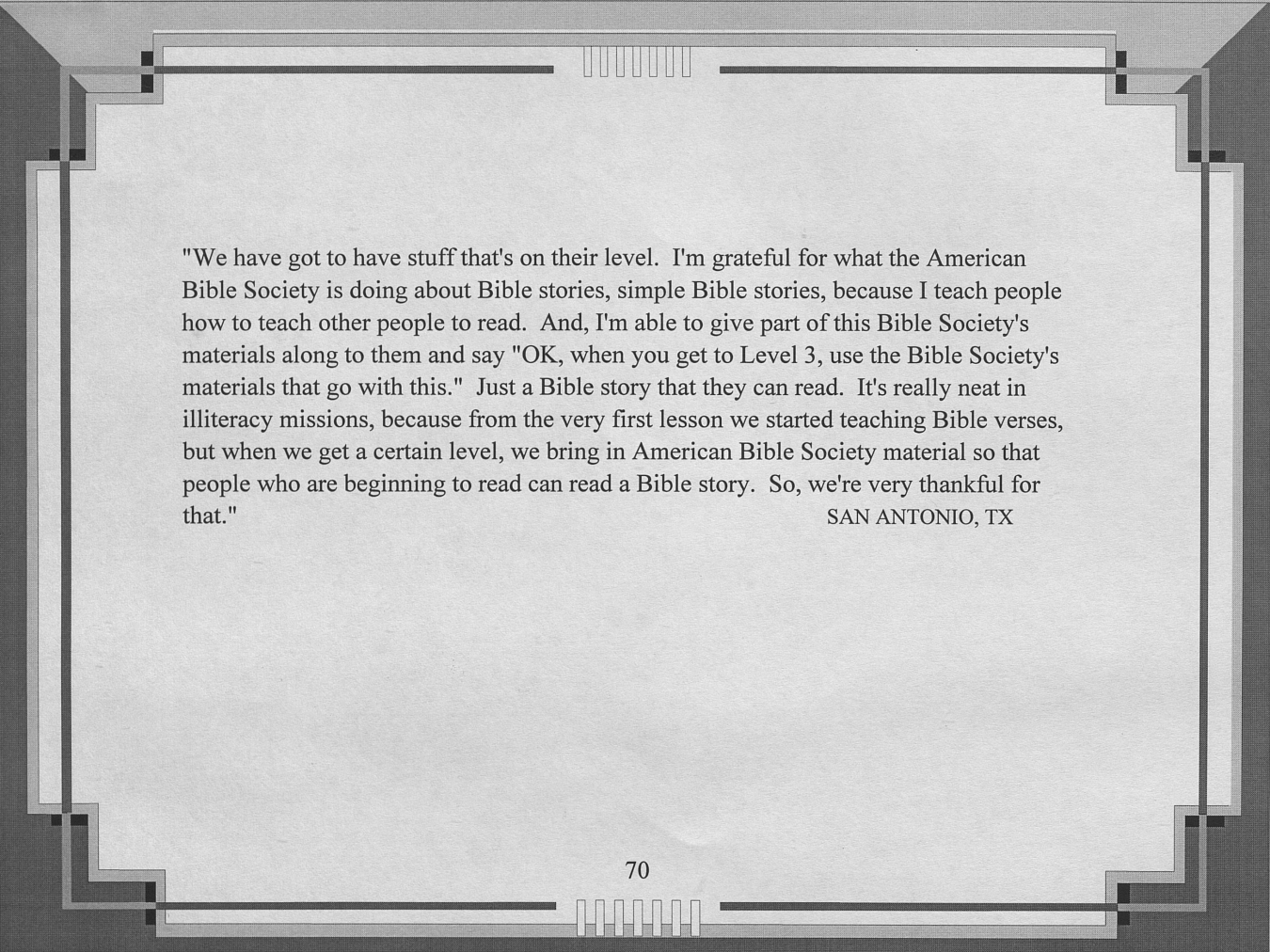
ATLANTA, GA

"Whether that's entertainment from a fireworks-type of perspective or just simply something that will catch the eye and gain the interest of a particular person. Visuals are an effective teaching tool. It's something that would help in any possible way. These types of things are important not only for teenagers, but also for the real youngsters say, the 9 to 12 age group."

DALLAS, TX

Bible Stories

Respondents requested simple Bible stories whereby groups can create contemporary drama. This product can be used in camp settings and after-school programs.



"We have got to have stuff that's on their level. I'm grateful for what the American Bible Society is doing about Bible stories, simple Bible stories, because I teach people how to teach other people to read. And, I'm able to give part of this Bible Society's materials along to them and say "OK, when you get to Level 3, use the Bible Society's materials that go with this." Just a Bible story that they can read. It's really neat in illiteracy missions, because from the very first lesson we started teaching Bible verses, but when we get a certain level, we bring in American Bible Society material so that people who are beginning to read can read a Bible story. So, we're very thankful for that."

SAN ANTONIO, TX



PART IV

RECOMMENDATIONS

The American Bible Society is in a unique position to address the needs and concerns of the at-risk population -- the focus of this research. The primary requirement to reach and meet the needs of any target market segment is to extract as much data as possible from that segment so that products and services are produced to address their immediate needs, wants, and/or concerns. The information gained from this research can be instrumental for ABS to guide its efforts in producing need specific scripture products with appropriate messages, so that the at-risk market segment will be receptive to God's Word as it applies to them and their situation/culture/environment. The products must represent what the audience feels and how it thinks.

The findings of this research capture the mindset of this market segment. A picture of their world is painted which clearly illustrates their pains, frustrations, concerns, and desires. The American Bible Society can take advantage of this information to develop scripture products

to address these issues, thereby creating and finding its market niche. We, therefore, make the following recommendations for future research and product development.

Prototype

(1) We recommend that ABS design and circulate prototype materials targeted to the at-risk audience. These prototypes should address specific needs/concerns of this market segment. The purpose of the prototype for market testing is to determine:

- a. If the product meets a specific need
- b. If the message is clear
- c. If the format is acceptable
- d. If there are other uses for the product
- e. If there is need for change, refinement, or elimination of the product in its current packaging.

(2) That Volunteers explore new frontiers in community-based ministries to youth.

(Examples):

- > Latchkey children
- > After school programs
- > Grandparent's programs
- > Intergenerational Programs
- > Livingroom Ministries

(3) That the Office of Development explore a possible relationship between this research and the *Foundations for Hope* concept.

(4) That the 1995 CEV launch include a strong Heritage component designed to reach urban youth.

(5) That immediate steps be taken to ascertain information from denomination/parachurch institutions as to the status of their programs designed to serve the urban youth population. Research will seek to determine:

- a. What programs are planned or in place?
- b. What Scripture Resources are being used and planned?
- c. What channels of distribution they utilize?

(6) That Multimedia Translation explore how its products can be adapted to meet some needs of targeted audiences in this research study. (For example):

THE VISIT -- Audience: Unwed Teenage Mothers



APPENDIX

Definition of At-Risk Youth

A young adolescent would be considered:

"High Risk" if he/she grew up under any of the antecedent risk conditions and is currently displaying one or more of the risk markers

"Moderate Risk" would be assigned to these youth who are either living under any of the antecedent conditions or are currently displaying one or more of the risk markers

"Low Risk" would be assigned to young adolescents who are not living in negative antecedent conditions and who are not displaying those negative behaviors which are risk markers.

Antecedents (Environmental)

1. Poverty
2. Neighborhood
3. Family Dysfunction

System Markers (Visible in Public Schools)

1. Poor school performance
2. Child protection/out of home placement

Problem Behavior (The potential to hurt)

1. Early sexual behavior
2. Truancy
3. Use of tobacco, alcohol, other drugs
4. Running away from home or foster home
5. Associating with delinquent peers

Outcomes (Negative consequences)

1. Pregnancy
2. Homelessness
3. Prostitution
4. Abuse of drugs
5. Dropping out of school
6. Committing of felonies
7. Low self-esteem, depression, suicidal thoughts
8. Physical abuse
9. Death or permanent injury from guns and other violent acts

(Source: Urban Institute 1990, *Youth At-Risk*)

Volunteer Institution Participation

The following institutions provided assistance in this Research Project in some manner:
Focus interviews, facilities, transportation, referrals, participant recruiting, etc.

Black Churches Coalition, Lexington, KY

Church In The City (City Life Youth), Denver, CO

City of NY Dept. of Social Services, Child Welfare Adm., Community and Family
Preservation, Brooklyn, NY

Colorado Uplift, Denver, CO

Eastside Baptist Church (Southern Baptist), Atlanta, GA

Foundation of Reconciliation and Development (Harambee), Pasadena, CA

Greater Miami Urban League, Miami, FL

Here's Life Inner City, New York, NY

Hispanic Association of Bilingual Bicultural Ministries, Pasadena, CA

more. . .

... more

Howard Payne University, El Paso, Tx
The LaVillita Community Church, Chicago, IL
Lawndale Community Church, Chicago, IL
Lexington Kentucky Housing Authority, Lexington, KY
Love Line Ministry, Fort Lauderdale, FL
Micro City Government, Lexington, KY
Morgan State University, Baltimore, MD
New Life Fellowship Church, Queens, NY
The Paquin Public School of Baltimore, MD
Rocky Mountain Jurisdiction (United Methodist Church), Denver, CO
San Antonio Baptist Association (Southern Baptist), San Antonio, TX
Southern Florida/Restoration Council, Inc., Fort Lauderdale, FL
more...

... more

Templeo Maranatha (Assemblies of God), Hollywood, FL
Union Baptist Association (Southern Baptist), Houston, TX
Urban Alternatives - Village Oak Ministry, Dallas, TX
Urban Discovery Ministries, Inc., Norfolk, VA
World Impact Inc., San Francisco, CA