MEXICAN AMERICAN / CHICANO GANG MEMBERS' VOICE ON SOCIAL CONTROL IN THE CONTEXT OF SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY: A CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY IN STOCKTON, CALIFORNIA

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By
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More than anything I dedicate this dissertation to my grandson Lorenzo (Nondi) De La Cruz. His birth and presence in my life are truly the reason for my existence. I hope that when he is old enough to understand the importance of education, he will appreciate the significance of this degree and what it allowed me to accomplish during my remaining years.

Last but not least I also dedicate this work to my daughter Jessica and hope she will soon come to the realization that she comes from prime stock.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to examine what role social control, in the context of family, school, and community, played in the participants' decision to join gangs in their adolescent years. The study examined the lives of four male ex-gang members over the age of 18, with extensive criminal records and poor academic histories. Participants were chosen from a Stockton reentry facility where ex-offenders were in the process of improving their lives by breaking the chains of street gang involvement, criminality, and incarceration.

The findings revealed that social control administered by family, school, law enforcement, and community all played a significant role in shaping each participant's decision to join his prospective gang in adolescence. The researcher found that while the family life of the participants was the prime mover in terms of a nudge toward gang life, school was also a place where they were constantly devalued, in large part because educators did not understand them, and the teachers arrived to their classrooms ill equipped for the realities of teaching in schools located in violence-ridden neighborhoods where the youth suffered morbid and multiple exposure to trauma. In fact, the teachers and law enforcement's inept ways of addressing the participant's maladaptive behaviors—with a propensity for handling all issues with punitive measures—ended up creating incentives for the participants to join a gang.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE EFFECTS OF GANG VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES

> The ongoing gang violence in the surrounding community has distracted students from the school's mission of trying to develop a college-bound culture. 'We are at the epicenter,' McKinley School Principal Sonia Ambriz said. 'Our children are being directly and indirectly affected. The children are talking about it in their classrooms. The horrible violence is taking over their thoughts' (Phillips & Ried, September, 2011 p. A4).

Gang-related activity, real or imagined, often filters into our public schools from surrounding neighborhoods. This violence frequently produces fear in students of becoming victims of street gang violence, creating a sense of dread prevalent in many schools and communities throughout our nation. The terror of street gangs is not uncommon nor should it be surprising, given that street gang members are repeatedly blamed for committing much of the violence that takes place in schools, cities, and rural areas of the United States. Time and again, the mere mention of a street gang presence in any community can amplify tensions in surrounding schools and communities, even though street gang members themselves may not be directly responsible for any or all of the violence.

Students' alarm concerning the possibility of becoming victims of violence is supported by the study conducted by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention

(2007), where researchers found that as many as 5,764 young people between the ages of 10 to 24 were murdered nationally on a yearly basis–an average of 16 each day. Although the report does not specify that the young people killed were actually murdered by street gang members, it does provide evidence that the trepidation students' experience of becoming victims of violence in their schools or communities is very real.

Adding to the hysteria surrounding school violence is the growing number of school shootings that have taken place across the nation during the past four decades. Ironically, the first school mass murder occurred in the city of Stockton, California, on January 17, 1989 in Cleveland Elementary School. The gunman, Patrick Purdy, who had a long criminal history, shot and killed five schoolchildren and wounded 29 other schoolchildren and one teacher before committing suicide (Mathews, 1989, p.1). Approximately ten years later, on April 20, 1999, the Columbine High School killings in Colorado took place. Two senior students, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, murdered a total of 12 students and one teacher. They injured 24 additional students, with three other people being injured while attempting to escape the school. Just like Purdy, the pair then committed suicide (Lamb, April 17, 2008).

Next came the March 21, 2005 Red Lake Senior High School massacre that occurred on the Ojibwe Red Lake reservation in Red Lake, Minnesota. Early that morning, 16-year-old Jeffrey Weise, an Ojibwe student, first killed his grandfather and his grandfather's girlfriend at their home. Weise then proceeded to kill a tribal police officer before driving to Red Lake Senior High School where he had been a

student some months before and murdered a teacher and five students (Huffstutter, March 24, 2005). This shooting was followed by the Virginia Tech bloodbath on April 16, 2007 in Virginia (Shapira & Jackman, April 17, 2007). School mass murder continued and on December 14, 2012, the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting to place in Connecticut (Barron, December 15, 2012). Again, it is important to note that none of these random killings had anything to do with gang violence, but these atrocious acts do serve to intensify students' fears of becoming victims of violent crime. Given that gangs have been associated with much of the violence that takes place on campuses and communities, it is easy to understand why people, including students, are so afraid of being victims of street gang violence.

Today's apprehension of present day street gangs was not always an issue in the United States. In fact, prior to the 1960s, there was very little attention placed on the existence of street gangs or street gang-related violence. Three federally commissioned studies concluded that street gangs were not of major concern nor did they pose a significant threat to the populace (Miller 2001, p. 3). In the 1970s, there was still very little interest in street gangs, with only 20 states and 73 counties in the United States reporting problems with street gangs (Miller, 2001). Not much changed during the early1980s and problems associated with street gangs continued to be almost non-existent and the limited street gang problems of that time period were characterized as a minority problem in most cities of the United States (Miller, 2001).

During the mid-1980s however, things changed dramatically, especially in California, where street gangs became such a quandary that the Street Terrorism

Enforcement Prevention Act (STEP) was enacted in 1988 to curb the escalating street gang crisis. What is more unfortunate is that the increasing street gang trend in California has spilled over onto a national level and street gangs can now be found in all 50 states (Egley, 2005). In fact, the growth of street gangs in California has become so widespread that gangs are considered somewhat of an institution, especially among minority populations, particularly within Latino communities (Vigil, 1993).

Supporting the proliferation of street gangs is a survey conducted by the National Gang Threat Assessment (2009), which revealed that there were approximately 1,000,000 street gang members and over 20,000 active street gangs in the United States. Of the law enforcement agencies who responded to the survey, 86% of the police departments from larger cities, 51% of those from urban counties, 33% of those from smaller cities, and 15 % of those from rural county police departments reported problems with street gangs. As previously noted, gangs and gang-related crime have increased dramatically in the past two decades. But, the increase in crime may not be attributed to gangs at all and is nothing more than unrelenting post-civil rights era attacks that have been unleashed against large numbers of African Americans and Mexican American/Chicanos especially on Youth of Color who live in impoverished areas (Mauer, 1999; Reiman, 2001; Russell, 1998; Cole, 1999; Jackson & Rudman, 1993; McCorkle & Miethe, 2002; Tovares, 2002).

For example, Rios (2011) pointed out that many young African American and Mexican American/Chicano youth who live in lower social economic areas are often

targeted and looked upon as deviant by police, school administration, and the community, based simply on where they live. Rios stated that these youth are victims of what he defines as the youth control complex: “A system in which schools, police, probation officers, families, community centers, the media, businesses, and other institutions systematically treat everyday behavior of young people of color as criminal activity” (p. xiv) even though the behavior might not be criminal at all.

The relentless harassment by school administration and teachers, the police, and other institutions within their communities seems to have led many Youth of Color to develop an aversion toward educational institutions. Nolan and Anyon (2004) found that many students of color who attended schools where street gangs are prevalent typically see little difference between prison and school. This was true particularly with youth who already had experience with the criminal justice system and who had been targets of harassment resulting from punitive social control policies practiced in many of the schools they attended. The researchers went on to declare that the only significant difference between school and prison for these marginalized students was that they were able to leave school at 3 p.m., whereas prison is 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Under the circumstance previously stated, one can see why some Youth of Color would band together in their neighborhoods to create a safe haven for themselves against the powers that be. In fact, Brotherton and Barrios (2004) stated that street gangs

> are formed largely by youth and adults of a marginalized social class which aims to provide its members with a resistant identity, an opportunity to be individually and collectively empowered, a voice to speak back to and challenge the dominant culture, a refuge from the stresses and strains of barrio ghetto life, and a spiritual enclave within which its own sacred rituals can be generated and practiced. (p. 23)

Duran (2006) indicated that he

> sees gangs, as the definition has been applied and adopted by certain segments of the population, as an economically and ethnically and racially socially disempowered group of people who reside in segregated areas that are not located in the areas of the dominant population. (p. 4)

There does not seem to be any question that the United States is grappling with an enormous street gang problem and that there does not appear to be an end to the continuous increase of street gang membership across the country. Therefore, it is vital that we find answers as to why street gangs have propagated at such a rapid pace during the last four decades.

Local Background of the Study

The primary purpose of this research was an attempt to understand the lived experiences of four Mexican American/Chicano self-disclosed street gang members in Stockton, California. The interest to conduct this study arose from the dramatic rise in local violence attributed primarily to gang members in this metropolis. During 2011-2012 Stockton, California experienced an escalating problem with violence that

local law enforcement agencies and news media sources associated with street gangs by. In 2011, there were a record-breaking 48 murders followed by an unprecedented 71 people killed in 2012.

Figure 1. Stockton California homicide record rates (Goldeen, 2013).

Stories of senseless, brazen, violent acts committed in broad daylight filled front-pages of the Stockton Record (the city's local newspaper) and headlined local evening newscasts two or three times a week. The bloodshed on the streets of Stockton made street gang violence all too close for comfort for many law-abiding residents. Throughout the carnage of 2012, law enforcement officials continuously maintained that many of the slayings and shootings that were taking place were gang-related and that the increase in violent crime was fueled primarily by street gangs. In addition to the 71 murders there were also 397 survivors of people who had been shot during 2012 (Goldeen, 2013).

In a telephone conversation with this researcher, a Stockton Police Department (SPD) officer assigned to the Gang Violence Suppression Unit (GVSU) pointed out that the murder rate in Stockton increased by 18% from 2010 to 2011 and

that there was also a nine percent spike in aggravated assaults during that same time period. He went on to state that 52% of all violent crimes in Stockton between January 2012 and August 2012 had been committed by a street gang member and that an additional three percent of the violent crimes committed during that time period had all the earmarks of gang affiliation. That same SPD officer emphasized that Mexican American/Chicano street gangs were primarily the problem, but that street gangs in general had an iron grip on different parts of Stockton, particularly in the central sector of the city. He maintained that his claim concerning the large number of gangs and gang members could be supported by the street gang graffiti found in areas where these street gangs thrive (Stockton Police Department Gang Suppression Unit Officer, personal communication, August 10, 2012).

Comprehending the significance of graffiti is essential to understanding street gangs. Valdez (2000) indicated that in neighborhoods with a strong street gang presence, it is common for street gang members to mark their turf using graffiti. Valdez further maintained that street gangs frequently use graffiti to declare their dominance over a particular area of a community. He also emphasized that tattoos are another method gang members use to make their street gang membership known to others as well, suggesting that tattoos are commonly used by street gang members to intimidate non-gang members and street gang members alike in gang infested areas (Valdez, 2000).

Street gangs and their dangerous nature is well documented (Huff, 1990; Vigil, 1988; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Miller, 2001) and in a city with a

population of 296,357 (U.S. Census, 2010), Stockton is allegedly home to some 70 different street gangs with approximately 3,300 street gang members (SPD Gang Suppression Unit Officer, personal communication, August 10, 2012). This large number of street gang members is purportedly the main reason for Stockton's high rate of violent crime. After all, street gang researchers (Huff, 2004; Thornberry & Burch, 1997) consistently found that gang members commit a disproportionate amount of crimes when compared to delinquent non-gang members. Moreover, Amato and Cornell (2003) found that street gang members are far more likely to die at the hands of another street gang member than delinquents who are non-gang members.

Nevertheless, this researcher did not uncover any empirical research or data specifically linking the rise in violent crime to street gang members specifically in the city of Stockton. The lack of data or literature supporting the assertions being made by law enforcement and news media sources, that street gang members are responsible for much of the violence in Stockton even though crime rates across the nation remain at the lowest levels recorded since 1973 (McCarthy, 2009), brings into question the methodology used by law enforcement and news media sources to validate these type of allegations. Could it be that it is simply easier to place culpability on street gangs for the increase in violence rather than to investigate the deeper complex structures of the ethnic and socio-economic factors involved in this dilemma?

Statement of the Problem

This critical ethnographic study of four self-disclosed Mexican American/Chicano street gang members focused on the problem of street gangs and their relationship to social control. The intent was to examine how social control influenced participants' behaviors and how social control impacted their lives in the context of school and the broader community. The interviewees were asked to give their perspective on their lived experiences regarding control by their families, school administrators and teachers, law enforcement, and the communities where they lived. This study also touched on the increase of violence in the city of Stockton as it pertains to gang members.

In order to investigate the many issues associated with this problem, the researcher delved into the deep-rooted phenomenon of social control through the processes of human domination manifested in the historical and continued un-equitable and classist experiences of both African Americans and Mexican Americans/Chicanos (Douglass, 1845; Duncan–Andrade, 2007).

Although the focus of this study was limited to adult Mexican American/Chicano males, the decision to address both African Americans and Mexican Americans/Chicanos in this segment was based on similar past events of domination that have limited the opportunities for both of these groups for socio-economic integration into conventional society (Rios, 2011). The complexities within the issues of human dominance by one group over another touch all minorities of lower socio-economic classes. It also appears that the continual attempts to socially

control African Americans and Mexican Americans/Chicanos by the dominant society and other entities such as family, school, law enforcement, and community has led directly to the present situation where African American and Mexican American/Chicano youth rebel against being repeatedly labeled deviant, suspended or expelled from school, and incarcerated at disproportionate rates (Rios, 2011).

The ubiquitous harassment by family, school administration, law enforcement, and the broader community, and the violence within these communities has affected many Youth of Color. As a result of the high exposure to violence, many of these youth (street gang members or not) may exhibit elevated rates of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms. In fact, more than one quarter of children exposed to this type of trauma, watching someone they know being murdered or violently assaulted, develop this clinical syndrome characterized by four clusters of symptoms: 1) intrusive thoughts, 2) reenactment of the precipitating event, 3) avoidance of cues related to the trauma, and 4) distraction or hyperactivity (March, Amaya-Jackson, Terry, & Costanzo, 1997).

Historically, intergenerational transmission or communication of violent trauma and related psychopathology often manifests itself through violence (Coates, Rosenthal, & Schechter, 2003). More often than not, African American and Mexican American/Chicano males are at a higher risk to be either victimized or victimize someone based on the socio-economic areas where they live (Rios, 2011). In addition, the social disorganization caused by poverty, discriminatory practices toward these two groups, lack of employment opportunities, forced living in deplorable housing

areas, and inadequate academic preparation has created a pressure cooker often resulting in violence amongst these two groups. It appears that much of the violence in Stockton during 2011-2012 was Black on Black, Brown on Brown, or African American against Mexican American/Chicanos.

This is substantiated by the fact that the majority of the murders committed in Stockton during 2011 and 2012 were primarily of young African American and Mexican American/Chicano males. For example, between January 1, 2012 and August 12, 2012, there were 57 homicides committed in Stockton. Of those individuals murdered during that time period, 30 (53%) were Mexican American/Chicanos while 14 (25%) were African Americans, accounting for 78% of the homicides in Stockton (Stockton Record, January 13, 2013, p. A1).

The violence between these two groups has produced a profound distrust, wide divisions, and intense inner-ethnic prejudices. Moreover, the huge number of violent acts that occurred during 2011 and 2012 in Stockton produced a deepening terror by Stockton citizens of becoming victims of violence perpetrated by young men from these two ethnic groups, developing a wider gap between Young Men of Color and Whites. In fact, the violence in California has created such a panic that politicians were compelled by their constituents to institute stricter laws and legislative policies that are even more severe and have made California a national leader of incarceration rates. This gang hysteria by the general public against young African American and Mexican American/Chicanos males has resulted in a culture of mass incarceration of these two groups (Davis, 1999).

An economic condition that had heavy impact on Stocktonians was the 2008 housing foreclosure bust. At the height of the foreclosure, one in ten houses fell to foreclosure in Stockton and the city became known throughout the nation as Foreclosureville, USA (Business Huffington Post, October 14, 2013). Many of the foreclosures throughout the state were disproportionately African American and Mexican American/Chicano family homes (Bocian, Li, & Ernst June 18, 2010).

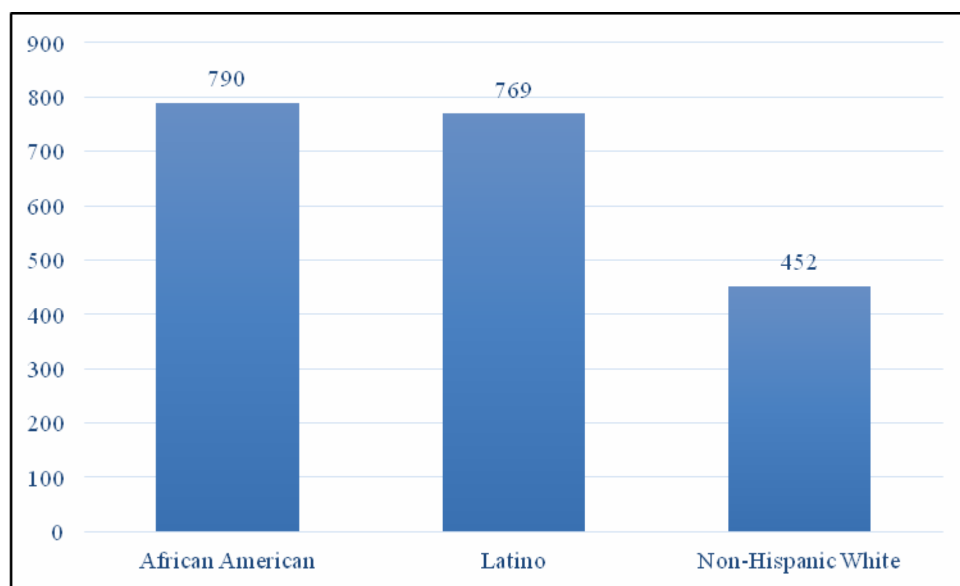

Figure 2. 2007-2009 foreclosure rates per 10,000 loans.

On the other hand, anyone visiting Stockton may not immediately notice just how much the city has suffered with the many issues associated with economics. After all, it boasts a downtown Regal Cinema City Center 16 Cineplex with a mixture of handsome, century-old and modern architecture buildings and a new sports arena. Stockton even has a promenade overlooking the city's marina. Nevertheless, the housing crisis changed the city for the worse and in 2012, Stockton became the largest United States metropolis to ever declare bankruptcy. Entire neighborhoods

were decimated by the mortgage disaster, shrinking the tax base drastically and forcing the city to cut services and slash municipal employment positions. Police officers lost their jobs, which in turn decreased public safety and left many people, mostly those from lower socio-economic areas, to defend themselves from harm.

Furthermore, Stockton had an overall unemployment rate of 14 percent compared to the 7.9 percent national unemployment rate during 2012. The unemployment rate in Stockton for African Americans and Mexican American/Chicanos, however, stood at an alarming high rate of 17.8 percent and 12.9 percent respectively (Adams, 8/29/2012).

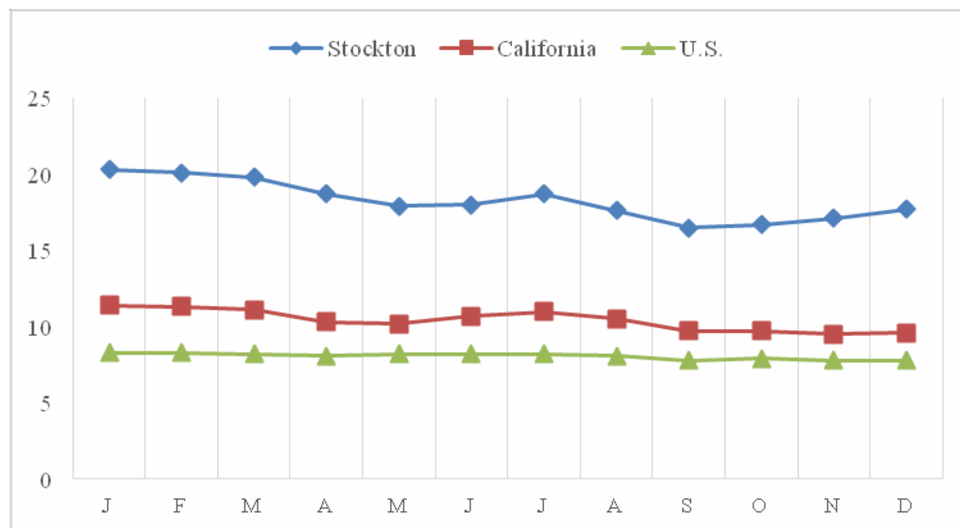

Figure 3. 2012 unemployment rates by city, state, and country.

Stockton schools were also impacted by the economic downturn, especially those in lower economic areas. It is also not uncommon to find students who attend Stockton Unified School District (SUSD), a White-Flight district consisting predominately of African American and Mexican American/Chicanos, residing in areas that expose them to violent and unpredictable environments every day. Many

young people who live in the impoverished areas of the SUSD are confronted daily with the acute possibility of violence and premature death. This fatalistic mentality experienced by Youth of Color is supported by a study conducted by Krivo and Peterson (1996) where they argue that students of color are repeatedly consigned to racially segregated neighborhoods where they are more than likely to experience victimization.

For the African American and Mexican American/Chicano student who has experienced long-term educational underachievement, the fact that approximately 59.4% of the SUSD faculty are middle-class Whites with only a White student population of 2.8% (Ed. Data, 2010-2011) might be interpreted by African American and Mexican American/Chicano students as a form of coercive power that demonstrates White control.

It is not surprising that most teachers who teach in SUSD are White given that 85 percent of the teachers in the U. S. have historically been White (Grant & Secada, 1989). Indeed, the vast majority of teachers who teach in "underperforming schools," (a term coined by the federal government and a label consigned to many SUSD schools) are White. Most of these educators do not live in the communities where they teach. The majority of these teachers are and were raised primarily in middle class neighborhoods, which further supports their inability to comprehend the daily struggles of their students lives (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1978). Digging deeper, it is actually quite understandable how "underperforming schools" end up with educators who do not reside in the school districts where they teach. African American and

Mexican American/Chicano students often attend schools that perpetuate and foster negative self-worth and create feelings of powerlessness and inadequacy in the student (Campbell, 1980).

As a result, many Youth of Color do not graduate from high school (Ed. Data, 2010-2011). In fact, two out of three Black males will be convicted of a felony and serve time in prison (Alexander, 2012), which will take away any opportunity they may have had to ever serve as teachers or work in school systems. This is a socially exclusionary and self-perpetuating gate keeping system that prohibits men and women of color from ever serving as teachers in the schools that raised them or where they live.

Ladson–Billings (1995) stated that another problem African American and Mexican American/Chicano students face is the constant devaluation of their culture, both in school and in the larger society. This devaluation is due largely because many educators do not understand these students and most teachers arrive ill equipped for the realities of teaching in schools located in lower socio-economic areas. This unpreparedness is often confused as incompetence and teachers are criticized unjustly for it. But it is unreasonable to expect any teacher to educate students who come from different cultural, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds without appropriate training. If we are to reach these students, it is crucial that teachers be trained and educated concerning the conditions, values, and cultural heritage that mold the students they teach.

Another layer of difficulty for the Mexican students who have recently arrived into the United States and speaks Spanish only, is that they are placed in an educational system they do not understand. To compound their incomprehension, they are often required to study in English only, with little to no language support, which makes their academic and social integration into the U.S. educational system even more complex.

Documenting Gang Members

There are ten criteria that the Stockton PD uses to validate street gang membership. The most commonly used criteria are: 1) self-admission, 2) tattoos, 3) associating with known gang members, 4) wearing colors associated with a known gang, and 5) field interviews conducted by police officers. Any three of these criteria can result in validation, except self-admission, which results in instant validation by itself.

To date, there is no uniform system being used by law enforcement across the country to identify an individual as a street gang member. Field interview is the primary mechanism used to document street gang members. This practice places many Mexican American/Chicano youth in a quandary, due in large part to the fact that Mexican American/Chicano culture often reflects many of the same core values of their native Mexican culture. One central value is the bond made by the individuals to their community and to other families for a communal type support system, which strongly values interdependence, not independence. As a result of this type of connection, Mexican Americans/Chicanos develop a trust among each other and a

type of closeness that has been important to the Mexican American/Chicano community for centuries. These cultural connections between families often create associations that support and strengthen their community (Organista, 2003).

From a law enforcement perspective, this interdependence between individuals living in Mexican American/Chicano communities can be misinterpreted as gang-like. Since mere association with documented street gang members is another of the principal factors used by law enforcement to label a person as a gang member, this core value imported from Mexico and passed down from one generation to the next has often times become a liability for many Mexican American/Chicano youth.

As noted previously, the current system of documenting street gang members is not uniformly administered and thus opens the door for injudicious application. In the last 25 years, however, the state of California launched what is known as the CalGang Database. Initially, this database was designed to house and keep current all documentation on the growing number of street gang members in the cities of West Covina, Pomona, and the unincorporated area of East Los Angeles (Muniz, January 22, 2013).

Since its development, CalGang moved beyond the initial boundaries to become the central database used throughout California to identify, document and track street gang members. Pictures and information collected through field interrogations, routine police stop and frisks are entered into the database. Once the information is recorded, the individual being labeled an active street gang member or associate is never notified by any law enforcement agency that this new incriminating

designation has been assigned to them. For anyone who is a minor, the parent or guardian is rarely, if ever, notified that their child has been documented a street gang member.

Muniz (January 22, 2013) found that over 200,000 people across the state of California have been documented street gang members and that one in ten of all African Americans between ages 20 and 24 in Los Angeles County have been entered into the CalGang database and documented street gang members. There are people as young as ten years old in the CalGang database.

CalGang can be accessed by any California police officer and enables police officers to make instant assessments of a person who they may be detaining for a justifiable or unjustified reason. The officer can, at any time, determine if additional information should be entered into the database that could further incriminate the person being documented a gang member.

Muniz (January 22, 2013) further stated that individuals need only fit into two of the ten criterions listed below to be entered into the CalGang database. This inclusion can be made even without the person ever being arrested or accused of any criminal activity. Although there is no consensus between law enforcement agencies across the state, CalGang does have a specific criterion for documentation of street gang membership:

1. Admits to street gang membership or association.
2. Is observed to associate on a regular basis with known street gang members.

3. Has tattoos indicating street gang membership.

4. Wears clothing, symbols, etc., associated with a specific street gang.

5. Is in photograph/s with street gang members and/or uses street gang-related signs.

6. The individual's name is on a street gang document, hit list, or street gang-related graffiti.

7. The person is identified a street gang member by a reliable source.

8. Person is arrested in the company of street gang members or associates.

9. Corresponds with known street gang members about street gang activity.

10. Writes street gang graffiti on walls, books, paper, etc. (California Street Terrorism Act, 1988).

As previously noted, the requirements for street gang membership or association are not uniform across the State of California. CalGang attempted to suggest consistent ways to measure gang membership by the development of the criteria above. Nevertheless, each city and county law enforcement agency in the state was not mandated to use the criteria. On the surface, the criterion developed by CalGang appears to be balanced and comprehensive. Unfortunately, many people are documented for inappropriate reasons by police enforcement who at times wishes to harm or impugn the character of someone they do not like in the neighborhood. There are not enough safeguards to protect those who cannot defend themselves from these closeted accusations. Moreover, the notion that police officers have a sort of sixth sense about the deep underlying nature of the gang culture —as a result a 40 or 60

hours of gang training or patrolling the streets—is an insult to those folks steeped in the African American and Mexican American/Chicano cultures, as well as those folks who have spent years studying the economic and political dynamic of the sustained culture as it relates to society (Giroux, 2012; Vigil, 1988; Rios, 2011). People on the inside of a culture have a perspective on their association within the community while police officers offer only a perspective of that association as they drive by in their cruisers making deductions about clothing and hand gestures and tattoos and body language on people they do not understand. Yet, society relies entirely on the limited observational quality of the 'outsider' police officer experience. The fact is that many youth and adults alike, who live in areas where street gangs thrive, happen to interact with documented street gang members all the time simply because they are neighbors, school friends, or relatives.

Moreover, the clandestine nature and manner in which the CalGang database is utilized by law enforcement to document street gang members clearly demonstrates that people from lower socio-economic neighborhoods are unfairly targeted by police. For the individuals who are wrongly labeled street gang members, the mark can have negative effects that will follow them like a dark shadow for the rest of their lives (De La Cruz, 2011).

The SPD, like many other police departments throughout the state, draws from the CalGang criterion. However, SPD uses any three of the criteria as the decisive factors for identifying street gang membership in Stockton: 1) tattoos associated with specific street gangs (e.g., 13 for Sureños or 14 for Norteños); 2) Red

clothing primarily used by Mexican American/Chicano Norteño gang members or by Bloods (an African American street gang) or the color blue for Mexican American/Chicano Sureño street gang members or the Crips, (an African American street gang); and 3) associating with known street gang members (Gang Suppression Unit Supervisor SPD, personal communication August 10, 2013).

According to the previously noted SPD Gang Suppression Unit Supervisor, Stockton has approximately 3,900 gang members citywide. It is therefore understandable that there could be much room for inaccuracy as to who is and who is not a street gang member. For example, during the last week of September 2012, of those in custody in the San Joaquin County Jail, 155 individuals were charged with gang enhancements (San Joaquin County Sheriff California, n.d.). While there is no ethnic designation assigned to inmates on this website, of those charged with gang enhancements, 105 had Mexican American/Chicano surnames, while 17 inmates charged with gang enhancements had Asian surnames. The remaining 31 inmates charged with gang enhancements could have been African American or Caucasian males based on the fact that all of the 31 inmates had surnames associated with Caucasians.

The negative ramifications and lifelong damage on an individual's future after being erroneously labeled a street gang member can be huge (Rios, 2011). Therefore, it is vital that law enforcement agencies, school administrators, teachers, and the community more fully educate themselves in order not to label falsely.
Documentation of street gang membership should not be based solely on the type of

clothing youth wear, their associations, or other evidence used to support the decision to document them as members of a street gang (Wall-Whitfield, 2010). Even evidence considered factual, such as self-admissions, tattoos associated with a street gang, or pictures showing an individual throwing up gang signs, are dubious and can be proven unreliable (De La Cruz, 2011).

Therefore, documenting street gang members continues to be problematic because youngsters throughout the U.S. who are not street gang members imitate and assimilate street gang values, attitudes, and behaviors (Stone, 2000). 'Thug culture' values and behaviors are shown on television and in movie theaters, constantly bombarding youth with the ease of earning fast money at any cost. Many youths, especially African American and Mexican American/Chicano youth who come from disadvantaged areas, often mirror the values of the gang through their dress and their behavior in school and community even while they themselves are not street gang affiliated. In fact, American 'thug culture' has been exported, strongly impacting International youth culture so that a boy in Sweden can dress like a Mexican American/Chicano 'Cholo' from Stockton, California, who is then afforded cool street credibility from his peers (Vigil, 1988).

Wall-Whitfield (2010) suggested that the street gang ethos has an immense influence on young people today, and that in recent years there has been an insurgence of street gang participation among school-aged youth, not so much because they are street gang members, but in large part because of how the American youth culture today seems to be centered on a prevalent street gang-like mentality.

Youths who are not street gang members are attracted to the language, the thug rap music, body markings, and clothing associated with the street gang culture. It is not uncommon to see youth from all ethnicities wearing sagging pants or tattooed arms. This makes it much more difficult for law enforcement, school administrators, teachers, and members of the community to identify or distinguish street gang members from youth who merely identify with the street gang culture and fashion (Evans, Fitzgerald, Weigel, & Chvilicek, 1999).

The school districts and law enforcement's approaches to documenting young men as gang members are conventional and binary. Tattoos, wearing clothing associated with gangs, hanging out with 'known' gang members in 'known' gang hangouts, etc, can easily contribute to the erroneous label of a young person, by school districts and law enforcement, as a gang member or associate.

Below is a diagram of the "Non-Gang to Gang Membership Spectrum."

Figure 3. Non-gang to gang membership spectrum.

a) Tattoos (e.g., four dots on fingers and one dot on the thumb, XIII/XIV, cross on hand with three dots, Huelga Bird, Aztec, R.I.P., tear drop, etc).
b) Tagging neighborhood gang symbols in journals/school folder/property.
c) Clothing (e.g. saggy pants, oversized t-shirts/pants, regional sportswear like blue
d) Dodger/red 49er caps and jackets).
e) Accessories (e.g., bandana, belt and watch band, earring, sport cap, phone cover, etc) that are the color identified with the local gang.
f) Nicknames.
g) Association (Jimmy is not going to gang members barbecue, he's going to his uncles barbecue; he's not hanging out with gang members, he's hanging out with his brother and his best friend from 2nd grade who grown up together).
h) Hangouts (e.g., community centers, parks, bus stops, only market in the neighborhood, etc).
i) Self-Admission.

The Non-Gang to Gang Membership Spectrum was designed to show that the gang markers that law enforcement typically uses are often inaccurate and can be easily misinterpreted. For example: the Roman numerals XIII and XIV were once only used by imprisoned California Latinos to symbolize where they were from—Southern or Northern California. Now 'cholo clothing' and the numbers are worn on models on fashion runways across Europe. The numbers 13 and 14 have so far transcended their initial use by gang members to identify where they are from that even in White suburbia California, Cosumnes Oaks High School Seniors wore sweatshirts with the Roman numeral XIV bannered across the front, proudly

displaying their graduating year. The numbers had become fashion (News 10 Staff, KXTV, November 4, 2013) and these primarily White kids did not associate the 14 to gang membership just like many young kids of color who wear the numbers 14 or 13 do not do it for gang recognition. To many young kids of color, these numbers are simply a symbol of where they are from geographically.

The young people characterized in the Spectrum below are not gang associates, and some are not even wannabes. They are simply young confused people who happen to like the texture that accrues to them for hanging around people the culture both idolizes and fears (Wall-Whitfield, 2010). This attraction to the thug lifestyle is often why young people of color end up being designated gang members by authorities like school districts and law enforcement.

Need for the Study

There is a need for this critical ethnographic study to be conducted for a number of reasons. First, street gang members and their relationship to school and community have never been scientifically examined in the city of Stockton. Second, there has never been an empirical research study conducted that uses the voice of the street gang members and their relationships to dominant society in the city of Stockton. Third, Stockton is a microcosm of the increasing violence in cities scattered throughout the United States, and especially in California. Given that street gang members are being blamed for much of the violence in Stockton, it is critical to chronicle their experiences, to explore how social control effectuated their decision to

join a street gang. Finally, this researcher has intimate entry into Stockton's covert community based on his previous and extensive street gang involvement.

There exists a surplus of literature concerning the gang phenomenon in the U.S. and many studies point specifically to the marginalization of Mexican American/Chicano young men (Vigil, 1988; Monti, 1994; Rios, 2011). However, there is no scientific literature of Mexican American/Chicano young men describing their personal narrative or explaining their individual realities about the current violence occurring in Stockton, California.

This critical ethnographic study incorporates the voices of marginalized, exploited and oppressed Mexican American/Chicano young men (Giroux, 1992). It is nestled in an emancipatory technique and uses critical ethnography and transformative learning as underpinning theories. This design was chosen because it is complementary to the guiding questions of the research, and the participants, and offers opportunities for broader understanding of the conditions and circumstances that fosters transformation. This approach also allowed the participants to engage in a Dialogical Retrospective process that can lead them to critically reflect about social control and how social control impacted the outcome of their lives. More importantly, this process gave the participants insight into what they can do to reduce the violence in Stockton, and possibly change the world in which they live.

This research was used as a vehicle to provide an opportunity to hear from gang members who historically have been ignored unless society is learning about them or those who look like gang members, through a media source reporting on their

crime spree or arrest. The intent of this approach was to gain insight and knowledge through their stories so as to create new ideas and innovative solutions and hopefully begin to address the rising violence in this city. Freire (1970) said it very well when he noted that the oppressor cannot liberate the oppressed, it is only the oppressed that can liberate and re-educate the oppressor.

It is through constructivist listening (Reza, Rona, Lampkin & Smith, 2004) that the collective voices in this study will make this sample size loud for many to hear and believe. Understanding the reality of the marginalization and broken spirits of this group of men is not only important from an academic point of view, but also because their voices have rarely if ever been heard and seldom discussed in the literature written about them. Their narratives can also provide a pathway toward social healing that we would be wise not to ignore (Smith, 1995).

The street gang crisis in Stockton, California, like in many other cities in the U.S., is not abating and nothing will change unless a collaborative effort between everyone involved takes place. This is an assertion of counter hegemonic cultural practice in action where real words of real people can become living examples of resistance (Andriola-Balderas, 1993) to the violent lifestyle pulling many of our Mexican American/Chicano youth into its grip. Moreover, transformation can only happen when new doors are opened to those who are stuck in lifestyles they believe they can never change. It is within this discourse that the voices of the oppressed must come forth through the efforts of those in positions of power.

This critical ethnographic study allowed four self-disclosed Mexican American/Chicano street gang members to voice and examine in-depth why they believe street gangs continue to breed even though harsher laws have been implemented to address the phenomenon. This researcher went directly to the street gang members and asked them about their perspectives concerning involvement in a culture associated with violence. Their input provided valuable insight into these shadowy and covert groups and gave us a deeper understanding as to why they behave so violently. More importantly, it made it possible to potentially use the information gleaned from them in the development programs that will intervene and prevent future youths from joining street gangs.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this critical ethnographic study of four self-disclosed male Mexican American/Chicano gang members was to gain insight into the participants lived experiences by listening to their voices regarding the complex phenomenon of street gangs. It was also the intent to learn about the experiences of these four self-disclosed male Mexican American/Chicano street gang members and how social control influenced their behavior in the educational system and the broader community. It was also important to get the participants perspective concerning the increase in violence and its connection to gangs from their point of view.

As is documented, most research on street gangs, street gang involvement, and street gang activities originate from a law enforcement, academia, and social service provider or from parole or probation staff perspective. There is scarce data regarding

the extent and precise nature of the day-to-day activities of street gang members (Katz & Jackson-Jacobs, 2004). This study was designed to address this issue by providing an opportunity to increase the field of knowledge through the lived experiences of street gang life from the perspective of the street gang member (Decker & Van Winkle, 1996) thereby enhancing our understanding about street gang involvement and violence as it applies to social control from an insider's point of view. Additionally, this study addressed the limited literature on street gangs from an ethnological standpoint (Collins, 2000) thus offering authentic minority voices an opportunity to be heard (Phillips & Bowling, 2003).

This study allowed the participants to highlight their lived experiences, conditions and circumstances surrounding social control. A dialogue was initiated between the researcher and participants asking them to illuminate how social control impacted their actions to join a street gang both in the educational system and the broader community, and how life changed for them once they became involved with their street gangs. By critically analyzing their narratives, the participants offer a more comprehensive awareness concerning street gang members' perceptions of their educational experiences. Their answers provided insight into what steps need to be taken to possibly ameliorate the street gang problem in Stockton. Through the critical ethnographic process, this study put forth a model that street gang members can use to reflect on their lives, and allowed them an opportunity to discover ways they can collectively or individually transform the social structures, which have kept them

from succeeding in main-stream society. It also provided them the possibly to change behaviors that may have negatively impacted their lives.

Major Research Questions

In order to understand the street gang members' perceptions of their school and community lived experiences, this critical ethnographic study attempted to problematize what street gang members think about their lived school experiences, the violence in their community, and what they believe can be done by law enforcement, school administrators, family and their communities to better understand and educate them. Although this study was grounded in critical social science theory (Fay, 1987), it also draws from Freire (1970, 1985), Kieffer (1981), Maguire (1987), and Ada and Beutel (1993). The major research questions in this study followed a scaffolded critical consciousness building process of naming, voicing, and ally building (Freire, 1970; Ada, 1991; Cummins, 2000). The major research questions are:

1.) What are the lived experiences of four self-disclosed Mexican American/Chicano street gang members regarding social control by law enforcement, the educational system, family, and broader community?

2.) Did social control influence their behaviors in the educational system and the broader community that compelled them to join a street gang?

3.) What do the participants believe can be done to ameliorate the violence in their communities?

The intent of the study was, 1) to reveal if social control impacted the participant's decision to join a street gang, 2) to expose if street gang membership increased the participant's likelihood of committing violent crime, and 3) to determine what part, if any, did education (or lack thereof) play in their decision to join a street gang.

The research questions resulted from conversations held between this researcher and gang members in the Stockton community. This researcher crafted the interview questions into four categories, attempting to elicit maximum information about the influence each domain had on their young lives, beginning with, 1) family, 2) school, 3) law enforcement, and 4) community. Great attention was paid to creating open-ended questions that would avoid simple yes or no answers, but instead would lead to dialogue. For example, the participants were asked questions like, "Describe how you were impacted by the schooling offered to you," and, "Describe the first time you encountered law enforcement in your community."

Toward the end of each interview, after the participants had shared valuable details about their lives and choice to become gang members, each participant was asked "you" questions, meaning questions like, "What would you do about changing school to better address the teacher's inability to understand the culture where they teach?" "You" questions are designed to indicate to the participants that not only are their stories useful to the research, but that their voices provide unique expertise that is now valuable in the public discourse beyond the interview. "You" questions are

also important because they empower the participants to see their story as active and fluid (Creswell, 2002).

Limitations and Delimitations for the Study

This critical ethnographic study did have limitations that were considered. First, the study utilized a very small sample size (n=4), which limited the generalizability of the findings. Moreover, the findings only reflect lived experiences of street gang members from Stockton, California, and may not reflect the lived experiences of street gang members from other parts of the state, region, or even the country. Second, the study was purposely restricted to Mexican American/Chicano male street gang members and does not include females or other ethnicities in the sample. A third limitation that was considered was the external validity of the study. Even though this researcher attempted to provide a 'speak freely' zone, he could very well have made the findings susceptible to biases and inaccuracy because data derived from in-depth dialogues may be distorted for fear of incrimination or sensationalized by the participant. The final limitation was that the interviews took place over several weeks, not months or years, giving only a slight glimpse into the daily lives of the participants.

By virtue of his personal and extensive life experience with street gangs, the researcher brought forth delimitation to this study as a result of his long prior involvement in street gangs and criminality. However, the researcher was consciously aware of his biases throughout the research and made decisions that diminished a priori findings. The researcher's theoretical perspectives, research questions, selection

of participants, and data collection procedures were thoughtfully and carefully analyzed for bias throughout data collection and analysis. This delimitation was continuously accounted for in order to consciously keep the research and findings open to new and unexpected possibilities.

Additionally, prior research studies that were included in this study employed different methodologies which attempted to determine the level of street gang membership, interviews, informants, and administrative records, etc. Moreover, each of the studies researched here used different questions and time frames, upon which to classify street gang membership. Definitions fluctuated widely from street gangs to delinquent youth. Some studies included here relied on self-reported street gang membership, while others based their findings on the perceptions of law enforcement, detached street workers and family members. Furthermore, some of these studies failed to validate the hypotheses they put forth.

Definition of Terms

California Youth Authority: Institutions where criminal youth offenders are sent to serve their sentences. A youth version of adult prisons.

Caló: Argot or slang of Mexican American/Chicano culture, the product of Zoot-Suit Pachuco influence.

Chicano: An ideology/identity that many Mexican Americans accept. Chicano is interchangeable with the Mexican American label.

Cholo: The term designated to Mexican American/Chicano males who are considered gang members.

Cultural Mainstream: The principal and dominant course, tendency, or trend of a society. In the case of this study, cultural mainstream relates to the habits, beliefs, traditions connected to the prevailing attitudes in California's Central Valley communities.

CYA: Acronym for California Youth Authority.

Honestly Being Dishonest: A person who tells the truth based on his understanding of the truth even though what they are saying may not be true. It is true to them and they believe what they are saying as truth.

Jumpings: Being jumped into the gang by two or more members to determine if the person being jumped in can take a beating without crying out, which would demonstrate weakness.

La Vida Loca: "The crazy life" of a gang member is often identified by drive-by shoootings, robberies, early death, getting high on drugs, and sometimes committing murder.

Legitimate Economy: Earning money through a legitimate job as opposed to making money illegally.

Mexican American: A person born in the United States whose parents were born in Mexico.

Original Gangster: A term used by street gang members to acknowledge older more seasoned street gang members.

Petri Dish: Something (as a place or situation) that fosters development or innovation.

Pinteros: Caló word for convicts.

Pisto: Caló word for an alcoholic drink.

Quinceañera: A celebration for a 15-year old female coming of age in the Mexican culture.

School-to-Prison-Pipeline: A phrase used to describe what is viewed as a widespread pattern in the United States of pushing students, especially those who are already at a disadvantage, out of school and into the criminal justice system.

Square: A common citizen looked down on by gang members because they are law abiding, educated, and employed.

Thug Culture: Defines an individual, who loves prison, glorifies crime, shuns education, and has no intention of fitting into mainstream society.

Trúcha: Caló word for be careful or watch out.

Underclass: A social class made up of people who are very poor and have very little power or chance to improve their lives.

White Flight: The move of white city-dwellers to the suburbs to escape the influx of minorities.

Youth of Color: Includes Mexican American/Chicano, African American, Asian, and any other group of young people who are not White.

Zoot Suitor: An individual who wore a men's suit with high-waisted, wide-legged, tight-cuffed pegged trousers, and a long coat with wide lapels and wide padded shoulders. This style of clothing became popular within the African

American, Chicano and Italian American communities during the 1940s in Los Angeles.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined how and why gangs are blamed for much of the violence occurring in our schools and communities. The researcher explained the origin of his interest in exploring whether these accusations propagated in the media were factual. The study was designed to examine the lives of four self-disclosed Mexican American/Chicano gang members in an attempt to gather data that would substantiate or disprove the allegations that gang members are the cause of the majority of the violent acts committed in and around the city of Stockton. The following chapter will delineate the previous research studies conducted on the history, definition, theoretical framework, and policy implications of society's understanding of gangs. The next chapter also addresses the Zero-Tolerance-School-to-Prison-Pipeline.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

> Crime involvement of a group must not therefore be a *sub rosa* function, about which few of the members have knowledge, if we are to consider the group a gang. Members of many legitimate voluntary associations and civic groups are sometimes arrested for a variety of offenses. But these are not offenses committed on behalf of their group; these are not even necessarily known to their full social network; these are not offenses condoned and approved of in advance by their organization, or which enjoy their acceptance or blessing. To be considered a gang, the criminal involvement of members must be openly known and approved of as such. (Klein, 1995, pp 23-24)

Historical Gang Research

The literature concerning gangs is certainly not exhaustive, but serves as a foundation from which to present the theoretical perspectives that informed the study. There is a dearth of literature concerning street gangs; however, this researcher hopes to extend the focus of research around gangs by contributing this new literature. Citing the growth of the underclass as formulated by Wilson (1987) as a cause of street gang formation and proliferation, several gang researchers (Decker & Van Winkle 1996; Fagan, 2000; Hagedorn & Macon 1988; Vigil, 1988) link the existences of urban ‘underclass’ to economic dislocation and deindustrialization. Wilson (1987) posits that criminality is connected to the social conditions prevalent in so many

neighborhoods with high poverty, low employment, urban decay, and a general deterioration of ecological systems.

While street gangs in society have been present for decades, the study of street gangs primarily began with Thrasher (1927) who pioneered one of the earliest academic treatments of street gangs and worked within a sociological paradigm of the Chicago School. Thrasher articulated an ecological theory, suggesting that street gangs developed from specific conditions and experiences of people living in impoverished environments. He argued that street gang members are not criminals, but rather just delinquents like other similar age-graded neighborhood youth.

Thrasher (1927) provided a common definition in one of the most influential studies of the early 20th century on street gangs:

> The gang is an interstitial group originally formed spontaneously, and then integrated through conflict. It is characterized by the following types of behavior: meeting face-to-face, milling, movement through space as a unit, conflict and planning. The result of the collective behavior is the development of tradition, unreflective internal structure, esprit de corps, solidarity, morale, group awareness, and attachment to a local territory (p. 46).

Street gang research re-emerged in the 1950s spawning a new generation of street gang research theory and policy. Cohen (1955) outlined a social strain model of street gang etiology that challenged the social disorganization approach and developed the theory of status in an attempt to explain the process of status within the

street gang and why young people become involved in delinquent activities and street gangs.

This researcher did not uncover any studies that were conducted during the 1960s on street gangs. It was not until the mid to late 1970s that street gang research resurfaced, and researchers attempted once again to define street gangs. Denoting possible correlations between street gang formation and social environment, Hagedorn and Macon (1988), Klein (1995), Moore (1991), and Esbensen (2000) have all argued that the existence of street gangs is a byproduct of post-industrial development.

Vigil (1988) sought to explain that the high prevalence of street gang formation within communities, and among youth, was a result of multiple forms of marginality. His conclusions were based on his analysis of 67 life stories of Latino males (20 from Los Angeles County, 42 from San Bernardino County and five from Orange County). Data were derived from participant observation or single-session in-depth interviews. Vigil argued that segmented labor markets, poverty, racism, and social isolation produced situations, in which the community and its residents were outside of, or marginal to, the legitimate economy and cultural mainstream. Vigil concluded that street gangs evolved as a survival mechanism for those youths who were prevented from adapting into the dominant culture. Two other studies conducted by Moore (1978, 1991) on Mexican American/Chicano street gangs in the Los Angeles area found that fighting occupied a central role in Chicano street gang life.

Finally, Decker and Van Winkle (1996) conducted a qualitative field study on African American street gang members from St. Louis and found that violence or the threat of violence played a large role in African American street gang life as well. Since then, sporadic research has been conducted that gives voice to street gang members concerning their point of views relating to violence, education, or their communities.

Social Dominance/Identity Confusion

There are many observational writings and studies on social dominance, behavioral deviance, and marginalized educational practices of African Americans dating back to the slavery days (Douglass, 1845) and the early 1900s (DuBois, 1903). The injustices and failure by Mexican Americans/Chicanos to succeed in school due to compensatory educational programs and strategies for effectively changing educational policies and practices are also well documented (Freire, 1970; Carter & Segura, 1979; Duncan-Andrade, 2007). Each of these researchers speaks to the persistent negative outcomes related to social injustices and marginalized educational systems for African American and Mexican American/Chicano students.

Finn (1996) found that students from lower socio-economic areas often attended schools that force them out of school and onto the streets. To make matters worse, Duncan and Brooks-Gunn (1997) reported that more often than not, African American and Mexican American/Chicano students do not have health care and often lack proper nutrition, which can make it even more difficult for them to concentrate on learning in the classroom or monitor their emotional poise.

More recently, studies by Nolan and Anyon (2004) examined the inequitable educational practices and policies in schools where African American and Mexican American/Chicano students attend. What they found was that many of our nation's schools do not prepare these young students from lower socio-economic areas to succeed in the real world. These students are not trained on what they need to contribute positively to their communities, or how to develop marketable job skills, or even what it takes to attend a university. In fact, the researchers claim that our school system is designed to prepare young people of color and poor students not to succeed, but to become criminals and eventually land in prison. There they begin the vicious cycle of recidivism, which then becomes a lifestyle that is difficult to break (Nolan and Anyon, 2004). Finally, Kim, Losen, and Hewitt (2010) uncovered that students who live in lower socio-economic environments are targets of concentrated racism and police scrutiny.

Another serious problem for many African American and Mexican American/Chicano students is that they suffer from identity confusion and have difficulty determining who they are and how they fit into the educational system (Maramba & Velasquez, 2010). For many Mexican Americans/Chicanos, identifying who they are is a difficult process. On one hand, some Mexican Americans/Chicanos identify themselves as Mexican American while others call themselves Chicano, while others call themselves Latino or Hispanic.

Like their Mexican American/Chicano counterparts, many African American students also suffer from an identity crisis. John Ogbu, a professor at the University

of Berkeley, argued that African American students often grapple with their identity, and that this struggle gives way to underperformance in academics as a result of their inability to identify with White society. Ogbu's research showed that some African Americans developed an oppositional cultural identity because they experienced and internalized constant discrimination and thus developed their own culture. To support his argument, Ogbu provided blues, rap, hip-hop and jazz music, loose fitting baggy clothing, and Ebonics as examples of African American oppositional culture (Racial Identity, n.d.).

Anderson (1999), another prominent researcher on urban culture, also argued that many African American and Mexican American/Chicano students have developed an ideology of alienation supporting an oppositional culture. He maintained that oppositional culture is heard clearly through rap music, produced and listened to primarily by African American and Mexican American/Chicano youth. This music encourages young people to kill cops, to rape women, and to hurt anyone who is not like them. With respect to Mexican American/Chicano emotional and mental development, they too, face many of the same barriers in identity formation such as discrimination, negative stereotypes in the media and popular culture, poverty, and lower educational attainment (Rios, 2011).

For the Mexican American students who have recently arrived to the United States, their problems are amplified because of their inability to speak English and their lack of knowledge concerning American culture. Ada and Beutel (1993) found that if Spanish-speaking students are allowed to use their own language naturally,

they have a much easier time navigating their way through an educational system that often labels them as problem youth. Student misbehaviors frequently develop as a result of educators' lack of understanding of the important role that language plays in accelerating English acquisition:

> In normal community life, all individuals, unless they are physiologically or mentally impaired, learn the language of their group, using it with ease and efficiency. And that language acquired readily and naturally, is the basis for all social activities, for enlarging any field of learning, and for acquiring and preserving useful knowledge. In communities where the use of written language is widespread, the process of acquiring reading and writing skills follows and complements that of oral acquisition. In other words, where family and community interaction takes place, it is natural for all children to learn their language effectively. And if the group to which the children belong reads and writes a great deal, learning to read and write comes easily to the children as well. The entire process can and should occur spontaneously, with little difficulty. (p. 89)

For many Spanish-speaking students, the difficulties associated with learning to read and write in English are due in large part to the disconnect with the school academic culture, as well as the teacher's inability to bond culturally and linguistically with Mexican students. Moreover, many students who experience difficulty accessing academic learning seldom have the coping skills needed to overcome the academic gap that continues to widen as they mature (Collier &

Thomas, 1989). This same language and cultural disconnect is experienced by many African American and other marginalized students as well (Anderson, 1999).

Giroux (1986) argued that schools are 'arenas of conflict' where both the teacher and the student struggle over different meanings, practices, and readings of the world. Thus, when there is a breakdown in communication and understanding, the student often responds inappropriately for a variety of reasons, to what they perceive as unfair treatment. Teachers are then faced with classroom behavioral deviance that interferes with classroom instruction. Generally, this deviance is typically a behavioral manifestation of the mismatch between the student's lived reality and the school's inability to create appropriate curricular connections that have meaning for African American and Mexican American/Chicano students and their socio-economic realities (Duncan-Andrade, 2007).

As these students repeatedly act out in the classroom and in their communities due largely in part to their inability to cope with the daily pressures of school, and whatever else might be occurring in their lives outside of school, their behavior becomes more serious. It develops into deeper and more negative complex responses. Without proper interventions this process amplifies into an even larger socio-academic gap and spills out into the community, eventually pushing some students toward joining a street gang where individuals believe they fit in and are understood by their peers (Vigil, 1988).

If what the research indicates is true, that the current practices in our schools and communities are creating criminals, then it is essential that we attempt to uncover

and illuminate the parallels between education and the social conditions that seem to convince young African American and Mexican American/Chicano males that they can only achieve economic success through street gang involvement and criminality.

Definitions of Gangs

The definitions of a street gang, street gang member, or street gang-related crimes are numerous. In every community throughout the nation, a discreet working definition of a 'street gang,' a 'street gang member,' or a 'street gang-related crime,' exists. These definitions are often inconsistent with each other, if not flat out erroneous. The correct determination of what constitutes a street gang, street gang membership or a street gang related-crime has been a problem for decades, not only for gang researchers and school administrators, but for politicians developing and implementing legislative statutes targeting street gangs as well (Bursik & Grasmick, 1993; Ball & Curry, 1995; Decker & Kempf-Leonard, 1991; & Klein, 1995). Definitions of street gangs are as abundant as the researchers trying to define them, yet there has not been a universally accepted definition of what constitutes a street gang (Spergel & Curry, 1990).

For example, Yablonsky (1997) defines street gangs along a behavioral continuum. He identifies three types of street gangs; 1) delinquent gangs, 2) violent gangs and 3) social gangs. On the other hand, Knox (1991) suggests that street gangs are determined by normative habits, behavioral patterns, and personalities of street gang members, which suggest that street gangs range midway between a stable,

cohesive, and relatively permanent group with fixed membership and a spontaneous, chaotic, temporary mob with shifting membership.

Cloward and Ohlin's (1960) Social Disorganization Theory is yet another conceptualization used to define what constitutes a street gang, taking into account the significance of environmental factors in their formation. The researchers hypothesize that formation of a gang is rooted in the alienation of young people who are deprived access to legitimate means by which the 'American Dream' is achieved. Lanier and Henry (2004) further argue that street gangs are typically formed depending on neighborhood characteristics and identify three subcultures for street gang typology: (a) criminal gang (b) conflict gang; and (c) the retreatist gang.

Frustrated with earlier efforts to construct a standardized definition, Miller (1980) utilized a national consensus of opinion from various juvenile justice personnel to define street gangs. He argued that street gang members are bound by mutual interests and defines a street gang in terms of a self-formed association of peers, with a structured hierarchy and identifiable leadership that operate in concert for the purposes of illegal activity and control over a particular territory or physical structure.

Hagedorn and Macon (1988) argued that contemporary street gang literature should no longer characterize street gangs within the context of territory, asserting that reliance on a stringent definition of street gangs fails to recognize the variation in types of street gangs. They define a street gang as a friendship group of adolescents

who share common interests with a less than clearly defined territory, and who are committed to defending one another and their street gang name.

Offering more of a delinquency-based definition of street gangs, Maxson (1999) argued delinquency and violence distinguishes street gangs from other groups. Patterns of criminal behavior often lend a hand in street gang classification. Klein and Maxson (1989) defined street gangs as groups of adolescents or young adults who have been involved in enough crime to be of significant concern to law enforcement and community. Klein (1995) further defined a street gang as a loosely organized group of young adults (11-24 years of age), who collaborate together for social and economic reasons. In the process, this group of people forms an allegiance for a common purpose, and engage in aggressive, unlawful, criminal, or anti-social activity. Finally, Decker and Van Winkle (1996) defined a street gang as "an age-graded peer group that exhibits some permanence, engaging in criminal activity, and has some symbolic representation of membership" (p. 31).

Since there has not been a consistent definition of what constitutes a street gang, gang literature has been plagued with the mix matching of incongruent concepts. In fact, the argument about what is a street gang has created so much confusion that some researchers encourage abandoning the phrase altogether, arguing that the term can never be standardized because it is not a description used by youth to identify who they are (Ball & Curry, 1995). Goldstein (1993) suggested definitions of street gangs vary with time and place and often in response to political and economic climate as expressed by police, government officials, and concerned

citizens. Law enforcement agencies have attempted to define street gangs in such a way as to categorize or catalogue groups of delinquents for the purposes of statistical analysis and prosecution (Katz, Webb & Schaefer, 2000).

As evidenced, definitions of street gangs often vary from one researcher to the next, from one organization to another, or from state to state. For example, California law defines a street gang as:

> …any organization, association or group of three or more persons, whether formal or informal, having as one of its primary activities the commission of one or more of the criminal acts enumerated in paragraphs (1) to (25), inclusive, or (31) to (33), inclusive, subdivision (e), having a common name or common identifying sign or symbol, and whose members individually or collectively engage in or have engaged in a pattern of criminal gang activity. (California Street Terrorism Enforcement and Prevention Act of 1988)

On the other hand, in an article circulated by the U.S. Department of Education authored by George (1990), a group of youth are considered a gang if they meet the following criteria:

> A delinquent gang is a group of six or more people who, while acting in concert, have committed a crime or some delinquent act, or who have engaged in an activity that disrupted the orderly operation of a school or school activity. In addition, group members must share some common bond, i.e., community ties, school association, race, sex, attitude, philosophy, or interest.

> Finally, to be considered a delinquent gang, there must exist some infrastructure that facilitates the carrying out of common objectives. (p. 1)

It is obviously clear, from the two previous definitions that the number of individuals and the type of activities associated with a group of people can differ depending on who is providing the classification and the purpose for their definition. What is also evident in these two classifications is that in order for a group of individuals to be considered a street gang, there must be some type of delinquent or law violating behavior involved.

Since delinquency seems to be part of the equation when attempting to define a street gang, it is important to understand the definition of delinquency, which seems to be another important factor needed when identifying juvenile street gangs. Shoemaker (2009) defined delinquency to include serious acts such as drive-by shootings or non-criminal activities like running away from home, school truancy, or disobeying parents and teachers.

Given that street gang members were blamed for much of the violence that happened in Stockton during 2011 and 2012, it is important for the purpose of this study that street gang-related crimes be defined. According to the California Street Terrorism Enforcement and Prevention Act (1988), a crime is deemed gang-related if one of the following acts is committed during the commission of the crime: homicide, attempted murder, assault with a deadly weapon, robbery, rape, kidnapping, shooting at an inhabited dwelling or arson if the suspect, or one of the victims of the arson is on file as being a street gang member or associated with street gang member/s.

However, other state law enforcement agencies across the country have adopted different definitional policies for tabulating and reporting street gang-related crimes (Maxson & Klein, 1990). Moreover, all of the crimes listed above are crimes that non-gang member criminals commit as well and often have nothing to do with street gang activity.

The contrasting policies of street gang proliferation and procedural policies used to define street gangs and street gang-related crimes are significant because they give us a snapshot as to the difficulty involved in the development of one consistent classification and the complex issues law enforcement and school administration must address when documenting suspected gang members.

Theoretical Frameworks

For decades many aspects of the street gang phenomenon have been examined. Investigations have been conducted using labeling theory, social control theory, self-control theory, and many other theoretical constructs. More recently, Rios (2011) combined critical criminology with urban ethnography to help develop a better appreciation concerning the challenges marginalized populations experience on a daily basis.

For the purpose of this study, the theoretical frameworks that informed the research was Vigil's Multiple Marginality perspective (Vigil, 1988; 2002). Vigil's model integrates many of the fundamental elements of several classical theories in criminology such as Social Disorganization Theory, Strain Theory, Routine Activities Theory, and Social Control Theory, all of which fit seamlessly into this study.

Vigil (1988) offered one of the most eclectic explanations for street gang formation and involvement. His framework challenges previous theoretical perspectives of street gangs and goes beyond cultural or individual factors. Vigil (2002) posited that “street gangs are a result of marginalization, that is, the relegation of certain persons or groups to the fringes of society, where social and economic conditions result in powerlessness" (p. 7). Vigil (1988) asserted that socioeconomic status (i.e., poverty and environmental factors, such as the neighborhood where someone lives, and racism) are also contributing risk factors to street gang involvement. This theoretical perspective acknowledges that there are a number of pathways that influence and sustain an individual to get involved in a street gang. Moreover, Vigil suggested that “racial segregation, depressed economic and social conditions produce a sense of powerlessness among ethnic groups, which, in turn, leads to sub-cultural and psychological mechanisms of adjustment, i.e., street gang formation” (p.1). The lack of power to change what seems inevitable for individuals who involve themselves in street gangs appears to be a major factor that hinders gang members with the ability to succeed in the mainstream culture. This powerlessness to change the individual’s lived reality also seems to be an important influence that sustains gang involvement.

It was also practical to employ a critical ethnographic model and include aspects of the Dialogical Retrospection model based on the notion of empowering the participants of this study and encouraging their voice (Kieffer, 1981; Maguire, 1987; Ada & Beutel, 1993). The critical ethnographic model and Dialogical Retrospection

approach were both particularly desirable in this study of education, street gangs, and violence of minority groups, since, as discussed by Paulo Freire (1994) it is a way to enable the participants to overcome their marginalization by "developing the pedagogy of their oppression" (p. 33).

Policy Implications

For law and policy makers, the need to control street gangs and their activities has led to the passage of statutes that have withstood the scrutiny of the appellate court system (Esbensen, Winfree, He, & Taylor, 2001). These court decisions have resulted in lengthy incarcerations of many people in the State of California. Many of the people sentenced under laws that were passed to immobilize street gangs will never be released from prison again (California Department of Corrections & Rehabilitation, n.d.). Laws such as the California Street Terrorism Enforcement and Prevention Act of 1988, instituted and aimed specifically toward street gangs, led to the mass incarceration of African-American and Mexican American/Chicano young men. The street gang hysteria also propelled Californians to vote into law in 1994, California's Proposition 184, more commonly known as the Three Strikes Law, which was designed to incarcerate violent offenders.

Nevertheless, the implementation of stricter laws proposed to incarcerate violent offenders did not stop with these two laws. In 2000, Californians voted for Proposition 21, another law that allows the prosecution of juvenile offenders (14-17) to be tried and sentenced as adults for violent offences. Overall, these laws have not curbed the violence in our communities as evidenced in Stockton, California. What

these laws have done, however, is increase the number of long-term prisoners in California. They have augmented the prison population three times faster than the general adult population since 1990 (Bailey & Hayes, 2006).

Although California is one of the nation's leading advocates on the 'get tough on crime' approach, this political tactic did not begin in California. The 'get tough on crime' mindset was primarily set in motion by the passage of New York's strict drug sentencing guidelines commonly known as the Rockefeller Drug Laws during the 1970s (Mann, February 14, 2013). The drug laws, too many to be articulated here, were named after their number one supporter, Governor Nelson Rockefeller, and have had tremendous negative consequences on individuals of color throughout the nation.

In the 1970s, New York, like many other large cities in the U.S., was battling a heroin epidemic. Heroin addicts were hanging out in parks and street corners of the city and creating havoc in communities (Mann, February 14, 2013). It was not until President Nixon declared a 'War on Drugs' that the political mood in the United States shifted (Vulliamy, Saturday 23 July, 2011). As a result of this political movement and the ensuing swell of the 'get tough on drugs' attitude across the country, the Rockefeller Drug Laws passed without much opposition through New York's Legislature. What is also interesting to note is that prior to this get tough on drugs stance, Rockefeller had supported drug rehabilitation, job training, and housing, and saw drugs as a social problem, not as a criminal one.

The idea of getting tough on crime, even on petty criminals, spread like an infectious disease across the U.S. Many states adopted mandatory minimum and

Three-Strikes Laws as did the federal government, which led the way to harsher sentences for crimes. Before the get tough on crime laws were implemented across the country, the focus was more on rehabilitation of the offender. Therefore, prisoners served less time and were afforded vocational and educational training while they were in prison.

Not long after the implementation of the drug laws, prosecutors in New York and other states became acutely aware that these laws had unforeseen and alarming consequences. After all, White people were using drugs during the 1970s and committing crime too, yet the people being arrested and sent to prison under the New York Rockefeller Laws came mostly from impoverished African American and Puerto Rican neighborhoods (Mann, February 14, 2013).

Although many prosecutors were aware that this get tough position on crime the court was forced to take was directly focusing on people of color, there was nothing they could do given that they had been mandated to prosecute to the full extent of the law under this provision (Mann, February 14, 2013). Scott Christianson, who has written about drug crime and America's prison system for the past twenty-five years, claims that we are just recently coming to terms with the impact of the Rockefeller policies and their effect on people who live in poor neighborhoods, as they apply to race relations and on how these policies have impacted the taxpayer (Mann, February 14, 2013).

These drug policies have increased inmate populations across the nation and have caused mass incarceration of many African American and Latino adults. One of

the most significant effects of this law is that the incarceration of so many African American and Latino adults leaves many children without proper male guidance, which in turn creates a vacuum and an impetus for these young boys to join street gangs and to continue the cycle of historical intergenerational trauma. It is an unremitting cycle that does not seem to have any finality in the near future.

Gangs and Schools

The disconnect experienced by African American and Mexican American/Chicano students in the schools they attend is even more exponential when a student has been labeled a street gang member by school administrators, teachers, the criminal justice system or their community. An argument can be made that students who join a gang are treated differently than their peers based solely on their street gang membership. A better argument, however, could be that students of color are treated differently not so much because they are in street gangs, but more because of where they live, how they dress, and the color of their skin (Rios, 2011; Duncan-Andrade, 2007; De La Cruz, 2011).

In fact, Urrea (2010) found that students who have been identified by school administration, law enforcement agencies or the community as street gang members are looked upon as individuals that should be feared, avoided, or incarcerated. It is understandable that society feels that students who misbehave or bully other students should be treated accordingly. But, Wall-Whitfield (2010) indicated that much too often, teachers focus on the superficial appearance of a student and this affects how teachers respond to their students. It is a well-known fact that teacher’s work is

challenging, multi-faceted, and stressful. Placing the burden of identifying gang members in a classroom setting without proper training is problematic since kids could be labeled gang members erroneously with dramatic inadvertent consequences for the child. Once the student is labeled a gang member, the subsequent treatment and marginalization by staff and community is devastating for the student, not least in part because of the isolation that follows, vis-à-vis suspensions and detention and continuation schools (De La Cruz, 2011). Nevertheless, Wall-Whitfield (2010) further stated that street gang members have a compulsory and legislated right to an education just as much as their non-gang member counterparts. More importantly, educators are mandated to provide these youth with educational services and seriously consider the importance of schooling street gang members not only because it is the law, but also because education could very well be the ticket for them to find a way out of the street gang lifestyle.

While there are many factors that lead to street gang participation, Vigil (1988) indicated that Mexican American/Chicano youth seem to experience multiple forms of racism, inequitable education, and societal barriers such as poverty, unemployment, and limited access to resources. Yablonsky (2001) suggested that another factor that may drive some youths to join street gangs is a dysfunctional family torn apart by divorce, domestic violence, and substance abuse. He goes on to state that youths who join gangs appear to be missing something in their lives that street gangs seem to provide: a sense of camaraderie, protection and a kind of pseudo-family when the youngster does not have a real family such as a mother, father,

brothers or sisters. To many youth, street gangs provide effectual needs by offering a family of sorts for those who may not have any support or protection at home or school or in the communities where they live (Yablonsky, 2008).

In this way, street gangs fill a hollowness that many youths who join them suffer. Given that the Original Gangster (OG) might have experienced this emptiness too, they are more likely to know what the recruit feels because they have walked in their shoes. The OG readily embraces the new gang member and provides them with the desperately needed attention they never received from the adults in their lives. The OG listens to the recruit's thoughts and ideas and lets him know that their opinions are valid. The OG educates the recruit concerning the aspects of living 'La Vida Loca' within the street gang and continuously reiterating to the new gang member their significance, whereas society simply labels, harasses, and profiles them (Rios, 2011; De La Cruz, 2011). Noddings (1999) indicated that these youth need adults who will "invite, guide, and support them," not broken individuals who are emotionally damaged like them (p. 13). Juarez (1996) stated that "When youth receive positive opportunities to be someone and do something in the eyes of others, they will be too busy and too happy to feel the need to join a gang" (p. 32).

Unfortunately, society often has not understood issues surrounding gangs or violence simply because they do not grasp the causes or conditions that drive someone to live against the mainstream. Instead, law enforcement, school administrators, teachers and members of communities often inadvertently and naively push these young people farther away by labeling them street gang members.

Regrettably, once the street gang member has been marked, there is little if anything that can be done by the marked person to prove they are not street gang members. As such, these individuals frequently suffer consequences associated with being in a street gang even though they may not or might have never been a street gang member in the first place (Rios, 2011). All too often, the ones who have been erroneously branded street gang members fall prey to the stigma placed on them by society and embrace the idea that they have no other choice but to join a gang since they have already been marked anyway (Rios, 2011). Time after time, it is the 'label' of being a street gang member that catapults many youngsters into criminal delinquency. It is during this period that the street gang becomes important to some youths by offering a different way to build meaningful lives in a world that seems meaningless to them (Monti, 1994).

The place where many impoverished kids live is very different than the one the dominant society lives in. These kids' lives are clouded with physical abuse, single parent homes, poverty, racism, hate, and injustice. Rios (2011) found that in the City of Oakland, California, where African Americans and Mexican Americans/Chicanos lived, there existed a constant criminalization of the youth who resided in areas designated as gang areas. Rios (2011) further stated that the ubiquitous harassment by law enforcement, school administrators, teachers, the media, and citizens of those communities, often catapulted many of these youth to join the gang for support. In addition, he found that in communities where African American and Mexican American/Chicano youth lived, a cycle of

hypercriminalization was perpetrated by law enforcement, school administrators, teachers, the media, and the community at large. The African American and Mexican American/Chicano youth who had been labeled gang members were constantly being watched, profiled, hassled, and punished beginning at a very young age, as early as age eight, even before they ever committed any crime (De La Cruz, 2011). De La Cruz (2011) suffered from this hypercriminalization: "We didn't consider ourselves a gang, but the police did and they kept a constant eye on us" (p. 39).

Another possible motivation for Mexican American/Chicano youth joining street gangs and involving themselves in delinquent behavior more often than any other group can be explained using Blau and Blau's (1982) hypothesis of relative deprivation, an ecological perspective that attributes inner-city crime with the inequality between communities where the poor and the rich live in proximity to each other. The stark difference between the haves-and-the-have-nots creates a general feeling of anger, hostility, and social injustice on the part of inner-city inhabitants, many of which happen to be Mexican Americans/Chicanos. This hostility often manifests itself in deviant behavior in our schools and the communities where these youth live.

Perhaps anger, stemming from discriminatory experiences and alienation from mainstream culture, as well as a desire to be part of a caring family-like unit, is another reason some Mexican American/Chicano youths joins a street gang (Vigil & Long, 1990). Rios (2011), De La Cruz (2011), Curry and Spergel (1992), as well as Kozol (1992), also found that inequitable practices by law enforcement coupled with

ineffective and un-cooperative secondary schools within urban areas contributed to high rates of delinquency. Vigil (1988) further extrapolated that the street gang member who has problems in school, frustrated by his experiences there, and his general distrust of authority, sees little advantage for staying in school much less ever graduating, which makes the seduction of the gang life an even greater draw.

Bhimji (2004) found that many youth of color in the San Francisco, California area expressed their frustration of being categorized and labeled street gang members by a legal system that did not recognize the different experiences that affect youth who receive low quality educational opportunities and limited access to housing and health needs. The youths involved in Bhimji's study articulated frustration for being treated as if they were unimportant. Students voiced their outrage at having to attend schools in which they had substitute teachers for much of the school year. Many of these same youths expressed the difficulty they had in getting their voices heard by anyone. They stated that they were associated with criminal behavior simply because of where they lived, their ethnicity, and how they dressed and talked. The students further claimed that they had banded together to confront the injustices they experienced and to support each other in a society they felt was ignoring and punishing them without a valid reason, and not because they were gang members.

Zero Tolerance – School to Prison Pipeline

The adoption of the get tough on drugs impacted school systems throughout the United States as well. In 1986, the Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act was initiated and school administrators and teachers throughout the nation embraced a

Zero-Tolerance approach when managing students with behavioral problems. Zero-Tolerance had been practiced in New York to combat crime. Zero-Tolerance was used to combat drugs and drunk driving, and then it finally made its way into our school systems, most prominently when Congress took the Zero-Tolerance approach a few steps further by passing the 1994 Safe and Gun-Free Schools Act, which criminalized our school youth and set the stage for the School-to-Prison Pipeline (SPP) during the mid-1990s. Since then, Zero-Tolerance policies have been the number one contributing factor leading to increased arrests in high schools across the country, especially among youth of color and students with disabilities (Kim, Losen, & Hewitt, 2010).

Feeding the Zero-Tolerance frenzy are the many school shootings that began in the early 1990s and continued with the 2011 Sandy Hook Elementary School killings, which cemented the irrational idea that some young people, particularly African American and Latino students and the schools they attend are dangerous places. In every case of these mass school shootings, the perpetrator(s) was a young, mentally ill, middle/upper-middle class, White male. More compelling is the fact that none of the school shootings have ever been associated with street gang violence. Yet, the policies implemented as a result of these shootings are primarily directed at controlling the behavior of students of color.

Fuentes (Winter 2011-2012) indicates that the Zero-Tolerance policies implemented by state and school administrations such as the War on Drugs have actually become a War on Youth. Stuart (2012) indicates that the War on Drugs

accounts for 45,000,000 arrests and has made America the world's largest jailer, while further destroying impoverished communities in the United States and leaving many children of color without fathers.

Given that the United States imprisons more people per capita than any other country in the world, it should not be surprising that for young African American and Mexican American/Chicano youth, Zero-Tolerance brings them a reality that they will more than likely end up in prison than in a university (Chettiar, October, 2012). In fact, California has built twenty-one prisons and only four universities during the last 30 years (University of California at Merced; California State University Channel Islands; California State University Monterey Bay; and California State University San Marcos).

Moreover, Zero-Tolerance policies in our schools have been matched by a police presence that would have been unimaginable a generation ago (Fuentes, winter 2011-2012). For example, during the academic school year 2010-2011, SUSD had a K-12 student enrollment of 38,803 with 42 campus safety assistants at the K-8 level, an average of 25 campus safety assistants at their four high schools, and 22 Stockton Unified District police officers (there are SPD assigned to SUSD schools, however the researcher could not verify numbers), to monitor student behavior**.** In contrast, Lincoln Unified School District (LUSD), located in a more affluent section of Stockton, with a student population of 8,981 only had three campus high school monitors, one SPD officer, and six LUSD Police Officers. The outward presence of police officers in SUSD can only solidify in the student's imagination that they are in

fact an inferior class. As a result, the ‘I-am-who-you-say-I-am’ mentality manifests itself through risky behavior such as joining a gang.

Since the social environments of many young people of color and white juveniles differ, as is the case for SUSD and LUSD students, there is a higher probability that the SUSD student will have contact with police independent of their involvement in delinquency. The SUSD student lives and goes to school where there is greater police presence, or where there is more police surveillance. Therefore, they find themselves coming into casual contact with the criminal justice system more regularly. To the extent that police departments focus patrols where there is more crime or where police perceive there to be more crime, African American and Mexican American/Chicano students are likely at greater risk of encounters with police. As Portillos (1998) notes “the assumption is frequently made that if you are a young Latino, and especially a Latino male, you are a gun wielding, drug selling gang-banger” (p. 156).

These stereotypes of young African American and Mexican American/Chicano males reinforce the perception that young African American and Mexican American/Chicano males are dangerous and in need of more severe punishment. In fact, during the 2010–2011 academic years, California schools suspended 700,000 students, many of which resulted from applying a Zero-Tolerance, punitive, approach toward trivial student misbehavior (Policy Priorities, 2012).
African American children in California received out-of-school suspensions at a rate of 171 per 1,000 students (Policy Priorities, 2012).

As previously noted, there is a plethora of literature on labeling and profiling (Rios, 2011; De La Cruz, 2011; Fuentes, 2011-2012) young men considered street gang members, and the impact street gang members have on schools and their communities (Duke, 2002; Venkatesh, 2003; Wall-Whitefield, 2010). On the other hand, there is limited research that brings together both researcher and the street gang member and gives voice to those people who are very seldom heard as it relates to school or their social needs. One of the primary purposes of this study is to increase that literature base concerning this topic by listening to the voices of the street gang member.

It is also important to examine the impact of the School-to-Prison Pipeline and how these policies and practices push our nation's schoolchildren, particularly children of color, out of the classroom and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems (Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2005; Nicholson-Crotty, Birchmeier, & Valentine, 2009). These social control policies criminalize minor infractions of school rules and encourage educators to push out low-performing students to improve their school's overall test scores.

Students of color are especially vulnerable to push-out trends and the discriminatory application of Zero-Tolerance discipline. Proponents of these policies argue that these practices were designed to: (a) remove the offending student, (b) provide temporary relief to teachers and administrators, and (c) get the attention of parents (Dupper, Theriot, & Craun, 2008). Similarly, the American Academy of

Pediatrics (2003) stated, “suspension and expulsion from school are used to punish students, alert parents, and protect other students and school staff” (p. 1206).

In actuality, these educational practices appear to do nothing more than to prioritize incarceration over education (Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson 2005; Nicholson-Crotty, Birchmeier, & Valentine, 2009). To start, many of the children impacted by these policies and practices have learning disabilities or histories of poverty, abuse (PTSD), or neglect, and would benefit much more from additional educational and counseling services. Instead, they are isolated, punished and pushed out of school many times for continual minor behavioral infractions. Moreover, there is no empirical evidence to support the alleged deterrent effect of suspensions (American Psychological Association Zero-Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Losen & Skiba, 2010). To the contrary, what has been discovered is that students who are suspended or expelled tend to get into more trouble because they are often left unsupervised. So the punishment of suspension or expulsion actually creates the occasion for more delinquency and acting out (Dupper, Theriot, & Craun, 2008). Additionally, when considering street gang violence, the tactics of continual repression often lead to violence, as illustrated in Figure 5.

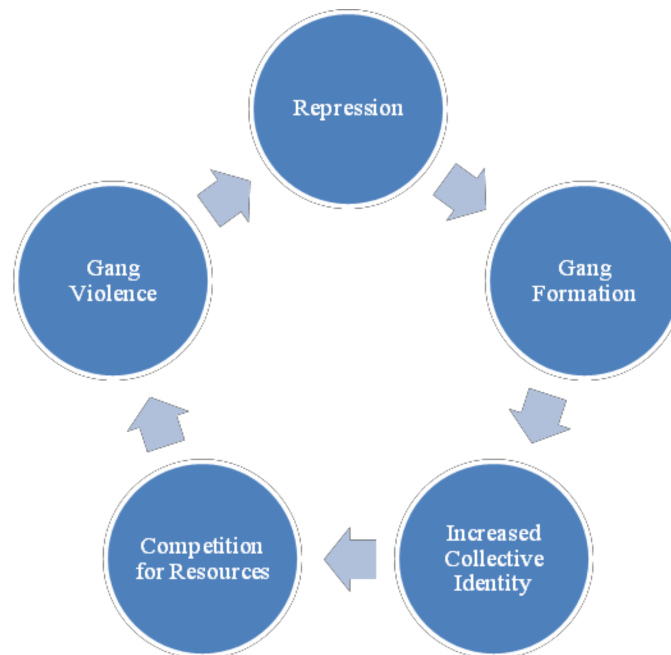

Figure 5. The Gang Cycle of Violence (adapted from Long, 2010).

More recently, the Center for Disease Control published a report in which they suggested that as many as 30 percent of our inner city kids suffer from symptoms of PTSD. Although the phrase is certainly racist, Harvard doctors have coined this phenomenon “hood disease” (Coleman, 2014 p. 1). Jeff Duncan-Andrade, Ph.D of San Francisco State University calls inner city “virtual war zones.” He states,

> Unlike soldiers, children in the inner city never leave the combat zone. They often experience trauma, repeatedly. You could take anyone who is experiencing the symptoms of PTSD, and the things we are currently emphasizing in school will fall off their radar. Because frankly it does not matter in our biology if we don’t survive the walk home. (Coleman, 2014 p.1)

Although there are no data available to this researcher to determine the number of suspensions or expulsions for continual minor behavioral infractions in SUSD, data are accessible that shows high dropout rates of African American students (33.3 percent) and of Mexican American/Chicano students (27.7 percent) (Ed. Data, 2010-2011). These dropout rates hold stark implications for the economic and social welfare of the students who fail to graduate, and could be very well one of the many reasons for street gang involvement and the high number of violent crimes in Stockton.

It is interesting to note that most of the research on street gang violence has primarily been conducted by law enforcement personnel and academicians. This researcher found no inquiries on street gang violence carried out by non-profit or for-profit corporations. More importantly, there has never been a research study conducted that gives voice to the street gang member in Stockton. It seems that if answers to the problem of street gang violence were to be found, it would behoove the besieged citizens of Stockton to listen, learn, and gain new viewpoints from the street gang members themselves. Their insights can inform us about venues and processes that lie at the heart of violent street gang behavior.

The intent of this critical ethnographic research was to address this issue by giving voice to four self-disclosed Mexican American/Chicano male street gang members over the age of 18 and explore their lived experiences in school and their communities. This researcher asked the participants for their perspective into what they believed are the causes for the continuous violence that has been increasing in

Stockton for the past two years. Participants were asked to give their opinion, drawing from personal experiences, whether or not violence had anything to do with social control, if social control impacted their decision to join a street gang, and if joining a street gang increased their violent behavior. They were also asked to elaborate on whether or not social control hindered completion of their educational endeavors.

Conclusion

This chapter provided an in-depth review of academic literature involving the development of U.S. gangs from the early 20th century to early 21st century. The chapter also gave us a glimpse into the difficulty law enforcement and academics alike have in defining an accurate definition of what constitutes a gang. It also furnishes a theoretical framework that allows for a richer comprehension of the specific policies that have been implemented in our school and communities to address gangs. Zero-Tolerance practices, and the widespread pattern of School-to-Prison-Pipeline, were also examined as a possible source concerning much of the explosion in gang membership and gang activity over the past thirty years.

Let us now turn to Chapter Three, which outlines the critical ethnographic study methodology used to answer the major research questions. Chapter Three discusses the selection of the participants, the data collection, data analysis, description of the participants, and the background of the researcher.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

> "Critical ethnography describes, analyzes and opens to scrutiny otherwise hidden aged power centers, assumptions that inhibit, repress and constrain. Critical scholarship requires that common sense assumptions be questioned" (Thomas, 1993, p. 3).

Overall Approach and Rationale

The method of inquiry for this research is critical ethnography, which is "the systematic recording of human cultures" (Merriam-Webster n.d.). Mertens defines culture as "behavior, ideas, beliefs and knowledge of a particular group of people" (1998, p. 165). This study focused and investigated the commonality of stories, actions, experiences and structure of four self-disclosed Mexican American/Chicano gang members as it applies to social control in the context of family, school, law enforcement, community. The following chapter outlines the methodology and research model that guided the study, the data collection and analytical procedures that were used, the selection of the participants, and the questions that guided the dialogue between researcher and study participants.

Critical Ethnographic Study

Thomas (1993) offered a comprehensive outline of the differences between conventional ethnography and critical ethnography. Conventional ethnography describes what is and speaks for the subjects, while critical ethnography asks what for

and speaks to an audience on behalf of their subjects as a means of empowering them by giving authority to the subject's voice. Thomas described critical ethnography as a tool with a political purpose that attempts to use knowledge for social change. He stated that critical ethnographers use their work to "aid emancipatory goals or to negate the repressive influences that lead to unnecessary social domination of all groups" (p. 4).

A critical ethnographic perspective in research is one where the researcher moves beyond analysis and focuses on openly advocating for a group that is marginalized by society. Moreover, critical ethnography challenges the status quo and advocates for emancipation of the marginalized (Creswell, 2002). It is an opportunity for the ethnographic researcher to shine a spotlight on inequality and domination of marginalized groups by those in power. Groups such as street gang members, the poor, minorities, and women have much in common in their experiences with oppression by the dominant society, and they share patterns of behavior and beliefs based on their mutual experiences with marginalization (Guajardo, 2005). Additionally, critical ethnography allows an outsider to enter the world of the participant and see the world through their eyes (Hanrahan, Griggs, & Zimmermann, 2005).

For this study the researcher interviewed four self-disclosed Mexican American/Chicano street gang members to investigate whether or not they encountered any barriers resulting from social control within their family setting, their schools, in their interaction with law enforcement, and the broader community where

they lived. The intent of this study was to provide school administrators, teachers, law enforcement, community leaders and the participants of the study a basis for the development and continued dialogue between these groups that may bring about change through praxis on the part of everyone involved. It was also the intent of this study to briefly investigate, through the voice of the participant, what may have caused the increase of violence in Stockton during 2011-12, and present possible solutions that may ameliorate the issues that have been outlined in this study.

Using a critical ethnographic approach allowed the researcher to take an active stance in the study and learn from the participants what part if any social control had on their decision to join a street gang. The study also presented participants with an opportunistic forum to share their life's story with the researcher so that meanings could be derived and expressed from their own perspective.

While conducting this study, it was essential for this researcher to do so in a manner that would not further trample upon the rights of the group being studied. For this reason, this researcher was reflective and acknowledged that a participant's lived experiences could very well have a great influence on how this researcher interpreted the culture and behaviors of each of the participants. Given that this researcher has had intense and direct personal experience with being harassed and profiled by law enforcement, school administrators, teachers and community members, this researcher took every precaution to ensure that the quotes from the various individuals in this study were interpreted through an etic perspective (Creswell, 2002).

The emancipatory nature of critical ethnography through critical dialogue complements a liberatory, multicultural, and socially Reconstructionist goal. Critical ethnography links research with action by involving the participants in the process and brings researcher and participant closer towards critical consciousness as an outcome of problematizing, probing, and naming the world (Freire & Faundez, 1989). Knowledge generated through this approach is emancipatory by its very nature in that it offers potential solutions to problems experienced by the participants. It is through the practice of praxis, amongst others who have experienced the same realities within their community, that this research was pursued.

As stated in the theoretical framework section, critical ethnography embraces a humanistic view of knowledge (Maguire, 1987). The openness of a critical ethnographic study gives the participants an opportunity to become constructors of their own knowledge and take ownership of the data, thereby dismantling the authoritarian nature of traditional research where the researcher controls the subjects and interprets the outcomes of the study (Freire, 1970). By posing questions in dialogue sessions, the participants had an occasion to contemplate on and describe their lived experiences pertaining to social control and uncover if social control impacted their decision to join a street gang. Through the Dialogic Retrospection process developed by Kieffer (1981), participants illuminated the concepts of empowerment developed by Freire (1970) and interrupted their powerlessness, however brief.

A major focus in this study was to shed light on the transformational process that characterizes the development of these individuals from voiceless people of the social, legal and educational systems to individuals who achieve a better understanding about their present condition and their potential future through critical discourse and reflection. Intrinsic in this undertaking was the recognition that "words" are more than just an instrument that makes dialogue possible (Reveles, 1993). Ada (1991) clearly emphasized that:

> Through the use of language, the possibility of communicating thoughts and feelings, sharing past experiences, and planning for the future is an attribute of human beings. In normal community life, all individuals, unless they are physiologically or mentally impaired, learn the language of their group, using it with ease and efficiency. (p. 89)

Freire (1970) maintained that there are two dimensions within the "word," rumination and action, and that if there is any compromise between these two interactions—even in part—the other suffers. Freire goes on to highlight that "there is no true word that is not at the same time praxis. Thus, to speak a true word is to transform the world" (p. 75).

The purpose of this research was to unmask oppressive practices and create new practices that empower. Through dialogue, the researcher was able to gain insight concerning each street gang member's point of view of the systematic procedures used by family, schools, law enforcement and communities to name and ultimately label them street gang members. Moreover, an examination of the street

gang member's relationship to school and their community was studied to determine the effect and affect gang members have on school systems and communities and how these two entities mutually impact and influence one another.

Identify Gatekeeper

Creswell (2002) provided a detailed outline that was used for this study when selecting the site and participants with the aid of a Gatekeeper: "(a) Review access considerations and approval from university institutional review board (UIRB). (b) Locate a research site using purposeful sampling techniques. (c) Identify gatekeepers who will provide access. (d) Guarantee the protection of the site and the participants" (p. 496). A gatekeeper is someone who has an official or unofficial role at the specified site and who can help identify participants for the study and assist in obtaining any required permissions to perform the study.

Given the researcher's personal history, it was the researcher's belief that Gatekeepers at various agencies who work with individuals on probation or parole could provide access to the best candidates for the study. The researcher knew that many people on probation or parole are often mandated to participate in self-help programs by their probation or parole agents. Additionally, many individuals that are on probation or parole have been 'documented' as street gang members by law enforcement agencies, and schools, or 'labeled' gang members by their communities.

There are a number of programs that work with persons who are on probation or parole in the City of Stockton. A good number of the programs working with offender populations are live-in programs that include a myriad of services such as

medical and mental assessments, and treatment for substance abuse issues. These programs often provide parenting and anger management classes and peer support groups. This researcher contacted Executive Directors or Program Managers (Gatekeepers) of three different programs (Recovery House, New Directions, and Fathers and Families of San Joaquin) that work with persons who have been involved with the criminal justice system.

During telephone conversations, this researcher briefly explained the study to every person in charge. Each director was asked if they would be interested in allowing this researcher an opportunity to interview a minimum four self-disclosed Mexican American/Chicano street gang members concerning the impact social control had had on their decision to join a street gang. One of the program directors indicated that conducting research on their site would require written permission from the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR), given that their clients were exclusively state parolees. The other program director indicated that research such as the one being conducted through this study could jeopardize their clientele and therefore decided not to allow their clients to participate.

The Executive Director of Fathers and Families of San Joaquin returned my call a few days after my initial contact via telephone and a meeting was scheduled to discuss the possibility of this research being conducted at their facility. Three days later we met. After a lengthy conversation concerning the pros and cons associated with working with street gang members, the Executive Director agreed to allow this researcher the opportunity to conduct the study at the Fathers and Families of San

Joaquin site. This is how the Executive Director of Fathers and Families of San Joaquin became the primary gatekeeper for this critical ethnographic study. As concierge in this case, the Director was particularly interested in this study because he also wanted to learn what impact, if any, social control had on participant's lives and the difficulties street gang members were encountering during their transformational process from the street gang lifestyle into mainstream society.

The Executive Director indicated he would provide a list of names of perspective participants for the study. This researcher decided to use a purposeful sampling technique. This intentional selection of individuals and the site of a study allowed the researcher and Director to choose men who were currently on probation or parole, but who were in the process of improving their lives by breaking the chains of street gang involvement, criminality and incarceration.

This researcher and Director agreed to choose participants with extensive criminal records and poor academic histories, who possibly were on parole or probation and who had struggled to live within societal rules and regulations. The requirements for participation in this study were:

1. Candidates had to be 18 years or older.
2. Candidates had to be in the Fathers and Families of San Joaquin program for a minimum of six months.
3. Participants could not have more than two absences during their program involvement.
4. Each participant had to be enrolled in school or gainfully employed.

5. Participants could not have had any physical or verbal altercations during the enrollment in the Fathers and Families of San Joaquin.

These requirements served to minimize potential problems during the study and it was hoped that each participant would by this time have a better understanding of societal norms.

During the initial meeting between the Executive Director of Fathers and Families of San Joaquin and this researcher, a copy of the consent form that was used for this study was provided to the Executive Director. Information as to why this site was chosen, what information was being sought in this study, how much time the researcher would spend interviewing participants, what potential harm there might be to the candidates, and how the information would be used at the conclusion of this study were also discussed.

Two weeks later, the researcher once again met with the Director to obtain the formal letter written by the Director informing the UIRB that he was the Program Director of Father and Families of San Joaquin and was granting permission for the study to be conducted at their facility (see Appendix B).

Once permission was granted by the UIRB, written documentation was given to the Executive Director of Fathers and Families of San Joaquin explaining the above-mentioned criterion for conducting the research study. A copy of the Informed Consent form was provided to the Director, and a detailed outline concerning the objectives of this study was also made available. Then interviews with the participants were scheduled.

Selection and Portraits of Participants

There were initially 56 individuals contacted as possible participants for this research study; however, only four eventually agreed to participate. The biggest barrier in identifying participants came primarily from a general reluctance on the part of the street gang member's willingness to engage in a conversation that involved revealing their involvement in their street gang and their personal information. Given that street gang members are often involved in covert and criminal activities, many of the participants who were asked to participate were suspicious about opening up to anyone concerning their street gang involvement, family interactions, school activities, and their prior history with law enforcement. Most of the individuals who did not agree to participate in this study made comments such as "Naw man, I don't want to get caught up" or "I don't want to get arrested." Even after this researcher explained that they would not get into trouble if they participated, many of the gang members approached by this researcher still believed they would somehow get into trouble with the police.

The two central factors in obtaining willing participants for this study were (1) the development of a genuine relationship between this researcher and the participants and (2) the fact that this researcher is a former gang member also helped create a sense of trust between the participant street gang member and this researcher.

The four individuals who did consent to take part in this study met the requirements noted earlier in that each participant had been enrolled in the Fathers and Families of San Joaquin Program for a minimum of six months; they had all been

without any behavioral infractions while in the program and none of the individuals chosen had ever missed a class session assigned to them by their program case manager. All of the participants had discharged parole and were attending classes in an attempt to improve the quality of their lives.

As previously noted, all the participants were over the age of 18. This researcher intentionally chose older participants because it was hoped that their maturity would provide us with richer information. Interestingly, all the participants did not consider themselves former gang members and indicated that they were still part of the gang; each participant claimed that the only difference was that they simply did not involve themselves in gang-related crime.

All of the participants had been involved in criminal activity much of their lives and have extensive police records for both petty and serious crimes. Contrary to common belief, however, the participants all claimed that very few of the crimes they committed were related to street gang activity. All four participants stated that most of the crimes they committed were due primarily to their development of a criminal mentality.

Given that there is often hostility amongst street gang members from different street gangs, it is important to note that even though the participants came from different street gangs, there was no animosity toward each other during their involvement in this study. The lack of antagonism was important because it made it easier to adhere to the confidentiality and anonymity required to conduct this study.

Each participant selected a fictitious first name (Louie, Mike, Mario, and Pete, respectively), to protect his anonymity.

Participant One

Louie is a 50-year-old Mexican American/Chicano male who was born in Los Angeles, California. At age nine, he moved with his family to the Vista Housing Projects located in South Stockton (the name of the housing projects was changed to ensure confidentiality). Louie comes from a large family of four brothers and three sisters and is second to the youngest. His parents divorced when he was six years old. Louie states that both his mother and father were alcoholics and his father was physically abusive to his mother. They are both deceased.

Louie claims that from the very start he had problems in the community where he lived and that by the time he entered high school in Stockton Unified School District, he had already developed a history of truancy, and a reputation with school administration as a troublemaker. Louie became associated with his gang during junior high school and by age 12, he launched what would become an extensive criminal history. He was arrested four times as a juvenile, three times for assault and once for murder. As an adult, he has been arrested four times for gun possessions, approximately 15 times for drug charges and on three different occasions for driving while under the influence of a controlled substance. He claims that only two of the gun charges and the murder conviction were gang-related.

When you first see Louie he appears to have the look that could easily be misinterpreted as hostile or one of consternation. But a closer look reveals that Louie's look has become part of his make-up to daily confront his world.

The lifestyle that Louie has led for the majority of his life is evident through the many tattoos covering his arms. The tattoos on his hands and arms are a vain attempt by Louie to cover the scar tissue that are the consequence of injecting heroin most of his life. In fact, Louie continues to struggle with heroin addiction and is currently a patient of the methadone maintenance program. I spoke with Louie's son, who continues to check up on his father. He knows his father struggles with addiction, so he makes sure that Louie eats and has a place to stay.

Participant Two

Mario is 53-year-old male Mexican American/Chicano male born in Porterville, California. Like Louie, Mario comes from a large family of two brothers and six sisters and both his mother and father drank constantly. Mario's family moved to San Jose, California, when he was four years old where he attended elementary school. Mario claims he had a lot of problems while in school and that most of his problems stem from his feeling that he never belonged in school. He indicated that he, his friend Andrew, and maybe four other students were the only Mexican American/Chicanos students in the entire school. He started getting into fights and having other behavioral problems by the fourth grade.

Mario and his family moved again when he was 12 years old to the South Side of Stockton. It was at this time that he joined a local street gang. He did not get into

trouble with law enforcement much during his teenage years, but does have an extensive adult criminal record. He has been incarcerated approximately 30 times for property crimes, seven times for drug charges, twice for armed robbery, twice for car theft and once for assault. Mario states that only the assault was gang-related.

Mario also seems to be affected by the same dilemmas that have adversely impacted Louie. The difference between these two men is that Mario does not have a son who looks out for him. In fact, Mario is currently homeless and living under a bridge. I saw him the other day, although I did not recognize him at first. He was riding a bike and pulled up next to me as I waited to pull into a street. He said hello to me and acted as though I should know him. I went along with the conversation until I recognized who he was and continued our conversation. I asked him how he was doing and he said he was doing alright even though he was homeless. I was sad to see him act as though being homeless was normal. I told him that I would contact him when the dissertation was completed and give him a copy.

Participant Three

Mike is 54-years old, the oldest of one brother and two sisters. He also has four half-brothers and half-sisters who did not grow up in the home with him. Mike lived in the East Side of Stockton in a fairly good neighborhood, where most of his neighbors were of Asian descent. Like the other participants, Mike’s problems began at home. Mike’s home life was so abusive that any opportunity to leave the home was viewed as an escape.

Mike, more than the other participants, began school with enthusiasm. He believed that school would become his refuge. However, not long after he began school, his religious mother went to the administration and told them that he was not allowed to pledge allegiance to the flag. This utterly humiliated and instigated a deep resentment in him for his mother and the way she polluted his one place of respite. Eventually, Mike began to run away from home and seek camaraderie among people who, like him, found themselves alienated from their homes. This led to Mike joining a gang that ultimately replaced his birth family.

Mike has an extensive criminal record, with 44 arrests, for a myriad of crimes. Unlike the others, however, Mike states that every crime he committed was gang related. Mike currently works as a substance abuse counselor in a methadone clinic in the center of Stockton. It is evident that Mike has worked through many of his issues concerning his gang past and substance abuse. However, Mike continues to harbor unresolved resentments towards his mother and siblings, and also toward religion in general. His son was murdered by gang members in 2012, so his rage is alive, and not helpful to the relationships that have survived, namely his marriage.

Participant Four

Pete is a 44-year-old Mexican American/Chicano male, whose parents were born in Los Angeles, California. He stated that he did not know his father and was mostly raised by his mother. Pete stated that his mother was a drunk and a prostitute. She did marry a good man who treated him as though he was his own son.

Unfortunately, the stepfather was only in Pete's life for two years as a result of his passing on when Pete was only 7 years old.

Pete was raised in the Southside Housing Projects in Stockton, California. His problems primarily began at a very young age as a result of parental neglect, abuse, and his exposure to intense violence both in the home and within his community. Pete attended Stockton Unified School District and subsequently, exhibited many behavioral problems while enrolled in elementary school. Eventually, he was isolated from his classmates and placed in a learning module intended to address his aggression and protect the other kids from him.

Pete also has an extensive criminal history dating back to when he was a young boy of 10 years old. He states that he has been arrested for assault on four different occasions, property crimes at least 15 times, robbery twice and drug crimes at least twelve times. He claims that only two of the assault charges were gang-related. On the surface Pete does not appear to have been affected by the lifestyle he has led for much of his life. Pete has a gregarious personality and is very chatty. It was through our pre-interview conversations that he revealed how his daughter was lost to the streets and how he feels partially responsible for her misguided life. It was during the conversation about his daughter that Pete demonstrated emotions that almost brought him to tears.

Table 1

Participant Arrest Demographics

Participant	Number of Arrests	Gang-Related Crimes	Non-Gang-Related
Louie	32	2	30
Mario	42	1	41
Mike	44	44	0
Pete	33	2	31

Data Collection

Creswell (1998) described four basic forms of data collection for ethnographic research: observations, interviews, document search, and audio–visual documentation. However, this study only used three of these forms and employed a triangulation procedure utilizing observations, audio taped interviews and note documentation. Triangulation of data ensures validity and brings together a variety of methods of gathering data that includes observations, interviews and document search. Mertens (1998) described triangulation as a method of "comparing the data from a variety of sources to find consistency of evidence" (p. 183). This research study employed audio taped interviews, observations and note taking during the interview process to afford the researcher a fuller picture of the information being provided by the participants. Through the observations, this researcher was able to read body and facial cues that revealed the participants various emotional states of mind after asking questions that at times seemed to cause the participant discomfort.

There are a number of advantages for using more than one method when gathering ethnographic information. First, not all information can be collected by simply observing the surroundings or individuals participating in the study. Therefore, interviews are needed to clarify behavior and situations that may arise during visits by the researcher at the research site. Second, the opinions and stories of the participants can provide insight into their perceptions of the reality of the experience in question. Finally, using a variety of data-gathering methods from a variety of sources connects and often helps confirm the veracity of the data (Guajardo, 2005). Observation is the "gathering of first–hand information by observing people and places at a research site" (Creswell, 2002, p. 199). In this study the collection of data was relatively unstructured, with no formal instruments such as surveys or testing forms used.

Once rapport between the researcher and participants was established, this researcher spent time making observations after the interview process was started. For this research, and before the tape recorder was turned on, an unstructured interview style using open-ended questions was used to allow participants an opportunity to discuss whatever they pleased (Hanrahan et al, 2005). The conversation between participant and this researcher was conducted so as to put the participant at ease. Marshall and Rossman (1999) assert that, "the researcher explores a few general topics to uncover the participant's views but otherwise respects how the participant frames and structures the responses" (p. 108).

At the first meeting with each participant, the researcher read the consent form aloud, then provided each participant with a copy. Every aspect of the form and study was explained in detail. The participants were also apprised as to why the research was being conducted and the integral part their participation played in this research study. This researcher also provided each participant with a clear written and verbal explanation concerning the importance of this study for law enforcement agencies, schools and the broader community, and how this research could possibly uncover information that could help them understand why they had decided to join a gang that ultimately led them toward spending many years of their lives incarcerated. Research participants were also informed that they would receive no compensation and that this researcher would ultimately obtain his doctorate upon completion of the study. The participants were also informed, verbally, and in writing, that participation in this study was voluntary and that there would be no negative consequences if they chose to withdraw from this study at any time.

Given that gang members typically do not trust anyone associated with law enforcement, schools, or anyone not associated with them, it was imperative that the participants understand and believe that their anonymity would be strictly confidential. They were also advised that their street gangs would not be mentioned by name to protect everyone concerned in this research study and that the Participants’ identifying characteristics would not be documented to ensure the participants safety. Although this researcher did make reference to participant’s age and general physical demeanor, this was only done to illustrate some of the issues the

research would be addressing. Given that a tape recorder would be used to record the interview sessions, participants were notified not to discuss behavior during the interview that could expose them to any legal problems. The participants were also made aware of the fact that the tape recordings, written notes taken by the researcher, and any other material used to complete this study, would be secured in a file cabinet at the researcher's residence for safe keeping. To ensure confidentiality, the participants were told that the materials gathered throughout this research study would be destroyed after five years and that in no time would anyone not associated with this study or the doctorial program at CSU, Stanislaus would ever be given access to the material. It was at this time that each participant signed the consent form (See Appendix A).

Interviews were conducted in an informal, one-on-one setting (Creswell, 2002). Small incidental incentives for the participants, such as drinks and snacks, were made available. However, it was made clear to the interviewees that they would not be paid for the information and that they were welcome to the refreshments even if they did not participate in the interview.

The interviews conducted with the four self-disclosed Mexican American/Chicano gang members focused on the issue of social control and the impact social control had on their decision to join a gang. However, questions concerning the increase in violence in the city of Stockton during 2011 and 2012 were also asked. The participants were encouraged to share events in their lives which had meaning for them in their past that they felt comfortable disclosing in a research

environment. To glean the most accurate read from their lived experiences, it was imperative that the questions and tone remain conversational. Despite the orderliness of the questions, it was also important to let the participants feel like the interview had all the features of improvisational dialogue present in the room where the research was being conducted. This was done by relying on the same candid, sincere and casual quality of our conversations outside of the research and the participant's responses were utilized verbatim in an attempt to capture their voice in its entirety.

Given that this researcher was acquainted with two of the participants before the research project began, it was less challenging to gain their trust and earn their respect as a person who valued the power of oral history and personal narrative. All participants were aware of the researcher's history in their underworld ranks and his [the researcher] subsequent transformation away from that violent milieu. Therefore, it was easier for the participants to believe that the researcher understood their point of view of their world, and the reality that each of the participants struggled and lived with on a daily basis.

The participants were encouraged to verbalize their lived experiences and elaborate on events that impacted them most profoundly during their childhoods. Utilizing a critical ethnographic free-flowing model, participants were able to describe, analyze and open to scrutiny the assumptions that they had inhibited, repressed and constrained. The critical ethnographic model was ideal for making the interviewees feel safe and provided them with the opportunity to expose otherwise

hidden power centers that had kept their stories in bondage and isolated from the world at large (Thomas, 1993).

In August 2013, this researcher contacted participant Louie to set up an interview with him. He agreed to meet with this researcher the following Monday at 10:00 a.m. The participant and researcher had had multiple conversations with each other over the span of 15 years so each knew what to expect regarding the other’s conversational temperament and demeanor.

On the designated date the researcher arrived at the facility where the interviews were to take place. Louie arrived promptly at 10:00 a.m. The researcher pulled out the Informed Consent and read it to him. It was important to establish that Louie was still committed to participating in the research project. The researcher again explained the objectives of the research study and asked Louie if he understood. Louie responded by stating he understood and signed the Consent Form, after which the interview began.

From the start, Louie openly shared his experiences with this researcher. His facial expressions gave the appearance that he felt like he was in a safe zone. Louie didn’t appear stressed during his responses. His answers were immediate and candid, sometimes portraying himself in not so flattering light. At the end of the session, Louie stated that he had benefited from the interview, and that talking about his past experiences revealed how much family, school, law enforcement and community had impacted his decision to become a street gang member. Louie, in a calm voice stated that he could better comprehend the circumstances that led him to ultimately adopt a

criminal lifestyle. He indicated that talking about his experiences had lifted a weight off his shoulders that he did not realize he had been burdened with for years. The fact that Louie was provided an opportunity to tell his story and have someone listen and understand him is beyond parallel (Noddings, 1999 & Juarez, 1996).

Each interview was conducted with the same list of questions, asked in the same order, and organized to fit neatly into four categories. Periodically, a question was asked outside of the preordained questions, but only so the participants could clarify a point they had just conveyed and to allow them the freedom to unpack an idea or story further. The first set of questions probed their childhood family lives. After those questions were exhausted, the researcher asked the participants to describe their childhood school experiences. Next, were the questions about the participants' relationships with law enforcement and the community where they grew up during their formative years.

After reviewing each participant's responses to questions from the first interview, the researcher scheduled a second interview. During the second meeting, the answers to the first set of questions were discussed with the participants before formally conducting the second interview. We discussed their responses to the questions and how their answers were related to their family, school, law enforcement and the community where they lived.

This researcher jotted down notes on paper during the interviews and expanded on the notes as soon as the interview session ended. On a few occasions this researcher asked the interviewee to pause or slow down to accurately write down

their responses. From time to time, this researcher stopped and read back part of the notes to the interviewee to make sure this researcher had a clear understanding about what the participant was describing.

Throughout the interview process, this researcher was sensitive to the issues the participants were dealing with and allowed the participants to guide the interview in the direction that they wished. In addition, this researcher continuously made a conscious effort to be aware of his personal biases and tried not to impose his personal values in the questions being asked or in the reaction to participant's responses. Again, it was important to win the trust of the participants so that they would speak freely and answer questions without fear of retribution. Marshall and Rossman (1999) maintained that it is a researcher's interpersonal skills that determine the success of the interviews. At each step, the researcher compiled findings and provided participants with transcribed copies of the interviews in order to encourage a dialogue over the content of the findings and how the information could be used to alter their life trajectories. These discussions provided the vehicle for possible "transformation" for each of the participants. The transcribed copy of the findings became a life document that they could take away and utilize in their continuing process of self-awareness. Given that these participants had survived large trauma in their lives, the relationship to their memories limited their ability to aid the researcher and provide substantive input into configuring or translating the data of their lives.

Major Research Questions and Questions to Guide the Dialogue

There are three major research questions that informed this study. They are as follows:

1) What are the lived experiences of four self-disclosed Mexican American/Chicano street gang members regarding social control by law enforcement, the educational system, family, and broader community?

2) Did social control influence their behaviors in the educational system and the broader community that compelled them to join a street gang?

3) What do the participants believe can be done to ameliorate the violence in their communities?

The questions to guide the dialogue were designed to answer the major research questions by eliciting the street gang members' perceptions of their family, school, law enforcement and community lived experiences. Moreover, it was imperative that the street gang members voice their opinions concerning the violence in their community, both past and present, and what they believe can be done to educate law enforcement, school administrators, family, and their communities to better understand and aid young students at risk of joining a gang. Below are the five categories of questions and categories posed to each participant in the order they were asked.

Family Questions

1. Describe your parents or your family background?
2. Describe the various ways in which your parents earned a living?9

3. What type of supervision did you have while you were growing up?
4. How many children were in your family and where were you in the line-up?
5. Did you feel like your parents expected the children to perform certain duties in the home? If yes, what would you say those duties were, for you, and for the other kids?
6. Did duties break down in any way by gender? If yes, can you explain how you perceived them to be gendered?
7. Did you feel like the expectations to perform home duties were even for the boys and girls? Is so, please explain?
8. How would you describe your family's economic circumstances?
9. Describe the time(s), if any, when you recall money being tight in the home?
10. Describe the times when you remember having to do without things you wanted or needed?
11. List the sort of activities your family did together?
12. Describe how your family celebrated holidays (e.g., Christmas, Thanksgiving, birthdays)?

Community Questions

1. Describe your childhood community?
2. What part did violence play in your neighborhood?
3. Describe the various levels of violence you were aware of in your neighborhood?
4. Can you describe how you felt about living there?

5. Please describe the parks in your neighborhood and explain the ways you used to use them – e.g. play, parties, hang out?
6. What type of fun activities did your community provide you with during your free time?
7. To the best of your recollection, please list and describe who you believed were the role models in your neighborhood?
8. What types of jobs were available during your teenage years? Doing what?
9. How prevalent were drugs and alcohol in your neighborhood?
10. Compare your understanding of the drugs and alcohol use in your neighborhood to use in an average neighborhood?
11. Compare your drug and alcohol use to the average user in your neighborhood?

School Questions

1. What was school like for you?
2. Describe how you were impacted by the schooling offered to you?
3. Explain what you liked most about school?
4. Describe your closest friends at school?
5. List the extracurricular activities you were involved in and why they appealed to you?
6. Did you have a favorite teacher?
7. How were the lesser teachers similar to each other?
8. How was your favorite teacher different from the other teachers?
9. What did you want to be when you grew up?

10. Describe the sorts of careers that appealed to you when you were younger, jobs or fields you thought you might one day find yourself in?
11. What sort of things did your most effective teachers do to open you up to learning?
12. What type of support did you have at home regarding school?
13. Describe the best ways you received support at home regarding your schoolwork and the ways in which you wanted more support but did not receive it?

Law Enforcement Questions

1. Describe the incident that triggered your first awareness that there was a police presence in your neighborhood?
2. What sorts of things did you feel when you saw police patrolling your neighborhood?
3. Describe your earliest contacts with police, your first three experiences?
4. Tell me about you evolving relationship with law enforcement?
5. Did the police ever come to your house to arrest anyone in your family?
6. Please describe in detail how you felt after the police left?
7. Please explain why you could, or could not, trust the police to protect you?
8. What were the more popular things—either negative or positive—you heard in your neighborhood to describe the police?

Recommendation from Participants Questions

1. How many of the murders and assaults that occurred in Stockton between 2011-2012 do you think were gang-related?

2. What do you think parents, school administrators, law enforcement, or community leaders can do to minimize the potential of their school-aged kids from joining gangs?

Once all the interviews were conducted, the task of coding the data and finding themes that continually reoccurred began in earnest.

Data Analysis

Interview questions were divided into five categories. The first four categories were devised to derive the participant's opinions on their childhood home lives, their interactions at school, in their communities, and with law enforcement. The fifth category was intended to elicit the participant's views regarding the level of gang involvement they attributed to recent violence in the city of Stockton. This category also chronicled their recommendations on how to minimize the risk of school-aged kids being enticed to the gang life.

The interview questions were all posed in the same order to help chronicle the progression of each participant's narrative. The purpose of the progression was to help capture a comparison of the same episodes of each participant's life story. This strategy allowed for clear contrasts and likenesses in the data to be easily revealed. For example, each participant was asked to describe the economic situation in each of their childhood homes. Three of the four participants spoke about the embarrassment of having to wear hand-me-down or handmade clothing to school and how this adversely impacted their evolving identities as the outsider to the normative socialization of the other students.

When each participant's answers were transcribed, every individual response was then incorporated into one document right next to the other participant's replies to the same question. Louie's answer about childhood poverty was placed right above Mike's answer about childhood poverty, which was placed right above Mario's and then Pete's reply. These four concurrent replies to the same question made it easier to discover and code similar themes and subthemes in their lives, what might be called the hidden likeness in their childhoods. Multiply this process by the many questions posed, and answers formatted this way in a single interview document, it is easy to see how the discoveries of themes availed themselves quite readily. This is how some of the findings were epiphanic and not derived from scientific methodology. The main method for drawing out the findings turned out to be simple readings of the data. This researcher only needed to pay attention to recognize and note the high degree of morbidity each participant was exposed to as a child, or the poverty and neighborhood menace they endured, or the levels of exposure to demented religiosity, or mental illness and drug addiction in their early years, to see the hidden likenesses in their lives.

The structure of the questions, the data revealed in each category, and the subsequent transcribing of each discreet interview response into one document, became a research device that helped facilitate the revelation of the themes. This study followed a two-pronged approach ethnographic data analysis: description and interpretation of gang culture. The description chronicled "a day in the life of the group or individual... focusing on a critical or key event, developing a story complete

with a plot and characters" (Creswell, 1998, p. 152). Mertens (1998) calls this a "thick description" (p. 183).

In a thick description, the researcher supplies enough detail about the time, place, and the context to allow a reader to get a full, complex picture of the culture and the individuals involved in the study. It is hoped that this thick description will allow the reader to catch a true picture into the world of Mexican American/Chicano street gang members and gain an understanding of their culture.

The huge amount of data generated through the dialogues with the participants necessitated a dynamic and flexible approach to data analysis. Although formal analysis of the data occurred after the dialogues were completed, the researcher continually assessed the information on an ongoing basis searching for relationships, meanings, and emerging themes across all the dialogues. Also noted were the emotions and body language of the participants during the dialogues in an attempt to better grasp the meanings and intentions of what the participants were saying or not saying. The themes and meanings that emerged in the first interview were presented to the participants during the second interview for their review, reaction, and interpretation. As this process continued for the participants, numerous evolving topics and themes were coded and logged. These written logs were continually updated as the participants clarified, and elaborated on what they had said.

Background of the Researcher

As a researcher conducting Critical Ethnography, my own background and biases are important to explain because they could shape and form the outcomes of this study. It was critical to remain continuously mindful of any preconceived notions concerning this topic. Critical ethnographers recognize that a completely objective stance toward their work is impossible. Rather than hide their biases, it is necessary to make the researcher's assumptions and perspectives in the study clear. There is no doubt that the penetration of my values in this study is unavoidable and the solution is not to try to expunge them from the research, but rather make myself visible and to identify biases and assess their impact on the study. Everyone, including myself, has been shaped by his or her life experiences. This in turn has molded my interest and shaped my point of view as a researcher. By sharing aspects of my life, philosophy and biases, the reasons for choosing this research topic will most definitely come to light. Therefore, it is important to share with the reader a small portion of whom I am and why I chose this topic.

Having transformed my life after years of criminal and gang involvement, it is humbling to have this opportunity to use my own experiences as a former criminal and street gang member to augment existing gang literature. My thirty year involvement in criminal and street gang culture has given me an insight into a world not many enter, and fewer leave. It is a world clouded with innuendo, deception, code, and cruelty, but a world that many find enticing because it gives them a vehicle to legitimately act out what amounts to isolation and displaced senseless violence.

My crime life began at the age of twelve, but my actual gang involvement did not start until age fourteen after being labeled a gang member by law enforcement, school administrators, teachers, and members of the community. This was done primarily because police and school personnel did not know the difference between a criminal and a gang member. To them, criminals and gang members are one and the same.

Another reason for my involvement in crime and gangs was because there did not appear to be any opportunities to succeed in my neighborhood. It was as though we were being pushed into working in a warehouse, a store, or in the fields picking fruit, which did not appeal to me. So crime became the only avenue open to me. Besides, it seemed it did not matter what we did because everything we did was considered deviant or aberrant by the police, school administration, teachers and some members of the community.

Growing up in the neighborhood was a vulnerable time for me and getting involved in the gang helped me navigate my way through a world which made no sense. It fostered in me a deep hatred toward anyone who was not like me. Poverty, racism, and a second rate education as a result of being Mexican American/Chicano was very prevalent during my formative years in the barrio.

At school, school administrators and teachers prohibited me from speaking Spanish and I was punished when caught, but at home, my parents constantly reminded me not to forget my ethnic Mexican origin. Those were confusing days, so the gang afforded me an opportunity for humanistic socialization not provided at

home or at school. I do not recall teachers or counselors telling me there was a possibility I could attend college. Believing there was no other way to achieve success other than by breaking the law, I took to the streets and the streets became my classroom with a hidden curriculum and a code of silence.

Once in the gang, it did not take long to realize that gangs were too restrictive so at the age of twenty-seven, I disassociated myself from the gang. But, leaving the gang was not a painless process. In fact, it was one of the most difficult decisions I made up to that point of my life. The gang was close to my heart and had provided a measure of affection missing in my life. I felt as if I were abandoning the people dearest to me.

Generally, an individual who has been in the gang will always be a gang member in the eyes of the police, school administrators, teachers, and the community, no matter what. Gang involvement also left me with an indelible mark that caused enduring psychological and emotional damage and the challenges for former gang members are many. Once you leave the gang you are dislocated from society at large as well as the gang, so you feel like a ghost inhabiting a citizen's space, silent as a spy, floating above normal human frequency and contact.

There will probably be people who will read this dissertation and determine that much of what has been written here is an exaggeration or excuses to explain away responsibility for behaving like a monster for years. What I have attempted to accomplish through this dissertation is to pull back the curtain, if you will, of a

society draped in innuendo and suspicion and expose flat out wrong assumptions by law enforcement, school administrators, teachers and communities.

Having lived in Stockton since 1990, I have witnessed the escalation of violence in this community firsthand. It is my belief that the root of the increase in city violence is not necessarily connected to gangs per se. Rather, it is a sense of hopelessness, which ultimately turns into rage that manifests itself as violent acts against the people closest to the perpetrator. Hopefully, the information gardened by participants through this study will be used by them to improve their lives and the people they touch. Moreover, this researcher is optimistic that law enforcement, school administrators, teachers, and the community will use the information contained here to implement new interventions and prevention programs.

Conclusion

This chapter elucidated the critical ethnographic study methodology used to answer the major research questions. The chapter explained the development of the major research questions and the process by which participants were selected for the study. Also revealed was the data collection process, as well as data analysis, description of the participants, and background of the researcher.

The following chapter describes the research findings as they pertain specifically to the ways in which the family influenced the participants' eventual decision to join a gang. The conclusions were derived from the participant's voices that were used to tell their stories concerning the reasons they each joined a gang. The research revealed that the conditions in the home (i.e. family) was the single most

aggravating factor that influenced these four participant to choose a gang lifestyle when they were young adolescent males, mostly to identify with a surrogate family structure.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS: FAMILY INFLUENCE ON ADOLESCENT GANG INVOLVEMENT

The concept for this dissertation arose from this researcher's curiosity concerning the steep rise in homicides in the city of Stockton during 2011 and 2012. Law enforcement and news media were adamant that gangs were the crux of the problem. This led to this researcher's intrigue about the possible connection, or lack thereof, between the violence that occurs within many of our communities and gangs. Given that these two powerful thought-leadership entities (law enforcement and news media) within the city of Stockton were blaming gang members for the huge increase in murders, it was the intent to uncover the causes and conditions that caused gang involvement in the city of Stockton. It also seemed logical that some of the answers would lie with the gang members themselves. Therefore, the study attempted to discover the causes and conditions of gang membership, and to learn if there was a connection between social control and the participant's decision to join their gangs.

What was uncovered through the interviews conducted with the four self-disclosed Mexican American/Chicano gang members were that the attempt by their families to control them was the primary instigating factor that catapulted these men into gang life. In one case, control by an older sibling was directly responsible for one participant's induction into the gang lifestyle. The home life of all the participants created such dissonance and disenchantment that it drove them away from their homes in search of a surrogate family structure elsewhere. The findings further

exposed that marginalization in school, harassment by law enforcement, and the community where the participants lived was also all closely intertwined, and that these factors aggravated and underwrote the participant's decline into wrongdoing.

The findings are lengthy, so this researcher chose to divide the findings into two chapters. This was also done to make it easier for the reader to understand outcomes and to facilitate the coding of the themes that reoccurred throughout the interview sessions with each participant.

From the discourse with the participants, many themes were identified that offered insight into how these men saw the world and their relationship to it. This chapter will only discuss the first most prominent theme, findings within the family theme: challenges of participants' oral histories; violence and addiction in their early home lives; memories of the economic circumstances in their early home lives; holidays, birthdays, and family trips; how their parents' type of discipline impacted their decisions to join a gang; and the effects of morbidity.

Challenges of Participant's Oral History

In reviewing the text with the participants, the most provocative theme that surfaced was how the participants narrated their story. Often their lived experiences as told by the participants were incongruent and cloaked with many inconsistencies and contradictions. As a researcher, it was crucial to believe that listening to the revelations of firsthand lived experiences by the four participants would provide the clearest, most accurate accounting of what happened in the participants' youth and adult lives. It was expected that since the participants were the ones who had lived

through what they had survived, they would know better than anyone else the facts and meaning of the events that had occurred throughout their lives.

However, the findings proved more paradoxical. On one hand, the participants did have cogent access to information about their lived experiences. For example, they could provide the location where they served their prison terms, detail certain crimes they had committed throughout their lives, and supply facts that could be substantiated by court transcripts. Truth telling on the other hand became more problematic when they were required to demonstrate a higher degree of self-awareness, as in the expression and interpretation of their tricky home life data, especially around trauma. Given that all four participants suffered traumatic experiences throughout their lives, it is easy to understand how their occasional inabilities to notice contradictions to their responses or even intentionally avoid cues that distract from a specific topic connected to particular traumas they might have endured during their childhoods. This intentional avoidance of cues and distraction from a hurtful subject are often symptoms associated with PTSD (Amaya-Jackson 1998; Perry & Azad, 1999).

One glaring example of contradiction is Mario recalling that in his youth he met a kid from Texas who became his school buddy. The kid arrived in town with a load of racial hatred:

> I didn’t know the difference between the racial barrier. But he did. He was from Texas. And he said that he didn’t like whites. He didn’t like

> blacks…Yeah. He would always say, "Man, I hate them other people man. We need to stick together."

Mario's response was more benevolent toward other races:

> I'd say oh, fine. That's fine with me. But I had white friends. Frank…he was white…He called himself a Polock…His last name was Pochesky. And his dad used to always say that they were Polocks…and that didn't bother me.

Mario was so adamant to be recognized as a non-racist that he declared, "I had white friends and black friends and that didn't bother me, you know. I'm glad. To this day it doesn't bother me." However, only eight quick responses later he admitted with a type of amnesia, "I used to fight a lot…With white kids…I had to prove myself…Because I was one of the only Mexicans in there." Mario vacillates between promoting the idea that he was above the racial fray, unlike his Texas friend who demonstrated acute racial hostility. Yet, he lets slip later that his aggression in school was underwritten by racial spite and rivalry.

Another example of getting lost in the narration occurs when Pete admitted being a troublemaker in elementary school:

> I was so angry and bitter, confused…I was very foul mouthed at age five years old…I got my mouth washed out with a bar of soap in front of my class for cussing my Kindergarten teacher out…I went to the school…to release the anger, and whatever I was feeling, by hurting other kids during recess.

Pete was frank in his description of his bad behavior as a child. He was equally insightful about what underwrote his acting out. Pete reflected:

> The type of violence that I was introduced to in the home, the yelling, uh, physical altercations between a man and a woman…my mother was very abusive, physically bruised and traumatized…I became more hateful, more hateful of her, and more hateful of men.

Pete, at age 53, learns these things about himself, as he gets older. He finds the language to comprehend his motivations more lucidly. Still, after years of getting to the heart of his out-of-proportion rage, he can still compartmentalize aspects of his life that are confusing to him, while being clearly visible to others. For example, he had just described his outrageously violent kindergarten behavior and even delved effectively into the causes, but could not comprehend why he was pulled from class. Indeed, he felt a sense of injustice about the school administration's handling of his physical volatility:

> I was always taken out of the classrooms…always segregated…put into these modules…I tried to ask why did I have to leave class and go to these modules when all the class is right here, these are my friends, these are the kids that I grew up with…and all they said was "It's a better class for you over here. You're going to be able to learn the same thing that they are doing here but only at a slower pace."

Pete suggests only a few answers later that he was being ripped from his friends: "I don't think I ever had close friends, what happens was I was a fighter."

Because these men had not been nurtured during childhood in functional ways by their parents, for myriad reasons that were beyond their control, the elementary

school became a place where the young boys acted out their aggressions. The school became a sort of surrogate parent that then had to step in and try to provide discipline. Given that the teachers were not trained to understand the culture of these students, or their family dynamics, the school administration then attempted to socially control the students based on the teachers' academic, personal, and professional experiences with each student.

A healthy happy child responds to social control as soft coercion to behave in a manner that invites them to participate in society with capable skill. The problem with these participants was that by the time they started school as boys, the interviews revealed that they already felt alienated from the greater society, in which case social control techniques merely accentuated their differences and did not invite them to become capable citizens within the group. In fact, social control only mocked them and created the occasion for them to feel attacked.

For example, all of them looked around and assessed their environment and noticed that they were different in a specific way. All the other kids who seemed well adjusted had things they did not (i.e., two parents as opposed to only one, parents who showed up to their ballgames and took part in school activities with them; parents who demonstrated affection to them with hugs and kisses). This resulted in the participants brooding over the differences between them and other kids and eventually growing resentful toward social institutions that all attempt to coerce them to modify their unruly behavior.

Their subsequent delinquent choice to join a gang can then be attributed to the inequality between the poor and the rich and stark difference between the haves-and-the-have-nots, which created in the participants a general feeling of anger, hostility, and social injustice (Blau & Blau, 1982).

Louie's storytelling was even wobblier around the edges than Mario and Pete's revelations. It was evident that Louie was not lying, because he was unafraid to disclose details that did not portray him in a sympathetic light. But he seemed to want to guide the conclusions about his brother Joey. For instance, after he explained that he had three brothers and three sisters, and that Joey was twelve years older, Louie was asked if any of his siblings had ever been in trouble. His first response was, "No, not really." Then he edited himself, and amended his story.

> Yeah my brother Joey did…We were living in Los Angeles where Joey went from being an A student to failing in school, from being surrounded in the gangs down there in Los Angeles…he got to sniffing paint and cutting class and doing all kinds of crazy things.

Louie came to acknowledge his brother's troublemaking as totally incidental, petty even. It was as if he were comparing Joey's transgression to Louie's own crimes, which include murder.

It was not until the questions about Louie's introduction to gangs that we begin to get a clearer drawing of Joey's involvement into the gang lifestyle. Louie shared:

> I grew up in the East part of Los Angeles…there was a lot of gangs you know…they're called the Maravilla projects and…my brother Joey he was involved in that gang. And so he would take us at a young age down to an alley to fight the other young kids, you know of my age. And the brothers of his friends would get their brothers and line us up and make us fight each other, even if we were friends…So that's how a lot of violence started for me…

According to Louie, Joey went from being a down and out kid who sniffed glue and seemed to only be harming himself, to a gang member who used his own brother in the neighborhood Fight Club. It does not appear as though Louie was intentionally trying to hide his brother's implication in the way Joey basically groomed Louie for the gang life or that he was trying to protect his brother. In fact, he was clear in his assessment about what that Fight Club was when explained what it was and what it did for the young boys from that neighborhood. Louie commented:

> I believe… To show, to see who the toughest one was, the toughest guy in the neighborhood. And I believe it was prepping us down the road to get ready to insert us into the gang…because why else would they make us fight our best friends...It was getting us ready to fight people outside of the neighborhood… they were prepping us.

Louie finally admitted that his brother Joey was probably the most influential factor in his joining a gang. Joey practically groomed Louie to become the gladiator he became for his neighborhood gang. Yet Louie began by first saying that nobody in

his family was a troublemaker in their childhood. Again, it does not appear that Louie was trying to conceal anything. The sadder truth seems to be that the impact of the participants lived experiences seems to be concealed from them in troubling ways.

They had no idea that what they were saying more often than not contradicted what they said earlier. This suggests that they were not lying, but merely losing track of the narrative. They were unaware that they had offered competing narratives. Moreover, it is quite common for people from the underworld who are no longer involved with gangs and criminality for them to be unaware of the times that they are honestly being dishonest.

Listening to the participant's double-talk by first stating one thing, then impeaching their version a few answers later, this researcher had to remain conscious that this was not because they were lying, but more because they seemed to hold their stories in silos. Their stories were like large competing narratives that sit next to each other, on the same territory of their life. But, the details never actually mingled or coalesced, which also might explain their reliance on cliché in their storytelling. A narrative that falls apart and loses cohesion is a significant issue. It seemed as though the participants did not hear their own narrative. For example, Mario says he did not have problems with whites, then next he is articulating clear conflicts with them. Their lack of self-awareness demonstrates how they have formed identities deeply steeped in wounds, defensiveness, so that over the years their notions of self have solidified, calcified to house their rage. It seems as though everything was constructed around this narrative-pyramid built to protect the scared child.

All of the participants had their clichés. "Looking for love in all the wrong places.' 'Damned if I do, damned if I don't.' 'People settle.' This prevalent use of clichés to represent their identity could very well mean that they own their story as a static life, settled conclusions, never revisiting what they actually mean. Clichés are code, meant to stop thought, not promote it. So when clichés like 'shoulda, woulda, coulda' are deployed, people nod their heads and instantly comprehend the meaning. But there it stops. Nobody asks if that is even true, or if the meaning even applies to what is being said. The cliché might even be a sort of cop-out, a way for the user to not take responsibility or look at the issue to see what lesson they might glean. In that way clichés, while very handy, are also a very lazy way to use language, especially in moments where personal lives need examination to change things for the better.

Paying close attention to biases, it was easy not to be judgmental during the interviews when the participants were caught in contradictions that could be construed as duplicity. Furthermore, understanding the human material involved in this research made it easier for this researcher to be open-minded. These participants have experienced such extreme trauma that it has impacted them in the smallest and largest ways.

The participants were all beaten, verbally abused, criminally neglected, marginalized in schools and their communities since childhood by their parents and teachers. They were battered by schoolmates, juvenile hall enemies, and even by arresting police. In their later years, all the participants survived major addictions and isolation in solitary confinement in juvenile hall and state prisons.

We understand that Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms can display themselves in the way people behave under duress (Amaya-Jackson, 1998; Perry & Azad, 1999). Therefore, it would not be farfetched to say that PTSD might not only have affected the way the participants behaved once they grew into young men, but also give us a better understanding as to how PTSD might have affected the way they constructed their narratives during the interviews. As previously noted, some PTSD symptoms are avoidance of cues related to the trauma, and distraction or hyperactivity (Amaya-Jackson, 1998; Perry & Azad, 1999). When folks afflicted with PTSD translate their experiences into stories, it is clear when they lose control of their narrative, just like in a conversation with a hyperactive child who cannot sit still to patiently explain their story in a logical procession.

It was through observation and active listening that this researcher began to understand the phenomenon of how the participants were "honestly being dishonest." It was as though some questions evoked so much pain, that the participants attempted to steer clear of answering the question by modifying their answers or simply going in another direction. To make matters even grayer and more complicated, Mario stated he had recently survived an aneurism that had distorted his memory. When Mario was asked if he had a favorite teacher, Mario revealed:

> No…Never…Not one that I remember. You know, to me…kids stand out more than…teachers… I don't even remember their [his teacher's] faces. I don't. I can't even remember one face…from kindergarten to sixth grade I don't remember none of them [teachers]. That's kind of hard. That's…I don't

> know, you know…And this is before I had my brain aneurism. I still didn't remember then, you know. Because I lost a lot of memory after I had my brain aneurism. I still don't remember them [teachers] before that…There was no special one that used to talk to me nice or anything, that would just strike a chord, you know.

This medical revelation by Mario partially explains his momentary unreliability as a narrator. It is interesting to note that Mario can remember not remembering, even before the aneurism. The fact that Mario confessed his medical condition to this researcher asserts his credibility. He offered information pertinent to the veracity of the project. He was very concerned that the project be given as much depth and understanding about his story, that this initiative on his part to share his trauma, added depth and understanding to the moments where his narrative sometimes became a bit incoherent.

The paradox of these men is that while they can relay information that comports perfectly with the data received from all the other men, lending veracity to their statements, sometimes the researcher had to be very discerning in parsing out the sections where the participants became unreliable narrators. The participants shared their stories and answered the questions posed as forthrightly as they could. Frankly, it was not surprising to find that these four men, who had lived for years as gang members and criminals, shared many childhood motifs in common. As stated earlier, Rios (2011) indicates that schools administrators, law enforcement, families, community centers, churches, the media, businesses, and other institutions

systematically treat everyday behavior of Young People of Color as criminal activity. Even though the behavior might not be criminal at all, family, schools, law enforcement, and communities attempt to socially control individuals such as the participants in this study, which in the end result as chaotic. The social pressures are not absorbed by healthy individuals, and become pressures on the young men's moral poise that ripples through them in a discursive and unorganized manner.

Violence and Addiction in Early Home Life

In the early years, drinking and addiction were key features of all the participant's environments. Both of Louie's parents were alcoholics. Louie reveals: I

> come from Los Angeles…I had both my parents in my family. My father was a groom. He worked at the Los Angeles Hollywood racetrack. And my mother she stood home and took care of the children. Both of them were alcoholics. It seemed like they were always fighting in the home behind alcoholism. I realized that they were alcoholic's, say around six years old, when I used to hear my brothers and sisters use that term. That they would always have fights behind their drinking, and they [my brothers and sisters] would say that they were alcoholics. I didn't know what that exactly meant but I knew that that meant that they had trouble with beer and wine and that kind of stuff. I realized we were having a bunch of problems when the police would come in the house and take my father off to jail for having a fight with my mother.

On traumatic occasions like the one Louie described above, children are left to cope with not only the broken furniture, the cuts and wounds, but they are also left vulnerable to confronting the violent ironies of child abuse. In this case, Louie loves his father, but when he returns home and asks to be let back into the house, Louie is conflicted, pained, and unable to parse out his confused feelings:

> At that time, when my father would come home and the banging on the door would start. And my mother would say not to open the door… it was my father out there. I would feel sad for my father. I would want to let him in, but I knew that he was going to start beating up on my mother. And that made me nervous, scared, you know. But yeah, it put a lot of fear in me.

Mario's parents were also both alcoholics. Mario reflects: "My father was a very hard-working man. He drank. They both [mother and father] drank pretty much when I was growing up. I remember them fighting a lot." Mario did not name them alcoholics, at first, but when he was asked to clarify if he thought they were he replied, yeah, yeah they were. But he indicated did not know that at the time because he was too young.

Even though both Louie and Mario's parents were alcoholics, the difference was that Louie knew the label and deployed it around the house with his siblings, while Mario was left to decipher the odd behavior by himself and did not come to this knowledge or the word 'alcoholic,' at least until later in life. This not knowing made it difficult for the participants to construct knowledge of themselves in the world because they could not name the phenomenon occurring in their own home that put

maximum pressure on their poise every day. Without naming it, it was not easy for the participants as children to devise a tactic to combat its negative effect on their life.

Pete was raised by his mother, not an alcoholic, at least not formally identified as such by Pete, but she raised him in an emotionally disorganized space. As is the case with the participants, pseudonyms were used when referring to the participant's parents or any other family members in order to protect their confidentiality. Pete reminisces about his parents and how one particular incident changed his world into a nightmare:

> My mother's name is Patricia. My father's name is Santos. They were never married. My mom was actually born down south, I believe, and they moved over here [Tracy] when she was about 18 years old from Los Angeles, actually El Monte, California…I never met him [his father]. He was never involved in my life until I was ten years old….There was a stepfather. I was seven years old at the time when I seen this figure…and he was an awesome man. He was my protector, because my mom she dealt with me a little more forcefully…his [stepfather] name was Nick Arellano…two years later he passed away from sugar diabetes. And that's when my whole world went chaos…he passed away, my mom was gone. He had a sugar diabetes attack. And I remember I was told that if he ever has an attack give him sugar. So me being seven years old I'm running in and out the house. I remember sugar, so I go pour sugar down his mouth, not knowing already that he is dead. So the ambulance came and I was yelling for my mother, and mom was nowhere in

sight. It was just me, my little sisters, and my stepfather who was in his bed, dead; with his eyes open…when my mom came in I remember cussing her out. I remember telling her that she was supposed to be here, you know. 'Where were you? I'd ask her.'…I wanted to know why she wasn't here to help save this man that I loved, who was my hero, who was my dad…see my mom was seeing other men. And one time she took me, 'Son lets go to a movie,' so I thought we was going to have some quality time, you know. So when we got to the movie, it was a Spanish movie, a man approached her. They start kissing and hugging. I kind of just looked, and said 'Wow, who's this?' So I started thinking in my mind…'Wow, my father just passed away and there's already another man involved. Man what's going on here…' prior to his passing away there were numerous men coming in and out the house…

And she already told me when my father passed that I was going to be the man of the house, seven years old. So what I understood me being the man of the house, I reflected on what he [the man of the house] did, he worked, he took on responsibilities. So…I started seeing myself cook while my mom went to the bars. I saw myself dressing my little sisters so we could go to school. I started realizing I was getting very angry…I believe she didn't have to go to the bars, because she said she had to work…I mean prostitution and working in the bars…and I go 'Why would you go to the bars when you get welfare for us. We don't need anything. We need you here.'

> So her excuse was that prior to my stepfather passed that he had told her that he wanted her to find another man to take his place as a father figure for us kids…I couldn't believe how a man would actually say that to his wife who he loved dearly, because I was 7 years old. I didn't understand it…my mom was a prostitute…she would come home drunk, waking me up to play her music all morning long, and I'm trying to tell her I got to get up for school, and she says that I was supposed to do what she says…So I'm there, while she plays her music, Al Green, watching her cry. And I would get so angry. I would say this is not cool at all….I'm not understanding this you know. And little by little, I lost every emotional feeling you call love. I let it all go; I became a very angry, resentful, bitter kid.

This narrative was allowed extra space to let the revelations come slowly because the lengthy description demonstrates that despite Pete's rudimentary verbal and grammar skills, there is genuine insight in the telling, the description, the storytelling flow that introduces you to a kid full of wonder who is transformed into a boy angry enough to join a gang and commit all sort of mayhem on the community. His portrait of how an earnest loving seven-year old boy becomes disillusioned is exemplary.

Disillusionment, Pete seems to suggest, comes from the disappointment of hope, a noble aspiration. He talked about being granted "man of the house" status and we see him take to the job with relish. He thinks about what his obligations are and he begins to act responsibly, in sincere good faith. He wants to contribute to the home,

be a team player. He gets his sisters ready for school, presumably. Takes charge. He also begins to lose his innocence. He sees that while he is being a good will ambassador in his own home, his partner, the mother in this case, is a dubious teammate. He scolds her, talks house economics, reminds her that she gets money from food stamps so she should stay home and parent him and his sisters. She proves unable to arrest her susceptibility to sex work.

Disillusionment grows almost in direct proportion to the shrinking of hope. So if the line on the chart for optimism, for the inspirational, drops by five points, then the line representing disillusionment rises five points. The more you believe that there is a possibility that with plenty of Benjamin Franklin-like roll-up-your-sleeves-do-the-hard-work optimism you can alter the trajectory of your life, then greater the degree of disillusionment will be after the reality sets in that there is no relief in sight, that this poor lot is all there is, that these are all the cards life will deal you. Well then rage gets ignited and turns outward, violently first, expires eventually, then goes inward, cannibalizing the angry person's self-esteem and good ilk. This is the power of disillusionment that Pete has so finely elucidated.

Mike, like Pete, was raised by his mother. And while Pete's mother's abuse was neglect, Mike's mother child-rearing tactic was physical abuse:

> My dad came from a family of addicts, and my mother came from a family that was very strict. This is what I know of them. And as they got together and married over a matter of time the behavior of my dad eventually led to their divorce. Which eventually led my mom to fall into a depression, which

> became anger and eventually turned her into a very violent woman. And verbally and physically abusive towards my brothers, sisters, and me. [All she knew to do] was to inflict physical abuse upon me. Me being the oldest to instill fear into the younger ones. I was the whipping post and the individual that she vented her anger against my dad. She was mad at my dad so she took it out on me.

The composition of the four participant's families, whether two parent or single parent homes, created the same disenchantment in the boys mostly because it doesn't matter if a home has two parents or one if none of the parents have sufficient emotional maturity to comprehend that tragic forces in the home would grow into the powerful resentments that one day led their sons to make poor life-sabotaging decisions.

Parents without the capacity to honestly explore the themes in the home that are tearing their families apart are not wanting to reward honesty in the home on any level. Witness Pete's mother cheating on her dying husband, then turning around to punish his impertinence for speaking forthrightly:

> …because I was really honest on speaking on things, I was always dealt with physical altercations, you know. It wasn't on being disciplined. It was because I spoke the truth and I got wacked. Hit, actually. I call it abuse.

And his mother was not the only person in his life unhappy with his initial and early attempts to voice his outrage, his "speaking truth to power." Other adults punished his impertinence.

> I call it abuse. Verbal, physical and mental, by her boyfriends and by the babysitters too, because I've always, I spoke on it, what I saw you know, being a seven years old kid. Why are these things happening? Why? Why do I have to take care of these kids, you know? Why is it that I'm getting put out of school and put in trailers and not being able to be with the rest of the kids. You know I was so confused and I became angrier and bitter and bitter, so, in my own mind I shut down.

This speaks to a greater issue in the home, that is, the extended family and surrogates who contributed to the temper of the participant's home life growing up. In Pete's case we learned that his mother left him in the supervision of brutal boyfriends and babysitters. Louie, rather than being raised in an abusive environment, suffered from neglect. On the question of the family or parental supervision he was accustomed to, Louie replied:

> Minimum. I didn't really have any supervision. My brothers and sisters used to try to take care of me the best they could, because my father was always gone, and my mother was always with her friends drinking for periods of days. So I didn't really have any supervision at all…I could come and do what I wanted, you know, what I liked to do.

In a family of seven children (four boys/three sisters), Louie was the sixth child. Louie's father worked at the racetrack, seemingly all the time. His mother was what might be loosely called a stay-at-home mom.

When Louie was asked if he felt like his parents expected him to perform certain duties in the home and what those duties were for him and for the other kids. Louie responded: “No, I have a sister named Marilyn that usually would take up that part. She was like the mother in the family. She used to care for us.”

Keeping track of siblings seemed a challenge. When I asked him to place her [his sister] in the siblings’ hierarchy, he replied: “third or fourth down,” which made sense once we learned the family dynamics.

Louie states matter-of-factly: “My oldest sister and brother, they lived with my grandmother because my mother couldn’t handle them. You know, because she just was too irresponsible.”

This fragmenting of the family augurs badly for the time when Louie would seek to find a cohesive functioning replacement family, namely, a gang. Louie recalls:

> All my relatives lived around the neighborhood that we lived in. And either my mom would be on the other side of the block with her friends, drinking with my aunt (because my aunt lived on the next block over) or she would be at my other aunt’s house that lived like three blocks away. That’s where I would find them when I wanted to go look for my mother, if I didn’t know where she was at, if there was an emergency at the house. There wasn’t too much discipline because my father was always away at work. He would always work… he would come home on the weekends, and that’s the only time I really got to see him at that age…five years old.

Mario experienced the opposite discipline at home, more hands on. Both parents physically punished Mario:

> Yeah, they [his parents] hit me. When they caught me doing something bad they whipped me…I felt I needed it. It didn't really do anything. I just felt I did something wrong and got caught, and had it coming. My mom and dad got divorced when I was ten years old. That's why my dad stayed in San Jose. My mom moved here [Stockton]. I stayed with my dad for a long time, until I started getting in trouble over there and he told me I had to leave the house and go with my mom.

Mario's parents were involved in his life, but only with a modicum of attention. Withholding the most important attention a child requires. Mario reveals:

> I remember playing sports at a very young age. My dad never went to my games very often. Very few games…He said he was doing other things, I don't know but…Sad you know. No support…The other parents were there and mine wasn't there. So, but I guess he corrected me when I needed correcting. My mother did too…

Mario could only measure his family in relationship to others. His father did not show up for the games, but the fathers of his teammates did, so he began to feel separate from the other boys and seems to have started to notice his 'otherness' acutely.

The other participants felt their 'otherness' differently. Louie noticed the differences quite literally in his house versus the dwellings not far outside his

apartment complex known as the Vista. (The name of the housing project was changed to protect confidentiality).

> I had some friends who lived on Seventh Street. A few blocks out of the Vista housing projects and it was a totally different life style because they owned their own house, and the blocks were quieter. And we didn't feel, I didn't feel the tension and I only could dream of, you know, I would dream of not living in the Vista…I would always wish that we were more stable as far as financially, so we could have a home like that.

Beyond houses, Mario and the other participants seemed to recognize the differences between their family and the better functioning, more supportive parental methods of other families who lived in more stable environments. Of course, this 'otherness' would play a key part in the development of their psychic in regards to their relationship to their community.

Left outside of the normative patterns of home life, they would become attracted later to what they felt they deserved; the abnormal home substitute of the gang. These poor memories, this inability to remember childhood fondly is clearly something all participants have in common. Mario sums it up when he notes:

> I wasn't really home you know. I was always out playing sports, playing baseball at the street corner. There was a school, and all I remember is playing football and baseball all the time. But sleeping at a friend's house, I don't remember any of that. You would think being a kid you remember the good times you know. I don't remember any of that. That stuff doesn't even come

> to my head. You know, I remember one day, one time my dad took us to Mount Hamilton and that's about it. We went to Santa Cruz one time I remember as a family. But we never went anywhere.

Household chores were gendered in Mario's home, not unlike many Mexican American/Chicano homes in the 60s and 70s. Mario laments:

> Well I know my sisters had to wash dishes, their job was to wash dishes and make sure the kitchen was clean, make sure the house was straightened up. I don't know what my brother did. He's nine years older than I am so I never seen him really. He was off doing his thing. I never really saw him too much. And mine was…making sure that the garbage cans were thrown out. And clothes in the basket, that's about it.

Chores are an important part of building a child's sense of communal responsibility, a 'buy-in' to maintaining a respect for one's space, while also bonding the family over shared caretaking duties of their living place. Chores, when distributed evenly and with forethought, can nurture children and model strong functioning. In Pete's case, his parents did not succeed in this regard. He called his home life and family duties "dysfunctional."

The type of parental supervision Mike had at home was more physically punitive. Mike elaborates:

> It was more intimidation than supervision or guidance. It was more demands, or with the consequences, being beat…that's the difference between raising a child, and abusing a child. From what I see today, my mom instilled fear. We

> [siblings] walked; I walked, on eggshells as a child in my home to where I was eventually led out of the home to run away.

All parents rightly expect obedience from their children, but not all parents know how to elicit it. They do not know how to draw out respect from their children in clever or subtle ways, so they lean on crude power tactics, forcing their children to behave through fear and intimidation. Lack of education, or modeling from their own parents, lead the parents of the study participants to behave in ways that were crudely elementary.

Mike's story was indicative of this rudimentary parental tactic. Of his mother Mike states:

> She expected us to, she only expected us, and to fear her voice…We were neglected of Christmas, holidays, no Easter, and no birthday presents. None of that was allowed in our home due to her religious beliefs. As I call it today, it's a religious cult. I'm not going to name the religion, but I grew up being deprived of any of those holiday events. And that brought bitterness to my heart as a child along with the beatings.

Parents are supposed to raise a child to buy into their traditions, in order to create a channel that can be used to pass on functional lessons to the next generation about survival. These lessons act as learned knowledge, a collection of wisdoms that children then pass on to their children and so on. This is the evolutionary imperative, to make sacrifices to protect and help educate a child so that that child may better

survive into adulthood and one day raise children that will be equipped to cope with future issues and crisis that may arise.

Every parent of the participants behaved in a way that acted against the evolutionary imperative. Rather than foster good will and fine habits that can repair the fabric of family, that can earn the elder's admiration and reverence with the powerful aid of nostalgia, the parents instead acted in ways that turned their kids against them. In the case of Mike, it is worth noting that his disdain for his mother's moral instruction in the childhood home is so strong that today he won't even utter the name of her religion. This abiding resentment runs deep despite the years Mike has spent trying to repair his life.

Economic Circumstances in Early Home Life

Not surprisingly, similarities existed among the participant's home economic circumstances. Some loose, and some oddly specific. For example, the type of clothes the men were forced to wear as boys was a type of humiliation, or what we can at least say the men noted as markers of their poverty. Louie noted, "We had a lot of hand me downs. A lot of the clothes I didn't even know where they came from when I was really at a young age." Mario didn't have older male siblings to pass down clothing to him. This created a different humiliation. He laments:

> I didn't have no brothers to give me hand me downs so I used to wear my sisters. If they looked like a boys I'd get her clothes. And I used to tell my mom, I don't want to wear this stuff here. That's my sister's stuff. And she

> [my mom] would say, "Just put it on." She wouldn't care. And that's about what I remember about that.

Clothing is one of the ways people get read by the public at large. We choose fabrics to cover our bodies. In that way the choice of our clothing reveals something about our personality. It is a superficial read indeed, but one that can also disclose key things about the wearer. Choice of clothing can act as a way to promote an identity. Choice of clothing goes a long way toward demonstrating to our school peers, in the quickest way possible, how we fit into their group. In the junior high and high school years, the more clothing options you have equals more occasions to express sameness and solidarity with the group you want to belong to.

But if you are poor, your limited clothing options become a marker of being the opposite of 'normal.' The lack of fashion choice and the inability to choose clothing that expresses a desirable identity in turn hands a child an 'outsider' or 'other' identity, often misinterpreted by a child as a marker of shame. Mike explains his opinion of clothing as a representation of his poverty:

> My mom was on welfare. She took a second job as a bank teller at a bank down town. But she used to make our clothes. And that was another embarrassment for me, because one pant leg would be higher than the other. With patterns such as Rusty the Clown, or whatever. And we were forced to wear these clothes because we were poor. My mom didn't have any money to buy us clothes. So I would say we lived in poverty.

Louie and Mario wore hand-me-down clothing, sometimes from older siblings, sometimes from mystery places.

In Mike's case, he wore poorly stitched hand-made clothes, all because they were raised in poor households. Louie was bold in his assessment of his poverty.

> My mother didn't work, but my father brought home provisions. But usually they didn't manage their money right so we ate—I can't even remember what we ate most of the time—we did eat, but I can say we came from a poor family.

People raised in poverty have their stories of industry, like working hard after school to collect "Blue Chip Stamps" that they could later redeem for food or small kitchen appliances, or working a paper route in their preteens to earn money to put food on the table. Some survivors of poverty sometimes tell stories of thieving for food, stealing peaches from neighbor's trees, or a piece of bread from the local bakery. Louie has his own story of larceny in his poor childhood:

> There was one time that my mother told me not to touch two dollars that were in the house. And at that time I was like thirsty and hungry, so I grabbed the two dollars and I took them to the store down the street and I spent them. And when I got back I got a spanking for it, because that was the last money that we had. My mother had me go back to the store and plead for the money, and tell the man that I took the money without permission because we were going to use that money to buy food. That was around the age of five.

Mario did not say he was poor; in fact he said of his family, “We lived pretty good.” That did not mean things were easy for his family.

Mario explains: “Money was always tight.” Like Louie, he had his own story about stealing during his poor upbringing:

> We were one of the first ones to get food stamps and welfare in our neighborhood. I remember being embarrassed to go get food, because my mom wouldn’t go get them…she would send us kids to go get them. I didn’t care. The [stores] would give us the change…We would put it in our pocket. She didn’t know about the change.

The participants all endured some tough periods of economic need in the home, so that they had to work when they were young. Mario started working early in the fields. Mario reflects:

> My dad was always working. He was a carpenter. He learned a lot of stuff on his trade as a cement mason. You name it, he did it out there…[my mom] worked in canneries…Even when my mom wasn’t working…we would have to go work in the fields to make things meet when my dad wasn’t working…I remember us working a few summers picking prunes…in the fields at the age of five or six.

The participants not only mentioned their parents beating, whipping or otherwise abusing them, they also sadly revealed the greatest pain of all childhood, emotional neglect.

Mario seemed genuinely baffled when he revealed the emotional neglect of his childhood. Mario recalls:

> She [his mother] never, to my first understanding, she never told me she loved me. Even when I talk to my sisters, she goes, “You ever hear, or remember mom or dad tell you they love you?” I go, “No.”

When asked if his mother ever hugged him, Mario replied, “I don’t have memory of that.”

When Mike was asked the economic question if he remembered having to do without things he wanted or needed, he poignantly turns his answer of deprivation into a personal one: “Of course, I was without, the one thing that really mattered, Love. I remember that I was without that.” Even Louie recognizes that sometimes love is a tough commodity to come by when he summed it up this way: “I have six other sisters and a brother. I guess there was too many. Too much love to pass around.”

Holidays, Birthdays, and Family Trips

It was not surprising that there is a dearth of good memories from the participant’s childhoods. Louie reflects:

> We never did anything. Not that I can remember as a family. I never went to any of those Magic Mountain, Disneyland, any of that we never went. Disneyland for me was my mother taking me to a babysitter’s house where there was a bunch of toys, and leaving me there for a couple days, and saying

> that was Disneyland. That was the way we did things. As far as any outdoor activities camping any of that, we never participated in that.

Mario not only has bad memories of childhood, he carries his resentment for family members as an active, present thing. Mario stated: “I don’t remember doing anything with my family. When my brother got married I don’t even remember going to his wedding.”

When asked about how they celebrated Christmas and holidays in general, they offered uniform replies about not enjoying familial bliss around the time of the year known for jovial good cheer. Louie reveals:

> I can’t even remember Christmas when I was young in the home we never had family [Christmas] dinners. None of that, you know. We would usually go down to my uncle’s house, they would be drinking. This was when I was real young. We really didn’t have like a gathering where there was a bunch of presents being opened and things like that, not that I can remember…Just play with each other, dance. Our parents would ask us to dance; we would dance with our cousins and stuff like that. That was about it. We watched a lot of cartoons, during the holidays we didn’t do too much of anything.

Mario’s memory of holidays was practically nonexistent. He stated: “I see pictures of me having parties with neighborhood kids you know, on my birthday. Maybe one or two. There weren’t very many pictures of birthdays in our family.”

Mike could never enjoy the holidays because his mother’s religious beliefs. Mike lamented:

> We were neglected of holidays. No Christmas. No Easter. No birthday presents. None of that was allowed in our home due to her [his mother's] religious beliefs…I grew up being deprived of any of those holiday events. And that brought bitterness to my heart as a child. Along with the beatings. …And again because of mother's requests and her religious beliefs. She made it very clear to the school that I was not to participate in saluting the flag. So that was a loss to me. The rest of the kids are saluting the flag and I had to keep my hands to the side. Plus the Christmas presents, the birthday presents, no turkey at Thanksgiving. All those things I was deprived of, so there was a lot of loss. Emotionally a lot of loss.

Pete tells a similar story:

> We didn't have holidays, my mother used to be Catholic, and for some reason or another, I remember they said, 'we not Catholic no more, we're Jehovah's Witnesses now.' I learned that…we didn't celebrate birthdays, we didn't celebrate Christmas, we didn't celebrate holidays, we didn't celebrate nothing…every once in a while she [his mother] would get worldly and maybe once in a while somebody would get a birthday cake. And we would have just a family happy birthday, cut the cake and that was it, that was the normal.

The participants were raised by parents who practiced one of three faiths: Catholicism, Protestantism, and Jehovah's Witnesses. Each participant had their take on the degree of religiosity in the home. Louie states:

> I didn't have really any religion. As far as my mother, she knew about the Lord. She got baptized because her father was a preacher, and my grandmother was very religious you know, as they come. Their home was totally different from our home. My grandfather he believed in spankings, he believed in discipline, you know going to church the whole yards you know. He was a street preacher and my mother; I guess it was too much for her so she broke away, she got rebellious and you know, got married at a young age. So as far as her telling us anything about God or any religion the only way we had found out about religion is when my grandmother would read us Christian stories. You know? But we never went to church or anything like that as a family.

Louie had his street preacher grandfather whose God was associated with strict discipline and menace.

Mario tells a similar story of God and fear collapsed into one dominant male in the home, but he was more afraid of his real father than his Father in Heaven. Mario reveals:

> We were Catholics. Was I scared of god? No. I think I was scared of my dad if I didn't go to church on Sunday. He made sure everybody would go to church because he was a devoted Catholic. He made everybody go to church, I remember that, and I remember one day I hid because I didn't want to go, and when I got home he made me go on my bike. I remember that. I had to go

all the way to my bike and take him. He gave me a nickel and told me, “Put that in the basket.”

Mike gives his account of being compelled to attend church under threat: “She expected us to, she only expected us, to fear her voice.” It is the contexts of his understanding of her energy in the home when we listen to him describe the role of church in his young life. Mike recalls:

> The only activity that was being done in my mom’s house as a child was going to church. Being forced to go to church, and the only activities that we really did was stemming from her religious beliefs…No outside friends, nothing, no neighborhood friends or anything. As I grew older I started to rebel against that…That’s where the conflict started and that’s when I started rebelling and resisting and striking back at my mom. Eventually I just took to the streets and ran away from home. I left that environment…her religious beliefs.

Pete’s account of religion in his home was very similar to Mike’s in that the rebellious result turned out the same in his life. Pete reflects:

> I became more rebellious because she [his mother] would take us to what they call Kingdom Hall meetings and leave us there, and take off to where ever she had to go. But she would pick us up. And I didn’t understand that. She goes, ‘Mijo, you got to go and listen to Jehovah and what He does.’ And I said, ‘Well, how do you expect me to listen and apply this when you’re not here? I’m not understanding that’…’Do what I say.’ Yeah, so again I hated God, or

> because I didn't know, I didn't understand, that's not, whatever she is trying to tell me that there is a God and I should follow him and do these things, I didn't see her doing it so why should I? It didn't make sense. I believe my younger brother and my two sisters didn't understand too much because they were young, but my oldest sister eventually she ended up leaving the house and living with grandma, and today, as of today I have a brother and a sister who are strongly in going to the Kingdom Hall witnesses and have a brother who is nomination in Christ, believer in Christ, and my other sister barely getting into church, but it causes a lot of confusion and a lot of hurt, lot of hurt, there is a lot of hurt in our family right now. I truly believe that, as result as how my mom tries to influence and still Jehovah witness religion, and it caused a lot of confusion and a lot of reversity upon ones belief and we are cold heartily screwed up.

Impact of Parental Discipline on Decisions to Join Gangs

The participants experienced either excessive parental discipline, or not enough discipline in their estimation. In each case, participants link the discipline in their homes to their choices to join gangs. A lack of attachment to the family at home acted as a sort of propulsion away from the house in search of a surrogate family structure. The absence of emotional mooring contributed to the moral drift in the men when they were young. Louie blames inconsistent parental discipline (sporadic spankings from his father and parental indifference by his mother) for his drift away from his family. Louie comments:

Well the lack of discipline, the lack of talks, she [his mother] didn't really care who I hung around with. As long as I wasn't bothering her, you know, and getting in her way and she was able to do her thing…My father was the only one that ever punished me. My mother never did. My father would give me spankings, real, real good spankings. He had a very big thick belt that he would use on me, and he would spank me with it…But that wasn't too often because he wasn't, like I said he was never around that much...So I kind of did what I wanted, you know went to school when I wanted. As long as I didn't get in excessive trouble to where the authorities had to come over to my house, I was all right to do anything that I wanted. As long as I didn't get caught at it, you know, come home as late as I wanted without getting yelled at or anything like that.

Louie's facial expression saddens when he talks about his mother disciplinary tactics:

When she would discipline me she would be drunk, you know, she would come home from the bar or whatever or from going out, and I guess everything that had been building up in her would come out and then she would let me have it you know, a slap on the face you know, a hit on the head, whatever little damage she could do, she tried her best to do it. Conversations and talks, she used to tell me, 'Son, never put a needle in your arm.' I don't know why out of all the kids she told me this. Maybe because one day I came home with a tattoo you know, and she goes, 'Son, I never want you to put a

> needle in your arm. I never want you to use drugs.' I never understood it, but I made a promise. But I didn't keep it.

When asked if his mother gave him any practical advice how he might be able to avoid using drugs, or where he might seek counseling if he found himself on the road to, or in the grip of, addiction, Louie replied:

> We never got any sit down talking to and stuff like that. We never seen school counselors, we never seen therapists because my whole family is dysfunctional. There was no one I could really talk to at that time. I didn't have anyone that I looked up to really….It [the home] didn't give me no discipline. It impacted me by giving me low self-esteem. I look at it like normal families don't do this; live like the way we lived. I mean, I wish I would have come from a more stable family. To where I would have gotten help with studies, because there was nobody there to help me with my education. There was really nobody there to really push me to go to school. So it really messed me up. As far as being confident in me it took all the confidence I had because the way the life style was. You know.

Without anyone at home to guide him, to maturely nurture his self-esteem, Louie eventually went to the streets at age 14, in search of surrogate parental figures. Louie recalls:

> Yeah, that's when things really started happening to me, crazy for me. That's when I started hanging out with the gang members and running around in the streets and the parks, experimenting with drugs, PCP at that age you ain't

> supposed to be using them kind of drugs. You don't really know what's in them drugs. And the people that I hung around with they were telling me this is good. So I'm getting wrong advice, and my mother didn't know about the drugs. She was an alcoholic, and for sure she smoked a little bit of weed…But she never, like I said, there was no counselors no doctors no therapist, there was no one that I really could talk to. No, even no church people.

Despite the neglect and his mother's emotional detachment, she did talk about Zoot Suitors in a way that seemed to romanticize them. Young Louie took cues from this. Louie even discusses his mother's romantic notions of the Zoot Suitors as a sort of induction to gang lifestyle. Notice how he uses the word 'into' in the following quote rather than using the word 'by' that most people would deploy in that phrase:

"My mother was always talking about the Zoot Suitors, about the gangs in East L.A. I was always fascinated into that lifestyle and so I wondered what was going to happen to me, I wondered if I would end up getting caught up."

Louie mentioned that his father beat his mother. When asked to ponder how that affected his violence later in life, he made a clear connection between the two phenomena. Louie reflects:

> Well violence was like a correction toward people you know. If they didn't listen to me, I felt like the only way they would understand me was by me using violent force. Either me beating them up or hurting them in some kind of manner to where I would be able to control what I would want the outcome to be.

In the end, the sporadic spankings by a father, the emotional dislocation from his mother, and the beatings he witnessed his father give his mother, contributed to his seeking refuge in gang life.

However, no other factor was more crucial to his joining a gang than his older brother both preparing him for and finally initiating him into the lifestyle by introducing Louie to East Los Angeles pee-wee version of a Fight Club. Recall that Louie told the researcher that his brother used to organize a Fight Club between the younger brothers of his East Los Angeles gang homeboys. Louis believed that his brother was training and preparing these young men to protect the neighborhood.

When Mario was asked how the type of discipline his parents practiced may have informed his decision to join the gang, he described his childhood as, “a lack of discipline.” But he does not blame his parents for driving him away, although he did note that their absence created the occasion for him to wander off and look elsewhere for what he needed most, namely love. Mario recalls:

> I had a lot more discipline, if they would have been around more, I believe that I would have took a different approach to life. I would of took another way, because my brothers, my older sisters, they went to college. I think I would have gone that way if I had the discipline, if my father was around like he was when they were growing up. I think I would have made something out of life. But since I didn’t have no father being around at that time, I was looking for love in all the wrong places, you know, and I ended up getting caught up…Everybody is looking for love, you know, I mean, don’t matter

> who it is. If your parents are not going to give it, if someone is going to give it besides your parents, then you're going to go that way, just know that. A family sort ah structure. If the gang it almost like a family structure, you're going to that way because you're not getting no love at home, you know.

Mike recalls his mother's child-rearing tactics as actively abusive:

> It was more intimidation than supervision, or guidance. It was more demands, or being beat. And that's the difference between raising a child and abusing a child, from what I see today…She only expected us to fear her voice…My mom instilled fear. I walked on eggshells as a child in my home to where I was eventually led out of the home to run away.

Pete did not directly blame his mother for him joining a gang. He did however implicate her in not creating incentive in the home for him to commit good behavior. Pete explains:

> I tried everything in my power to get my mother in trouble so she could acknowledge that she needed to stay home. It didn't work. I would walk the streets acting if I was lost with my two sisters, saying, my mom left us. We have nothing to eat. She's at a bar. The police would come and they would contact my mom. My mom would come, and she would explain that I was the baby sitter. She [his mother] would try to say, "He's old enough to take care of them. I trust him." The police would say, "Okay, try in find a baby sitter." And after they would leave I would get the shit kicked out of me. That's what

> I thought life is about, that it didn't matter if I did good and it didn't matter if I did bad, I was always getting the shit kicked out of me by my mom.

Pete would not say that the beatings by his mother led directly to his joining a gang. He did not see them as the cause. Nonetheless, he need not accuse her for us to recognize that her parenting directly altered his life course; her choice to leave him alone was an action that altered his imagination about his place in the world, which very directly led to his eventual life on the streets.

In his story we see that Pete would take his younger brother and sister to the streets to get his mother in trouble. This would instigate law enforcement getting involved in their family life. His mother may not have romanticized tough guys in gangs. She may not have brought boyfriends around to beat him. Her choice to go to bars, however, created the occasion for him to go seek on the streets relief from the trauma of his life. He was already showing signs of future moves to go to streets to find adults who could step in as parental surrogates. Pete's walking outside, when children are supposed to be safely ensconced at home, brought him into contact with the police. Pete's mother did not take him hand in hand to 'gang headquarters,' but her parenting style could not have been a better introduction to street life and the idea that he needed to go outside the home to find people who cared for him. Pete would not admit it but his mother could not have primed him for gang life better had she been an official gang member recruiter, so powerful was her shove of Pete in that direction. Pete joined a gang when he was twelve. Pete explained about his gang life:

> I just went to the streets because she wasn't at home. The only discipline that I knew was her beating me down, because I spoke up about her behavior, or my actions at school, or the trouble I would bring to the house. So I went wholeheartedly…I was so angry that I used to overextend my anger on whoever came my way. I looked for every chance to put my hands on somebody, or to extort money from them. Or if because of my poverty I didn't have a pair of shoes like the homeboys had, I would go to the high school and break into the lockers and steal me a good pair of tennis shoes, and stash them in the bushes at night, and put on my little cheap tennis shoes that my mom could afford. I always was embarrassed that my mom couldn't afford those things, six kids. So I went and stole shoes probably like three times out the week because everybody else was doing it, you know. So, like I say, not having no direction and no purpose, I got lost, and I remember saying this a few years back that I didn't even know who I am, I'm learning today that I'm somewhat beginning to like who I am today.

Here we find ourselves listening to a man recall the poverty of his youth, and the clothing that represented him then and now as a marker of shame, his "otherness," his humiliation.

The Effects of Morbidity

The findings reveal a central theme of morbidity. These men, throughout their lives, beginning from childhood, all witnessed grisly deaths and ghoulish violence. For example, Louie at the age of nine witnessed a violent kidnapping. Louie reflects:

> I was in front of my yard, I was sitting down and this car pulled up and this man was running around the corner. We were in The Vista Housing Projects and these Black guys jumped out the car, and this individual, the one who was running, was white and they [Black guys] were beating him up, and they [the Black guys] were talking about 'Give me my money! You owe me my money!' They opened the trunk of the car and threw him [the White guy] in…

While this is a stark violent crime to witness, his level of morbidity was heightened even more when a few years later he witnessed the murder of his brother-in-law. Louie recalls:

> I was 15, they stabbed him in the neck, blood started coming everywhere…I seen him flopping around…a pool of blood, my sister was there. He was flopping around like a fish, and nobody would identify who stabbed him…

While some deaths were bloody murders, some brushes with death were simply horrible natural deaths in the home. Pete was seven years old when his stepfather, the man he considered his dad, died in the home from diabetes. Recall that at that time, Pete found his stepfather's corpse on the couch, and because Pete had been told that sugar would help his stepfather survive an attack, Pete tried to shove sugar down the man's mouth not realizing that he was feeding a corpse.

Mario was not detailed in his accounting although he does admit, like the others, to a life rife with observations of extreme brutality: "I saw people die in front of me. I seen people shot, people stabbed. There was a lot of violence, you know, growing up."

Pete shared a story that reminded me of a scene from a Quentin Tarantino movie, so cinematic was the wound on the body after an attempted murder.

> I went to L.A. I was 14 at the time, visiting that summer. I met a friend over there and he got stabbed in his lung, right here in the chest…he had a big hole in his chest, and I was intrigued by it opening and closing, you know I was just like, Wow…

As noted earlier, a study conducted by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2007) found that as many as 5,764 young people ages 10 to 24 were murdered nationally on a yearly basis–an average of 16 each day. This data unveils that young people die violent deaths quite frequently in this country, creating a sense of dread that seemed prevalent in all of the participant's lives during their youths.

These firsthand contacts with death seemed to drive the participants to become preoccupied with unwholesome thoughts. Confronted with the deaths of friends and others who lived in their communities who died as teenagers, the participants began to be harassed by notions of their own mortality, of a very acute chance of a gruesome extinction. They did not have the luxury of being afforded innocence and protection from grappling with their own mortality in appropriate old age, grandchildren on their lap, their bodies beginning to turn frail. No, they became obsessed with survival when most kids get their first flush of life during puberty. Like young soldiers sent to war who have returned home, they suffered the same traumas
of grieving lost comrades in foxholes, looking at a group of their pals and wondering whose casket they would mourn at next.

The participants' reactions to witnessing grim violence is normal psychology. Anyone would develop a morbid relationship to his environment given these circumstances. In fact, the Benedictine monks intentionally follow the motto to "Keep Death Daily before Your Eyes" (St. Benedict of Nursia, n.d.). They do this because they believe a healthy approach to death can benefit the spiritual growth of an individual. However, these Monks are trained to focus on the death as religious practice. But what happens when a child witness's death and dealing with death is not their vocation, and they are not trained to cope with the metaphysical aspects of existence, and their parents beat them, the school punishes them, and nobody can help them cope with the myriad traumatic issues they must navigate on a daily basis? The short obvious answer is that that kid, like the participants in this study, crumbles under the weight of the gross moral conundrum in their rage-filled, confused, and desperate young imaginations.

After Louie watched the kidnappers toss a man in to the trunk of their car when he was nine years old, he tells us how this swift and brutal introduction to hazard and contingency altered his imagination.

> …they opened the trunk and threw him in…and my mother comes out and told them [the Black guys] to get away from here, you know, and she told me to get inside the house. And that was my first time witnessing something like that. I didn't understand it, but it happened…It made me feel scared because I was like, I'm small, and they could've got me. I could get thrown easily in the

> trunk, and take me for whatever reason and do whatever they want to me. So I was kind of fearful.

After Pete watched his brother-in-law get stabbed and murdered at age 15, that was an intersection with violent chance that pushed him over the edge and made him consciously decide to live armed from then on out, to become proactive with violence, to decide that he would choose life in any occasion where death came to snatch his final breath. Pete offers this explanation for his rationale in choosing to arm himself:

> I was fifteen. They stabbed him in the neck. Blood started coming everywhere. At that time I was barely associated, I was associated with the gangs, but I hadn't really decided to be a full time gang member. Until that happened. I didn't want anybody to touch me, nobody to even come close to me without me assaulting them first. That's the kind of fear it put in me…Nobody would identify who stabbed him, or who the guys were that did it. Nobody would tell me that. I was young, but I wanted revenge. I had brought a shotgun with me and nobody would tell me anything. And that's how much fear it put in me, to where I started carrying weapons, and really using violence as a tool and to create fear.

Mario summed up the appeal of the gang lifestyle, the way the gang provided desperately desired emotional purpose and human connection lacking at home. Poor family structure, dysfunctional disciplinary strategies, outright abuse and neglect all led to the participants' declines into wrongdoing, ultimately driving them to find

comfort in a den of thieves. Mario shares: “It [the gang] was probably more like a family atmosphere that I never had. You know…more love there then I ever experienced in my life…my friends…just like they embraced you. And gave you a sense of belonging.”

Conclusion

In this chapter, the conditions of family life proved to be the number one overriding strongest influence on the choice of the participants to join a gang. The evidence demonstrated that particular economic pressures on the family, along with domestic violence, mental illness, and intoxicant abuse, all acted on the poise of the home. Unstable parenting led to a destabilization in the participants’ growth from early childhood to teen years. Also noted in this chapter was the concept of too much early exposure to morbidity caused in the participant’s a familiarity with profound grief but with understanding of how to process the emotional trauma, thereby leading to moral confusion in the participants.

One of the more impactful findings had not to do with the family as much as it does with how people understand their place in the world if they do not really understand their own story in relationship to organizing the facts adequately enough to characterize their lives and volition in the world. The participants could not always extrapolate from their stories important points of meaning because they often had difficulty simply organizing the facts of their histories in a cohesive ways.

In Chapter Five, the participants will discuss how their time in school influenced their identities and acted as impetus to join a gang. Also explored will be

the contact the participants had with their communities (i.e. jobs, recreation) and with law enforcement, and how those interactions impacted the participants' decisions to join their gangs. Also the findings will close with the participant's and researcher's recommendations on how the community can address the issue of young men joining gangs, to help prevent the problem from happening in the first place.

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS: SCHOOL, COMMUNITY & LAW ENFORCEMENT

INFLUENCE ON ADOLESCENT GANG INVOLVEMENT

From the discourse with the participants, many themes were identified that offered insight into how these men saw the world and their relationship to it. The themes are presented here under the following headings and sub-headings:

PARTICIPANT VIEWS OF SCHOOL

a. Participant's Early School Years – Alienation
b. Ethnicity Used Against the Participants
c. Bullying on the Schoolyard
d. Extracurricular Activities at School
e. Preparation for College

COMMUNITY INFLUENCE TO JOIN GANGS

f. Feeling Safe/Unsafe in their Neighborhood
g. Crime life in the Community
h. Assaults Create Desire for Young Men to Look for Gang Back Up
i. Work and Other Productive Involvement in the Community

LAW ENFORCEMENT

j. Thoughts about Police Patrols in their Neighborhoods, Gathering Information
k. The Role Police Played in the Participant's Choice to Join a Gang

2) Participant's Opinion About Degree of Gang Involvement in Recent Stockton Violence
3) Participant's Recommendations on How to Minimize the Potential That School-Aged Kids Might Join a Gang.
    a. Family
    b. School Administrators/Teachers
    c. Community
    d. Law Enforcement

Participant Views of School

It is clear that each interviewee believed that school was not a good fit, or safe place, for them. Beginning in elementary school, they had an intuition that school was a holding station for them until they could leave their homes, drop out of school, and join a gang. All of the men look back at school and see a swindle.

Louie gave his insight about how he felt about his schooling: "I got cheated out of an education." Mario condemned his teachers and administrators: "They weren't giving me the proper tools to be successful." Mike qualified his education this way: "I couldn't focus on my studies because of the things that were going on at the house." Pete qualified his schooling as a trauma when he offered the following explanation: "I really felt 'less than.' I thought there was something wrong with me."

Participant's Early School Years – Alienation

Louie equated being bad in school with being 'confused.' He was willing to accept some blame as a kid with a troubled home life. But he did not excuse the teacher's lack of interest or intervention in his young life. He states:

> I used to see that if you were doing good and you were you know, making your grades and you weren't a trouble maker, or a confused individual, kid, or whatever, the counselor had their favorites and the teachers had their pets. Me I used to go into school late. My grades were bad. I had a lot of unexcused absences.

As previously stated, Louie is quick to take responsibility for the part he played in missing school, but his voice rises as he explains the lack of interest by teachers and school administrators to find out why he is missing so much school. He explains:

> The district never called my home asking, 'How come your child isn't in school?' They never really took interest in me. I guess there were a lot of other kids just like me, coming out of the Vista Housing Projects and around that southeast area. They just didn't have time for everyone. But they should've made time instead of just pushing us through school like cows or a number. That's the way I felt…I really can't say there was a teacher that took real, real interest to me until one teacher named Mr. Manchaca. He just gave me a little counseling asking what I wanted to be in life. 'You could be anything,' he told me. He was trying to give me a little pep talk, but that's as

far as it went. One time. One time in my whole time in school, all the years that I was there, he only gave me, you know, one time.

Mike enjoyed school up until seventh grade. Every other participant began his decline into wrongdoing much earlier, but Mike seems to have staved off his skid the longest, mostly because he enjoyed school in the early years, therefore his alienation took longer to get sparked. Mike commented:

> I enjoyed going to school and learning. The English to arithmetic. I enjoyed participating in the classroom setting. I would do my work, but I was very intimidated by my teachers. Intimidated by my mom. For my grades. You know, it all starts at home.

Mike gets angrier as he talks about how his home life impacted his schooling, and his mouth literally curls up in a snarl as he explains:

> I brought my environment at home to the classroom. I couldn't focus on my studies because of things that were going on at the house. The beatings, the verbal abuse. And the arguments with my mom and dad. So I was just an average kid barely getting by. I got a lot of C's, D's and F's…

Mike seems to mellow as he describes his enjoyment at being able to hang out with his friends on the school playground. He comments:

> But I enjoyed going to class and being with my classmates in grammar school. I think the most I liked about school was being able to be out on the playground, participating in games with the other kids that were in the classroom or other classes. The arts and the crafts, going to the auditorium and

> watching some of the plays, and stuff like that. That was fun. My closest friends at school were some neighbors that lived next door to me. Some of the Asian children because they were real quiet, real studious in class, so we kind of hung around together. They were close to me in the schoolyard.

However, Mike's relationship to school changed once he got to seventh grade. He attempts to explain what happened to make him hate school so much during this period in his life.

> I can't remember [a favorite teacher]…I hated school. I hated teachers too, because the teachers reminded me of my mom…The authority figure, the demanding. 'Where you been? How come you ain't been to class? Sit down. Quit talking.' And it triggered what I was going through at home. The shouting, the talking down to.

Still, Mike believes that his teachers who did not offer him help did, however, offer him pity. He comments further:

> That was in grammar school. When I was small. When I started getting into the junior high school the only two instructors that I really enjoyed was the gym class, because it gave me time to vent some of my anger participating in some of the sports activities. And the other one was wood shop, where I was learning to build things and learning how to do things as a craft, or a, what's that word I'm looking for? In wood shop learning a trade. What I saw in those two instructors right there, they were taking my dad's place…I looked at them more as a father figure. Because they were taking time out as a man. Teaching

me how to build a frame, build a wooden bowl, a metal object. So that's why I really enjoyed this class, because those male figures.

In my grammar years in school my mom would make sure that I would go through my homework. But as I got into the older grades seventh, 8th, 9th grade, junior high school. I just wouldn't come home from school. And there would be no homework. In fact, I used to sneak home and catch the mailman dropping the referral slips in the mailbox. Suspensions stuff like that before my mom could get them, and I would tear them up. There was no homework time, or anything like that. I was always ducking and dodging the school administration, and my mom. Without getting in trouble…seventh grade I just stopped going. I dropped out because of my home environment…I was being abused at home. Emotionally and physically, and I missed my father. I was starting to learn at that age what the word divorce meant in my life. My dad wasn't coming back. I was starting to be a young man. Rebellion got in my heart. I just didn't have anything to do with school. I was just total juvenile delinquent.

Pete began acting out in class at a very early age; distracted from his studies and aggressive with his classmates, he ended up in a different classroom than his peers.

To be honest with you, I was always taken out of the classrooms. I was separated from my class…I was the only one. There were maybe one or two, but in spurts, but I was always told [by the teacher], 'You're going to be going

> to class over here.'…I went with it, and uh, I didn't understand why, maybe because I was so angry and bitter, confused... I was very foul mouthed at the age of 5 years old. I remember I got my mouthed washed out with a bar of soap in front of my class for cussing my kindergarten teacher out. And, first, second, third, and fourth grade was always out of classroom, into this module, I just stopped asking question because I went to school for the peace, as I was able to release the anger and whatever I was feeling by hurting other kids in recess.

Pete was sent to classes outside his normal routine because he displayed deviant behavior. This being picked out of the bunch did not sit well with him. He did not like the way he was treated. He states:

> Well, I really felt less than. I thought there was something wrong with me. I tried to ask why did I have to leave class, and go to these modules when all the class is right here, these are my friends, these are the kids that I grew up with, and I got to get separated. And all they [the teachers] said, "It's a better class for you over here. You are going to be able to learn the same things that we're doing here but only at a slower pace." So I went with it. And I got a lot of certificates for completing the things that they asked me to complete, from second, third, fourth, and fifth grade. When I got to sixth grade I got to stay in the class. I think I was kind of maturing a little bit, making a little bit better choices for myself, because I always felt like a alien, I was always different

from everybody, I didn't feel adequate enough, I didn't feel I fit in, I felt less then, I felt like dirty, filthy…

School did offer Pete a respite from his home, as he said, going to school "was a time to get away from the chaos at my house." Pete elaborates:

I think that was the best thing. It was a break from all the dysfunctional activates going around my home, as of my mom always being drunk, men around the house, different men, seeing her get beat up all the time. It [school] was just a break from the madness. I don't think I ever had close friends. What happened was I was a fighter. I didn't have a problem fighting, so they would become my friends after we fought…I had one named Santiago Rivera. I looked up to him because everybody acknowledged him, like he was somebody special. So he became my friend after we fought, and then I started to get acknowledged that I fought the toughest guy at school. So I was getting acknowledged by that, but I never really had a close friend that I'm aware of. How can I say I was treated at school? I was always in trouble, so I was always in the office. My mother was always getting called, and that was the only time I was always treated with discipline, like there was something wrong with me. So I had to go out of class like I said, or get swatted by that big ol' paddle. And that's the only time I was acknowledged.

Pete quickly amended his statement that he had never been acknowledged by teachers or school administrators positively:

I became boy of the year on the crosswalk patrol. I don't know how I did that, but it happened. They gave me an award for that, but other than that…I don't ever felt like I was acknowledged honestly. I was acknowledged by all the bad that I did, that was basically what my life was about—bad.

Ethnicity Used Against the Participants

For Mario, race was an issue in his early matriculation as he states below:

I grew up in a white community. And I think there was maybe six Mexicans in the whole school….about your average size [school]. …there were maybe two Blacks in that whole community. The rest were White. You know maybe a few Hawaiians, Asians, and that was it. I used to hang around with a little Mexican kid named Andy Garcia. I remember, now that I think of it he had a famous name. Me and him used to play ball together all the time…You know I didn't know the difference between the racial barrier. But he did. He was from Texas. And he said that he didn't like Whites. He didn't like Blacks. I don't know where he came from but that's what he thought about them….He would always say, 'Man, I hate them other people, man. We need to stick together.' I'd say, 'Oh, fine. That's fine with me.' But I had White friends, and I had Black friends and that didn't bother me. I'm glad I did because to this day it doesn't bother me. You know…It was usually me and Andy. And another guy Frank…he was white…he just hung around with us…I guess he just liked us. Rather hang around us than all the rest of the kids. He was, I guess he was, because he called himself, he didn't think he was White. He

called himself a Polock. And so that's why I think, his last name was Pochesky. And his dad used to always say that they were Polocks. So I guess he didn't think he was White, and he didn't get along with the other kids either. So, he used to get into a lot of fights too…

Mario seems to be trying to convince not only me, but himself as well that he was not the bad person everyone seemed to think he was back when he was a kid.

I wasn't a bad kid I don't think. You know. I used to fight a lot yeah. With white kids yeah…I just remember fighting a lot. I guess I had to prove myself…Because I was one of the only Mexicans in there. And they probably picked on me, or something, and I'd have to go fight. I never been scared of fighting, so that was my way of them not picking on me.

Race was not only an issue between friends and school enemies. According to Mario, school administrators also demonstrated racial bias as demonstrated in his following statement:

I didn't care for going to school. It didn't interest me at all…They didn't give me enough, even the teachers didn't. Like I would ask for help and they kind of shined me on and go to the next. It was kind of like a racial barrier there, you know…I didn't know that, No. But I could feel it. Like I wasn't the most popular kid with the teachers. You know….I felt like an outcast. I didn't know it though. I didn't know what prejudice was. You know, but I felt it. You know what I mean.

When asked how he felt about this vague sense that his race was being used against him, Mario responded:

> Pretty shitty. Yeah. I didn't like it at all. It was…I think it was, I think that's why I fought so much. You know, that's why I fought so much because I think the kids were making fun of me because I was Mexican. You know. But I can't remember real good but that's I think that's why I would fight because. But it was like a weight on my shoulders. That's probably why I didn't like going to school. I didn't like school very much.

When Mario was asked if he thought the school system, teachers and administrators intentionally pushed kids to one side or another, Mario replied, "Yes. There was no embrace there. I didn't feel like I was embraced." Then Mario told a sad story about his encounter with adult racism and callous indifference:

> When I was going to school, I used to fall asleep on the bus and the bus driver used to drop me off like three or four blocks away. And I would wonder where I was at. That was first grade, kindergarten. I remember getting off all the time crying, because I didn't know where the heck I was at. You know…The bus driver, white guy…people would have to take me home. You know. I remember one lady waited for the bus driver to drop me off because she knew he would drop me off right there. And she goes, 'Doesn't he get dropped off down there?' She goes, 'If he falls asleep, you need to wake him up and drop him off at his bus stop.' He [bus driver] goes, 'He's not supposed to be falling asleep on my bus.' I remember them getting into a real argument.

> But after that he [bus driver] would wake me up….I remember that real clearly.

Mario attended school early on with a sense that being Mexican was to his detriment. He credits the lack of tools as maybe even responsible for his broken decision-making mechanism:

> Now where I grew up at, there was like maybe four or five Mexican American families. The rest were white. I don't believe they [the teachers] gave me a fair chance…They weren't giving me the proper tools to be successful…they put me kind of like on the back burner. They could've did a lot better job than they did, and the impact it had it just, I feel like if I would have had the proper tools that they have to give the children to teach them how to read, do math, I think I could have been a lot better in my head at making decisions.

Mike dropped out in seventh grade after losing absolute interest in school. After being asked what happened to turn him away from school he declared,

> I had no interest in school. If there's no interest in school, why do you want to go there? If they're not teaching you, it's just like a waste of time. So you rather be with your friends and the gangs than be at school.

Pete did not credit his teachers with encouraging him in even the most minimal ways possible:

> I don't think my teachers were able to give me any type of positive insight because I was so disturbing to them and everyone in class that they focused on

> all the bad I did. That's what I brought out. I would stir up so much chaos that it would anger them…

Pete gets into a pensive mood and stops talking for a minute. He seems to be pulling memories from somewhere deep in his mind as he continues his narrative:

> My fifth grade teacher slapped me in my face for breaking a pencil, so I had to slap him back. My sixth grade teacher kicked me in my balls when I had my back turned on him because he thought I was causing commotion. So I don't think none of my teachers were inspiring to me…Except for that old lady Ms. Fisher…I think the only reason why I learned what I know today is when they took me out them classes and they put me in that special class. I think that's why I know how to read, pretty much. I can read. I don't know math, don't know nothing about history, but I can read. And I think that's the reason why I was took in these classes to give me the chance so I can read, so they did something that I didn't understand, probably, but I don't even remember who the tutors were, they were older people, but I don't even remember their names, but I know that by going to that class, I know how to read.

Bullying On the Schoolyard

Like the other participants, Louie got into a lot of trouble at school at an early age. The number of times he got in trouble was almost innumerable. But the issue for him was the bullying. He got caught in the cycle of being bullied and then seeking violent retribution he became the bully. Louie reflects:

> Oh man, at least once a month. Either cutting school or getting in a fight, cutting school…you know, just a fight. Somebody trying to bully me, or whatever. That's why I couldn't concentrate really in school a lot because of the fights…The violence in the school. They didn't have enough security in there. Like they now have that thing about bullying. Back then they didn't have it. Back then there was nothing like that. You told on someone you be a snitch. You would have to worry about other people beating you up, that kind of thing. So that's why my education was kind of poor you know, because of that.

Mike felt safe in his "mellow neighborhood," but it was school that created a sense of unsafe stress in him. His teachers did not intervene to protect him from the relentless bullying, but his teachers did exhibit some pity. Mike explains:

> The neighborhood was mostly Asians, so it was more or less a lot of respect. There wasn't too many, there was probably certain Hispanics that were struggling. But mostly it was a pretty mellow neighborhood. The Asian community surrounding our house, so I went to school with a lot of Asian culture. I felt secure in the neighborhood but insecure at the school. Because school had a wide district of children coming to the school so that was a little bit more bullying and picking on that one over there…In school I was bullied, teased. I was treated with pity by the teachers. They really felt sorry for me because of my home environment.

Like many students, all of the participants experienced bullying in school, but in the 60s and 70s it was mostly excused as boys-will-be-boys. It is no surprise that we learn how a man in his 50s can only recently realize that the rough-housing or hazing they endured in junior high school would today qualify as bullying, something not to be tolerated on any campus today.

Mike has only recently deduced that he was bullied in his childhood, and that his response to the bullying may have led him directly to a gang. Mike reflects:

> Well, I just barely realized that I was bullied from the fifth, sixth, and seventh grade. Seventh grade is where I started cutting a lot of classes and hanging around with a lot of the troubled kids, the problem kids at the school…seventh grade. That's where I just stopped going to class. I was in the back of the school getting high. Sniffing paint. Just running amuck and hanging around with a crowd, everyday got to be exciting. It started with not really a street gang but just a gang of kids cutting class. Taking off to the mall and stuff. So yeah, I think that's where it [the gang] was birthed, to eventually transform into a street gang, where guns and more violent behavior was being done.

Extracurricular Activities at School

Mario remembered that his mother did enroll him in an extracurricular activity, but one month later he did not want to participate in the activity. Mario explains:

> I remember my mom made me join the cub scouts…I didn't want to wear that little blue uniform…I didn't like that…We were going to the field one day,

> going to our cub scout leader, and I seen Andy just kicking back in the field. And I go, 'What you doing?' And he goes, 'What are you doing wearing that?' He started making fun of me. So I just took it off right there. I had a shirt under, took my hat and threw it, and I didn't wear it no more. I told my mom I lost it.

Mike had the most Spartan answers. When asked to describe any extracurricular activities he may have participated in, Mike answered:

> I was involved in no extracurricular activities. Because my mom was very controlling and demanding and it was totally against her rules and regulations to have us involved with anything outside her religious beliefs in the school, and at home.

Pete was involved in one extracurricular activity, which was soccer. Pete shares:

> Yeah, the only thing I got was in sixth grade. I had soccer participation after school, and one of my mom's husbands was a soccer player and he was always coming out in newspapers. He was a good soccer player. And he was a man that I trusted until what he did to my mom, but he showed me how to play soccer. And I got real good at it and our team became champions that year for the first time they started that sport event. We played all the schools in Tracy, California. We beat them all, and we were champions, and nobody scored. I think it was 45 goals in all our games, and no one scored against us. So that was an all-team effort. It was awesome, the best year, the best moment in my life, for me. I was part of something, a team.

But beyond that one activity, Pete did not see himself as the sort of young man who could find traction in the kind of activities sanctioned by safe society. Pete offers this explanation:

> Back then, I really couldn't focus, I didn't really focus on life. It passed me by, because of how I would single myself out. I didn't know how to express myself because of what was always dealt with me from being abused. I know that if you were bad, say like I was attracted to you, in other words you were going to be a friend because we were always in the mix, so I was cool with that, but as my brothers and sisters I see that they hung around with different type of people, people that were involved with school projects, you know interesting things within our community. And I was attracted to all the bad people in the family. Bad people. I didn't care to get into any type of functions unless it had to do with wild activity, wrong activity, thieving, stealing, hurting, and taking, you know, with the young ones.

What Drove Them To Join A Gang?

Louie believed the bullying and fighting played a big part in his choice to join a gang. The violence occurred mostly in his school and community. In that sense, the social control mechanisms provided by these social systems failed the participants by first not realizing that bullying was taking place, and then punishing the young men as they tried their best to navigate through a maze that was set-up to trap them. Louie reflects:

> Yeah, it [the school violence] did because it took me away from the school environment, first of all. We would go to the parks where you feel like you could trust people there. The guys around you weren't going to let anything happen to you. They would take you down to their family's house. They would feed you, regardless of who you are or what you did or whatever. What I mean, you were accepted, and so I didn't have to worry about that. That's what kind of influenced me [to the gang]. They [the gang members] tried to show some kind of concern. Some of it might've been genuine; some of it was false, yeah…It was way more than I was getting at school…and at home. But in the long run, it [being in the gang] wasn't going to do me no good, because I got cheated out of an education...

In 9th grade Mario enrolled in Golden Valley, a continuation school. This is where he began to search out fellas with a familiar life experience, just like everyone in junior high school, at that crucial age of human development, when kids attempt to forge an identity in a group. The usual clubs and extracurricular activities (i.e., Math/Chess clubs, band or theater) were not available to Mario or the other participants. So Mario dropped out of school and went searching for solidarity and acceptance elsewhere. His family did not offer love, nor did they or his teachers disrupt his sojourns to the streets. Mario comments:

> No love at home. Looking for love in all the wrong places. They [his family] didn't do anything to prevent it…They [his teachers] didn't tell me, 'Hey like, don't you think you're going the wrong way? Or, don't you think you can do

> better for yourself if you try this or try that?' If I was a teacher and I saw a student going the wrong way I feel it's my duty as a teacher to get this kid on the right track. By any means. That's what you go to school for. That should be your [the teachers] goal anyway as to teach somebody. Not just to teach, but to steer them in the right direction.

Mario did not connect that the kids in his continuation school were 'troublemakers' who already exhibited disruptive behavior in the regular high school, therefore the tactics the teachers had to employ were more defensive, and rudimentary because of the low level of real matriculation of each student. Also, by the time students (predominately African American or Mexican American) ended up at continuation schools, they already had a peculiar relationship to school. Mario explains:

> I wasn't attending class [at the local high school], and plus the guys I was hanging around with they weren't going to school. They were older. They would come pick me up. And they [school administrators] had seen that. They said, "You know what, we don't want them guys around our school no more." So me not listening to them, they told me I had to go to Golden Valley…I was glad…It was closer to my house. I didn't have to walk so far.

There is no defense for certain professional negligence that occurred at the Golden Valley Continuation School. There is one incident in particular that made Mario bristle with anger and acted as the final straw that broke his back and sent him permanently to the streets. He shares:

> I forgot what I did. They wanted me to clean windows. That's when I said, "I'm going. I'm not a window washer. You got me messed up." So I walked out and never went back. My discipline for doing something bad…they had me washing windows…Here's your mop, here's your bucket.

Mike was 13 years old when he joined his gang. He doesn't blame the school for his choice as much as he blames his mother:

> I think the beatings that I took from the hand of my mom instilled a lot of rebellion and anger inside of me as a youth. So I was an angry, angry kid. So when I ran away from home I needed to vent that anger somewhere. And hanging around with the other runaway kids I found that it was pretty enjoyable busting windows downtown, engaging in the alcohol and drugs, and assaulting people. It was an outlet for me to vent. So I found it pretty enjoyable. It released some of the anger inside me.

Preparation for College

Mario does not recall that any teacher spoke to him about the possibility that he could attend college. No effort was made to alter his imagination about what was possible in life for him. When asked directly the question, 'No teacher ever told you, 'Hey, you can go to college?' Mario replied:

> No. Never. Never. Nobody told me you can be anything you want. Never ever have I been told that….In school…Trying to teach me how to get over this kind of reading problem, but when you're a teacher you're supposed to know. To me now, my kids, they're told that they can be anything they want

nowadays. And I even tell my son you can be anything you want. He [his son] goes, 'I want to be.'

Mario has no recollection of any of his teacher's faces. The faces of his fellow students are less of a blur, but barely. Beyond facial features, Mario also could not recall a favorite teacher. When asked if he ever had a favorite teacher, Mario replied:

> No. Never. Not one that I remember. You know to me I remember kids stand out more than I do teachers…I don't even remember their faces. I don't. I can't even remember one face of being in my adolescent life. From kindergarten to sixth grade I don't remember none of them. That's kind of hard….and this is before I had my brain aneurism. I still didn't remember then you know. Because I lost a lot of memory after I had my brain aneurism. I still don't remember them before that. I just didn't. There was no special one that used to talk to me nice, or anything that would just strike a chord you know.

Mike dropped out of school too early to be ignored by teachers who would not prepare him for college. He surrendered to delinquency early. Mike declares:

> The type of things the school did to prepare me for college was, well I didn't go to school. I dropped out…at 13 years old…I had no vision of any careers as a young man, because of my life being in total rebellious attitude, angry and resentful. It just blurred my vision of advancing toward any type of career. I had no long-term goals. No teachers ever consulted with me or asked anything [about career goals]. I was always referred to the principal's office. Where back in them days you were swatted, it wasn't against the law to be

> swatted or to be disciplined by the vice principal. So I spent most of my time sitting in the office, or just running from the truant officers in the back of the school.

Pete found no encouragement to prepare for college. The phrase “marches to the beat of a different drum” aptly applies to Pete, who used the metaphor of music to describe how he felt out of step with his classmates and the expectations put on them. Pete explains:

> I don’t think I had any preparation about college…from what I understand, or recognized. I don’t remember anybody talking about college. Basically because the people that I was growing up with from the barrio, our hood, we settled for less, we settled for the normal, as of, “Okay, go to school, come back, and out in the streets, we are in our yards.” But in school I never can recall somebody talking about furthering your education as to becoming something, at least not to me or to people that I surrounded myself with. I don’t think I was ever in tune with that.

Community Influence to Join a Gang

Feeling Safe/Unsafe in the Neighborhood

There were many ways in which the community of the participants influenced their perceptions of themselves. In some cases, the participants as young men felt safe in their neighborhoods, only to later to feel more menaced by the streets. The interviews yielded their impressions of the lives around them in the community, and how they developed their antagonisms with other groups within that place.

Louie noticed that when he moved into the projects in Stockton that he was now moving into apartment-living, which was different than the neighborhood of homes not far away where his friends lived. This knowledge that apartment-living was a drop down in socio-economic ladder instigated fantasies in Louie in which he could live higher up, away from his circumstance. This was the beginning of Louie imagining gambling to become something different than the cards he had been dealt.

> We moved from a totally Hispanic neighborhood, to a black community when I was seven. You know, the Vista in Stockton, the projects…I had some friends lived on Seventh street. A few blocks out of the Vista and it was a totally different lifestyle there because they owned their own house, and the blocks were quieter, and I didn't feel the tension. I only could dream of not living in the Vista and just living like my other friends would live. I would always wish that we were more stable as far as financially, so we could have a home like that.

Louie confronted culture shock when he moved in the Vista projects. Foisted on him was now the occasion to see that different racial groups do not always respond to newcomers with baked cookies and welcome choirs. Some react violently and in Louie's case, he was attacked in the neighborhood and school, and thereby learned to fight back. Louie comments:

> It just totally gave me a culture shock because I was used to Mexicans all my life, and now I'm living in a different culture. And it's something that I wasn't used to. It was hard for me to adjust. I used to get in a lot of fights. Going to

> school was a problem because I would be getting jumped all the time going to school by the Blacks in the projects. It seemed like the twenty or thirty Hispanic families that were there….all the Hispanics in that community were having problems. It was racial…I used to run thru the projects. I had to watch where I was going, from when I hit Airport Way, from where Ralphs Market is going into the projects. I had to watch that I didn't get jumped because I was a target. I was of another race, and at that time of the early 70's there was more Blacks than Mexicans in that area, mostly a Black and Mexican community.

Louie looks at me as though he wants me to explain why Black kids would want to hurt him simply because he is Mexican as he continues his story:

> But there were more Blacks and they would want to jump me and beat me up…For no reason, just because I was brown, just because I was a different color. It was easy for them to do it because I was by myself. They all had family in the projects, so they made me a target so it was always a fear of coming home.

Louie was the participant who as a boy saw a man thrown in the trunk of a car and kidnapped in front of his home. He lived in a very dangerous place. Louie explains:

> I believe it was when I was nine years old, I was in front of my house and I seen this man running around the corner, and all of a sudden this car pulls up. Skidding around the corner. They start beating up on the man, demanding him

> to pay some money. I guess he owed these men some money. They threw him in the trunk, you know, that wasn't normal to me you know.

Mario moved into a Mexican neighborhood, a safe environment he recalls with tenderness:

> When I was living with my dad it felt pretty good, because we moved into a Mexican neighborhood, on the East Side. And I felt among my own people. And I'd go to a school where it was a lot of Mexicans and really no violence. Everybody got along with each other. In there I felt that's the way it was supposed to be. We were La Raza. The community was good. They had a club out there called the Mosquito Club. A community center. Play pool. Ping pong…They had dances there and stuff…They were cool.

As Mario grew up and moved into Stockton, he became quite familiar with plenty of crimes and criminals in his community growing up. He was asked to describe the various levels of violence that he was aware of in his Stockton neighborhood. Mario replies:

> Murder to rape. It affected the community really horrible. Because a lot of murders were happening back then…Some of them were altercations between individuals…They could have been [gang members] but a lot of them weren't. They were just fighting. One individual was Black guy, and a Mexican. It was a family thing. Family feud. A few of them got killed. But I've seen people die in front of me. I seen people shot, people stabbed. There was a lot of violence growing up.

Mike's mother kept him locked in the house because of her religious beliefs. This is how Mike was able to feel safe in his neighborhood. He did not have the nighttime run-ins with roaming/loitering gang members.

Mike was asked to describe the parks in his neighborhood and explain the way he used them. He revealed an extremely severe home environment:

> We were forbidden to go outside. Yeah. It was a straight lock down situation. We couldn't go to any neighbors, children's homes. They couldn't come to our house. It was rough…My mother forbid…The only activity that we had fun with was maybe at school. We weren't allowed to go outside.

Pete described the neighborhood he was raised in like a raw nerve, exposed, making him feel vulnerable.

> What I acknowledge when I was growing up in our neighborhood in the projects, everything was exposed there. Everybody is carrying a beer, smoking weed, or crystal, other drugs. But the only thing that was actually hidden was heroin. That was really never talked about. It was a private thing. I've acknowledge there was a few people who I looked up to that were using it and I didn't say nothing about it because like I said, it was them not me. I never said I wasn't going to be one, I just said, 'Okay, that's just another choice of substance.' At that time I didn't know what substances are, I just know they were feel good and like I say, everything was exposed. Nobody hid actually nothing from what I know. Except heroin…

Pete discussed the violence in his neighborhood first as domestic violence—the beatings at home, behind closed doors. Then he made the observation that the violence at home and in the community was a sort of Petri dish that cultivated his baser violent instincts that would grow into him terrorizing larger society:

> Well number one, violence was in my household. And then there were certain families that had the same type of violence that I was introduced to in the home: the yelling, physical altercations between a man and a woman, or a kid fighting, or you know, mothers and fathers having their issues when they're drunk, the kids trying to protect themselves from their parents. I grew up with my mother being very abusive, physically bruised and traumatized and I became more hateful, more hateful to her, and more hateful to men. As far as I'm concerned, I don't think anybody cared, in school or my home. Because the way I acted out, my foul mouth. I just got swatted, but there was no like 'What's going on with you? Why are you doing this?' It was just my mom signing consent for the school to discipline me or she would discipline me.

Crime Life in the Community

Gangs were first looked to as surrogate family, for the support they offered, both for the emotional acceptance and the physical protection, but soon they became a group of like-minded angry men to test their manhood by acting out in the community. Louie compares gang life to Superhero life. He comments:

> It [the gang] made me fill like Superman. I knew I had people that I could rely on. I knew that at any time I could go over there and get a gun. I knew that at

> any time I could have somebody ride with me. We could do a crime and nobody would say anything against me because our code was if you found a leak and we found where that leak came from we going to stop it. And so with that I always kept my mouth shut and I knew the guys that I rode around with were going to keep their mouth shut. So that made me feel like, Okay, you know, there's people that I could trust. I got enemies, but I'm not alone….In my daily life, I could say in my weekly life there were jumpings, stabbings and shootings. We would go out to parties like to *quinceañera* dances and things like that. We would run into other gang members, and it would go down. And that's the way we lived. We would fight each other, stab each other, shoot. Run from each other if we were losing. It was just like the army, when they [soldiers] would fight their enemies. You could either retreat, or you could go forward.

Louie saw gang life in a childish way, which makes sense since he joined as young boy with only the perspective of an adolescent. And this sad irony is telling. Society would like to put these boys on trial as adults when they commit serious crimes, when in the imagination of these adolescents they are simply play-acting, locked into only seeing their place in the world with the decision-making apparatus of a child.

Mario likened his attraction to crime the way boring "square" people look at other people having all the fun. He comments:

> To me, everybody else was joining gangs in the community. I mean if you weren't in a gang you were kind of like a square. That's the way I looked at it, because the guys who weren't doing nothing were having no fun, and the guys who were in the gang looked like they were having all the fun. So I kind of just went that way.

Mario looked up to older gang members in the neighborhood, an attraction that would not bode well for him, and an attraction that would lead him to join a gang in Stockton. When asked to name role models in his community he replied, "*Pinteros.*" When asked to explain why he considered men who had gone to jail to be role models, Mario replied:

> They were the older homies and they seemed like they would tell you more things than your own parents would tell you. I call it schooling now. That doesn't make them very smart if they went to prison…I had nobody else to look up to…It was like looking for love in all the wrong places. You know. I won't let my children do that. If I had a father and a mother that was out there, trying to tell me something to me what was right, what was wrong, I would probably listen to them. Maybe just tell them, I probably would. But I didn't. So I never did listen.

Pete was asked to describe the parks in his neighborhood in south side Tracy. He did not talk about parks per se, but he did begin a meditation on role models. Pete comments:

> We had a group of men from the neighborhood older guys and us young ones, and we followed each other to parties, even at young age, ten years old, 11 years old, 12 years old, we always followed our older guys because they was fixing up the low-rider's, [cars] or we would mimic them. We didn't have cars so we would mimic low-rider bikes putting music on our little bikes, little cassette boxes, and going cruising you know like 15-20 deep all around the South Side, you know we would stroll. We rode through the North Side, East Side, and the West Side, showing off our bikes and doing what's not accepted in society.

Pete's expression turns into one of pain and for a second, his voice falters as though these memories of hurting people hurt him too. He continues:

To hurt, to take, to inflict pain on people because I believe all of us were so confused and angry that the only thing we knew how to release those feelings was to medicate ourselves with *pisto*, and go check out the older women and the older guys partying. And the fights would happen, and that was the normal, that is the normal…

Pete then begins to talk about the guys he looked up to and as he talks about them, he literally shakes his head as though he cannot believe he was so attracted to these guys.

> When I look at my role-models back then, I didn't have a concept of what a role-model was, but I did acknowledge that there was certain type of individual that I admired because they was strong. Because a lot of people did what they [the strong guys] said, and I wanted to be like that, I wanted to be

> where I had control, where I made a difference, that people would be behind me for whatever I stood up for, you know what I mean, Power. And when I have these certain individuals and I think about them they were always looked upon as were very bold, as if they didn't care. They [the strong guys] didn't think twice about anything and I admired that because I had a sense of belonging, because I kind of understood that, because of my actions of what I portrayed. And having a group of young guys like that we did whatever we were told to do…

Pete's emotions seem to go from sadness to uneasiness as he talks about his community, his home life and the violence in both settings.

> The community in general, like I say, it was poverty. Everybody settled for their welfare checks, from what I seen. And us guys we just terrorized our own people, steal their food stamps, and just celebrate within ourselves, and that was it. Our way of survival was that you had to do anything and everything to survive…I don't think I felt anything to tell you the truth. Me growing up in a violent home, where it's so dysfunctional that my mom would bring people [men] over. Maybe someone got stabbed in the bar and she would sew them up. Until I went to L.A. I was 14, at the time, visiting the summer, I met a friend over there and he got stabbed in his lung, right here in the chest, and the only thing that I saw was that he had a big hole in his chest, and I was intrigued by it opening and closing, you know I was just like 'Wow!' When he would breathe it just opened up, and when he stop breathing

> it shutdown, and it would go open, it was a big ole' gash, open hole in him, and I was just like 'Wow!' He didn't die. They took his lung, but thank God upstairs, he didn't die.

There is a fatalism that sets in on certain folks raised in dysfunctional neighborhoods and they just give up and surrender to a "if you can't beat them, then join them" ethos. This seems to have been Pete's response to the overt criminality everywhere apparent in his community. Pete comments:

> I did what everybody else did, I would carry my beer, I would drink my beer, and I would smoke my weed, and not hide it. Why should I hide it when everybody else is doing it? I didn't get into heroin until I was 12 years old, but I was introduced to it when I was 10, when I met my father for the first time. I was a reflection of what my neighborhood was, and what they did, and what they believed in just followed through, that's all I did.

Assaults Created Need for Gang Back-Up

Louie explained that the violence in the neighborhood played a big role in him joining a gang. His community was fraught with tensions between the various racial groups. Louie reflects:

> There was always different neighborhoods there. There was the southeast neighborhood. There's the 8th street mob neighborhood. So at that time their telling me, 'Lou, who are you going to go with? Little Unity, or Central? You got to get in some type a gang for protection. You can't be by yourself. If you are, you're going to be a target.' At first I was like, 'I'm going to be a target.'

> I believed it, but then I started feeling the vibes when I would go to parties, and different neighborhoods. They would come up on me knowing that I was in a gang, that I had these certain individuals that I knew were feared. I wouldn't get bullied as much, or picked on as much, so that's what made my decision…

After joining the gang, Louie felt safe and a part of something bigger than himself, part of something that demonstrated power as denoted in his following commentary:

> Getting, being safe, I wanted to have guys around me where I could call at anytime, that would come and assist me in my troubles, because at one time there was a guy beating on my brother, and he was just taking his bike. So I went over there. I hurt him, and before you knew it, I had twenty Black guys maybe thirty at my door chanting my name: 'We want Louie! We want Louie!' I opened my door and I came out with a knife, and they had guns. I said 'Wow!' At that time I called my homeboys over and they all came over carloads of them with guns, rifles. There was going to be a little miniature war out there, and the Blacks seen that. They said, 'You know what, it ain't that serious. Just don't hurt my brother again, and we won't hurt you.' Which was a lie because later on when I got locked up they jumped both of my brothers. But I felt safe knowing that I had someone to call and that I could identify who the community feared, because they [gang members] were known.

Even the name of the gang Louie joined signifies that these guys will go to any lengths to back each other up and Louie feels safe and is finally a part of a group that lets everyone know he is not alone. He continues:

> At that time I belonged to the gang, and they were very popular in Stockton. They were always coming out on the news, always on TV, always associated with something that was happening in the community…Bad or good, either way, for us it was good for the individual that were our enemies. It was bad, so I joined them because I felt safe around them. I had them to protect me as well as they had me to protect them at any given time, and a phone call away.

Mike makes a direct connection between the violence he experienced in his neighborhood and his decision to rise up and respond, which was the slippery slope to joining a gang. Mike states:

> The violence in my neighborhood as I got older compelled me to protect myself and my loved ones, like my younger brother and sisters, against anyone doing harm to them or coming against them in any way. So I stood up it made me a protector.

Mike became a protector for his siblings. Eventually, he would look outside the home to find people who could offer him the very support he provided his siblings, hence his joining the gang. Mike continues:

> Yeah it made me feel like I had more support. Support as to deal with the situation if an issue arose that I wouldn't have to deal with it by myself, that I had others that would help me with whatever…I was the individual that

> always had my hand in the air first. It was to create a name for myself. To my fellow gang members that I tried to instill in their minds that I was a lunatic and I wasn't scared to die or be harmed. I've had four failed suicide attempts. So you know, I deliberately tried to put myself in harm's way so that I wouldn't have to live the life of shame, betrayal and rejection anymore. So I was always the one to say, 'I'm gonna do it.' I was always the one to go first. To deal with any type of issues in a violent way

Work and Productive Involvement in the Community

Mario participated in his community's ethnic labor market. He remarks, 'I worked summer jobs. I got a lot of jobs in the *concilio*. Back then man power in the *concilio* was strong and they were good jobs…Yeah it gave me a sense of belonging.' Mario said that the *Concilios* provided psychological counseling, but that he never used their services. Mario specifically recalls advice he received from one of the work counselors at the *concilio*:

> One of my counselors who I always used to go to, a white man, he used to always tell me, 'Your appearance always has a better sense of giving you a better sense of direction. They look at you, and they'll second guess you if you're not dressed right.' He would tell me, 'Try to change your dress' because mine was starched khakis and starched Levi's. He said to put a nice shirt on, put some slacks on. Which I never had. I probably could have had them if I wanted to but I didn't. I just never thought to dress like that, you know, even for interviews.

Although Mike talks about being forbidden from participating in the regular social features of adolescent life, he did have a typical paperboy job: ‘I was a paperboy when I was 12 years old, delivering news papers. That was my first job. Then after that I was washing dishes at a restaurant. Until I was about 15 years old.’ When asked to describe any jobs he had growing up, Mike replied:

> The only jobs that were available to me in Tracy was farm work, picking fruits, vegetables. And then I went to Los Angeles with my dad after a few years. LA has a bigger field of youth so I got a job through the school. I earned money for my school clothes from the seventh and 8th grade. I eventually got kicked out of 9th grade, and I just stopped going to school because I was really polluted on drugs.

For Pete, joining a gang made him feel bigger and safer. In this way, he said, “I felt on fire, like the world was mine.” Again, his perception of gang life was a kind of comic book grandiosity, juvenile and indicative of his boyish comprehension of serious themes. Pete states:

> It [joining a gang] made me feel like I belonged. It was a group of us young men that basically lived in the same projects and our mothers were doing the same thing, because there really no one had bothered us in our neighborhood, it was always the same women that went to the same bars, and us kids just being left to our own devices. We were just terrorizing…I got involved with the neighborhood boys because like I said, there were no men around. Our mother’s were always at the bars, and we just controlled the neighborhood. No

> parents said anything to us. I mean no parents. They were either hung over, or they didn't care, no one cared…I felt on fire, like the world was mine, I felt that for all the stuff that happened to me and continued to happen to me is that every opportunity that I could do something wrong that I give my fullest attention that I can hurt somebody.

Pete's narrative about why he joined a gang is truly sad in that he and his friends seem to be lashing out at an unfair world. A world that has treated them all with such disdain as is elaborated in his next comment:

> Plus I had guys who thought about the same way I thought. If you didn't fit my caliber I didn't have nothing to do with you, you had to be for me. You couldn't think twice. You just do it. Consequences? Don't even worry about that. Who cares, right? Because I was dealt with when I did good and I was dealt with when I did bad, so I didn't have no understandings, in other words I'm just going to do what I have to do. I acted out to the fullest, all of us did. We encouraged each other. I went wholeheartedly, because I was so angry that I used to overextend my anger on whoever came my way.

Law Enforcement Influence on Joining a Gang

Thoughts about Police Patrols in Their Neighborhood, Gathering Information

The incident in Mario's life that triggered his first awareness of a police presence in his neighborhood occurred when he was seven years old:

> The first time I was in a cop car was when I was about seven years old. I was trying to cross my bike across the freeway in San Jose and the CHP stopped

> me. They put me in the car, put my bike in the trunk and took me to my moms. I was pretty scared. I was scared of going home probably. You know, facing my mom and dad. They let my mom whip me. I was mad at my mom for whipping me. Probably appreciate them [law enforcement] for taking me off the freeway. But about six months later I got caught throwing rocks at the water tower, which I didn't know was an irrigation tank for some farmer's field. He [the farmer] called the cops on me and my friend Andy. We were throwing rocks at bats, that's it. I didn't know it was a tank. The cops ended up taking me home. I was mad at that. You know then he got kind of smart. The cop, I remember him getting kind of smart with us. Why were you doing this? Don't you know that that's somebody's water, and not yours? And that's when I felt like I disliked the way they talked to me. It could have gone better I think. But it didn't you know. I guess he was trying to scare me into not getting arrested, but that didn't work. It seemed like I was always in a cop car.

Mike recalls that his first awareness of police in his neighborhood occurred when he was 11 years old.

> The first time I think I was like 11 years old and I remember a police car being parked on the corner of my house, and we had a neighbor that was a little old lady, 80 something years old. And my mom told us that they found her dead. And she was murdered and raped in her home and that's the first time that I actually seen a police car in our neighborhood. At a crime scene. I was torn between scared and being safe. At that age I was like 11 years old.

> Their presence made me feel safe but then it scared me also. It scared me because I never actually seen a cop car parked so close to my house. I always seen them driving down the street, patrolling, but as far as stopping to get off the car, it kind of scared me.

Seeing police from a distance frightened Mike, but soon he had his own private contact with them.

> My earliest contact with the police was when I ran away from home. I was approached by a Stockton police officer in a paddy wagon. And he obviously had it on his computer that I was a runaway. He got off his truck, arrested me and to teach me a lesson he put me in the back of the paddy wagon and bounced me around town a little bit, and took me to juvenile hall. That was my first encounter. We didn't talk. He was just asking me a lot of questions…like, what are you doing out here? What's your name? Where do you live? That was my first encounter. Questions like that. And more or less just getting like background, gathering information about me.

Initially, Pete was inclined to view police officers as agents of caring and concern, there to help people be safe, even if that meant they needed to point out a person's wrongs. Pete was very willing to give police the benefit of the doubt after his first run-in with them at age seven:

> When I was seven years old, I lit three backyards on fire with a kite that I received, but no one told me I had to put a tail on it so it could fly up. So I got pissed off, because it was all holey. I went to the backyard and I put it in

> tumbleweeds and it caught the whole weeds on fire, that yard caught on fire, that yard caught on fire, so fire engines came, the police came, and boy let me tell you, I got my ass beat for that and that's the first time I acknowledged to pay attention to that the police were there to enforce your wrongs' to be addressed.

Louie recalls that police presence in his neighborhood instigated alertness and strong bitterness in him. He used the Mexican barrio slang for "careful" to express his sense of vigilance when the police came around. Louie said he felt "Kind of *Trucha*:"

> It was a bitterness in my mouth, you know. After about my second stop or third one I was just like, 'They were the bad guys now.' Because I knew I was doing wrong, but you know they're the ones out there busting me. And I felt like what I was doing I just felt like I had to do. I wanted to do it and they were there to stop me. And I sure didn't want to be stopped whatever I was doing.

Louie noticed that police officers in his community were not equal opportunity defenders. He recalls:

> On the south side of Stockton, a pretty crime ridden community, you can call the cops, and it'll take them like half an hour to 45 minutes to get there. Now on the north side of town [identified by the participant as the good side of town] you call the cops it takes them five minutes to get there. Like one time, someone was breaking into our house. I was young, and it took them [police officers] a long time to get there. Seemed like they [the burglars] were trying

> to climb up the back of the wall. They had moved the garbage can back there. What happened was I got some hot water and threw it on them and they took off. That's the only reason they left.

Louie's dislike of what he perceived as unfair treatment by the police is explained:

> And when they [the police officers] came here I got mad because, I go, 'I already took care of it you know.' They started asking me questions. I was so upset because it took so long for them to get there. They didn't care what took place in that side of town. I had a bad taste in my mouth for cops because of that.

Louie also recognized that race played a huge part in the way certain teenagers of color were watched and policed more than their White classmates. Louie laments:

> I didn't understand it. I always seen that when we were having problems in our schools they [law enforcement] would always go to the Blacks and the Hispanics and harass them. And if we [Hispanics or Blacks] would walk in groups they would pull us over, and check us. That would really make me upset because we were you know, kids just like anybody else going to school. This is in high school. Going to school trying to get educated. But yet there's separation, that racial separation, and you see a bunch of Whites walking together not getting bothered at all. And when we would ask the police why you ain't bothering them [Caucasian students], their response to us would be,

> 'Shut up before I put these handcuffs on you.' How am I supposed to look at them? I hated them? I was like, 'Man, they don't give us a break, you know, they're racist.'

Louie seems to have realized during his high school years that he was going to be a failure because at every turn in his life, the police or his teachers were reinforcing this in his mind as he states below:

> We ain't going to go nowhere in life. This is our life, so basically that's how I looked at them. Because they [law enforcement] never offered me any help, far as helping me find a job or go into any programs that would assist me like job-core, they would never give me any good talks or anything like that. I had a counselor one time would tell me, 'You know what your future is? That you're going to be a prison gang member.' Man, how could you tell a kid that? I was like, at that time, I was like maybe 18 or 19. I was already like an adult, but they were telling me this, and I'm like 'Wow.' So that made me more not want to become, or join no prison gang, which I never did, but even though I associated, I never was involved in none of their dealings. I didn't want that because I was always worried about my family. But the police made me have that decision. I'm like, 'They never helped me in no kind of way.' There was one officer I could say helped me after all the mess was done, Officer Wagner. He offered to do some kind of intervention, body of warfare kind of thing. He was offering us counseling jobs, desk jobs, but still at that time we were still unsettled, I still was gang oriented at that time, I don't

> know if he could have really been trusted. Plus the guy who was supposed to lead it had a fear of being out there in the public because he felt that he was going to get assassinated, so that didn't work out for us.

Louie described multiple violent confrontations with the Stockton police:

> In Stockton, we were thrown on the ground and they were putting guns to our heads. They had the shotguns out. The gang I was in was well known for violence and they [cops] were looking for weapons. They had thought that I did something. They were always going by my house and stuff. So they wanted me. I know they wanted me but they couldn't, they couldn't pin nothing on me. One of them [police officer] goes, 'I'm going to get you. One of these days I'm going to get you. And you're going to go away forever.' I said, 'hey, talk is cheap.' And then he got mad man and he kicked me right in the ribs.

In some cases, some family members of the participants also ran afoul of the law, and arrests or questioning by the local police occurred. The police came to Mario's sister home for her. Their interactions with her upset him. He recalls:

> I was hella mad because of the way they [the police] treated her. You know….my sister. They talked to her bad. Saying she was a bad mother, which she's not. Her son had a gun that looked like a real gun, but it was a BB gun. And her son pulled it out the window and started shooting another friend with it, which he shouldn't have done. But he did. He was about 12 years old. Some of these guns looked like real guns you know. I don't know how it went

> down, but she was the mother that got busted for saying that she went on a drive by with her son. She went to jail for it. The way they talked to her made her look bad. You know. Even in the paper. They blew it up…The media will eat that up and they will come on the news and they would say…bullshit. But to me it was just to sell papers and to blow up that issue. Because whether they're under gun control or under something. Pressuring the gun control. Or they wanted to pack the prisons up. You know stuff like that.

Police came to Mike's house to arrest other family members beside him. He recalls,

> My mom called the cops on my dad one time. But we were all put in our rooms and we didn't really see that. It made me feel mad. It hurt me as a kid to see the parents fighting and then to have law enforcement come and get involved it felt like a parent was being torn away.

Pete's misbehavior brought the police to his mother's home, to visit her and check up on her parenting. When they left, he felt like maybe the police visit may have helped in the long run. He had no clue he was an actor in own disillusionment, setting himself up for disappointment in police who could not do what he hoped and expected them to accomplish with his family, namely, save it. Pete remembers:

> I felt temporary relieved, as if secured, because they took an interest of asking my mom things. I felt like just maybe that by them coming one too many times that might straighten out my mom's life. As to doing better for herself, you know like, telling her, 'You know what, you shouldn't be going to the bars, you shouldn't be bringing these men in the house.'

Pete's dreams that the police would save his mom came to an abrupt end when the police focused more on the wrong Pete was doing as opposed to what his mom was doing as indicated in his following comments:

> All these wants that I wanted them to tell her it was always focused on, 'Patricia, your son did this, your son did that.' And all I did was get physically abused every time they left, so like I said, I was damned if I did good, and I was damned if I did bad. But every time the police would come, I felt that I did something so my mom could acknowledge that she was doing wrong too…The first time that they [police] ever came into my house was to arrest the man who beat the living shit out my mom, because I couldn't protect her. I was just 11 years old. I was just glad he got arrested. I didn't understand why, he did what he did to my mom, and I just wanted him to just disappear. I wanted him to hear, 'Just don't you ever come back, don't you ever come back.' But my mom brought him back. Man it's crazy. I didn't understand that either.

Pete's disillusionment with police started early. The police, who showed up to help Pete's family when he lit fires in his neighborhood at age seven, were no longer kind or protective in his eyes. He reflects:

> When I wholeheartedly needed help, as a kid back then, to keep my mom at home, they [law enforcement] just neglected me. But when I did something that may have caused harm to somebody else or damaged some property, they came all right, they were interested all right…They would come if I did

> something wrong, right? To rescue, or to say, 'Hey, you can't be doing that!' That there's consequences. That would trigger me to do all the things that I did to bring them to my house, so they could talk to my mom, or, just be there, have their presence there because I knew that they were there and that they would speak to me, they would take time with me now because I was doing bad things. Either make prank calls, pulling fire alarms. I was getting their attention by the wrongs that I did.

The Role Police Played in the Choice to Join a Gang

One factor for joining a gang, among several, was that law enforcement gave off the appearance of being another gang. And so the participants excused themselves for reacting as if they needed to belong to a gang too in order to better handle the onslaught of attention and aggression thrown their way because of the way they looked, where they lived, and how they were handled. Louie explained his response to law enforcement:

> If they would've been more positive in that event, I think I would have respected them more. But when they didn't care, to me they didn't care, I felt, "Hey I'm going to join the gang, because at least I got someone to take care of me, someone to back me up, because they [law enforcement] are not going to back me up.

This treatment by police was the last straw for Mike. He comments:

> I think I reached a point where the anger from home, I just didn't know how to confront it. Confrontation or bullying tactics [at home] until I reached the

> age of 13 to where I just living on the streets, being in juvenile hall. I think living in the juvenile hall detention center got me to a point where I wasn't going to take anymore from anyone. I made a decision that I was going to deal with any conflict, confrontation in a violent way.

Mike initially had a bland attitude toward police. As a young boy he had no contact with them. Things changed when he got to seventh grade and began being singled out by them. He recalls:

> OK, when I was in school in the grammar school I never got stopped by the police. But once I went in to the seventh, eighth grade, junior high school, I was always stopped by the police. It made me feel…It actually got me to feel tougher. And it made me feel important. Like I was being recognized. I was thrown against the wall, being frisked down, or told to stop, or whatever. It wasn't intimidating. It was more like the focus and spotlight was on me I was getting some attention. That's how I really felt…in the early times in the seventh grade most of the majority of the children who weren't going to class were minority. Black, Hispanic. We were the ones who were always out. Off the school grounds and we made ourselves targets. And we were you know.

Mike was pressed to elaborate how he believes he and his friends made themselves targets:

> By being off the school grounds. And by our ethic. The way we dressed. The way we carried ourselves, in areas like hanging out, you know. Off the school

> grounds…I dressed that way to fit in with my gang and to fit in with the other kids. And it brought attention to us. And that's where we were targets.

Pete definitely did not see the role of police as 'to protect and to serve.' Public service is not what he thought law enforcement brought into his community. In fact, he became a willing player in the antagonism that existed among some members of his community and the police:

> I didn't really see police at first as protectors. I seen police as enforcement, like some team of people that could just come in, and when they were there everybody actually changed, their attitude, their demeanor, so basically, when the police were involved, I seen two sides. Sometimes they were there to protect, but sometimes I seen them inflict a lot of pain on individuals….There was nothing positive, I've never heard nothing positive about a police officer as I grew up. I always was aware that they were the enemy, they were out to get you, and we had to prepare ourselves because when they come in our neighborhood that we had a right to do whatever we could to keep them out. And we gave them a hell of a fight.

Conclusion

In Chapter V, the participants discussed the myriad ways in which their early years in school influenced their identities and led to them to act out and move toward a life of delinquency. They shared how their ethnicity in school introduced them to systemic racism. They described the sense of social dislocation they felt after the participant's reacted to trauma at home by acting out in class, which resulted in

punishment and separation. They described how this was not helpful, certainly not the intervention they needed from adults who should have known the children were not intrinsically delinquent but merely crying out for help. The label of troublemaker by school teachers and school administrators created the occasion for the participants to begin a life of resentment toward authority which the participants believed as children was more punitive than concerned with seriously addressing the underlining issues with troubled kids aiding.

The participants also discussed crime in their neighborhoods and their relationship to safety in the community while growing up. Law enforcement patrolled these neighborhoods, so the participants each presented their perspective on the surveillance society they were raised in, how the constant harassment and labeling affected their identity and ultimately played a role in their joining their gang. In the next chapter, the participants give their opinion on the degree of gang involvement they believe was responsible for the 2011-2012 murders and assault crime wave in the city of Stockton. The participants also make recommendations on how to protect young school-aged children from being enticed to the gang lifestyle.

CHAPTER VI PARTICIPANT OBSERVATIONS ON CRIME AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In 2011 there were 58 killings in Stockton and 71 murders in 2012 (and 397 shootings). The Police and media almost uniformly blamed the majority of the murders on gang related hostilities, but when the participants were asked how many of those killings and assaults they thought were gang-related, their responses contradicted what the police and news media were claiming.

Participant Views on Degree of Gang Involvement in Stockton Violence

Louie was clear he thought the attribution to gangs was overblown and that most of the crime is due to drugs or alcohol. He stated:

> I'd say about maybe 18 of them, 18 out of the 58 were gang related you know. Yeah, out of the 58 murders maybe 18. The rest was, it could have been because of alcohol or drugs, a lot of it [the murders] have to do with drugs, I say more on drugs.

Mario also thought that the amount of murders considered gang related in Stockton in 2011 and 2012 was too high. When asked for his opinion, he replied:

> Maybe a quarter of it [the violence]. Yeah, I say about 25 percent because you know what the media, I mean the paper they blow it up too, I mean they want to sell; they got to sell papers, you know they got to sell papers, you know money, I mean that's what makes the world go round, and I believe that they

> don't care what they write, you know, it could be a lie but they want to sell papers you know. I mean they just want to wash their hands off on something so they just wash their hands on gangs and it's not even gang-related.

Mike was the one of the group of participant's who was willing to attribute a high percentage of the murders to gangs. His son was a casualty of gang violence, and his son's best gang buddy was murdered in front of him. This recent and stark nearness of gang-related hostilities and murder may understandably explain the reason his view on the number of gang-related murders in Stockton was higher than the other participant's. Mike began his answer by qualifying his angle on the issue:

> Well I personally know two of them that were gang related and one of them involved my son. Where he was shot seven times and his friend was murdered next to him. So I know two [in 2012] that were actually gang-related. I say that before I give you an answer on this because I strongly believe and it's sad to say that most of the murders and the assaults that happened in 2011 and 2012 were not random.

Like Louie, Mike elaborates on the high usage of drugs and how this has impacted Stockton communities. Mike continues:

> Because of the amount of drugs and illicit drug use that's being done in the city and the amount of guns that are being supplied by drug connections to the kids and because there are no resources in the city for the kids to spend time. At after school programs any type of programs for the youth that they are kind of forced into the environment of the street life. So I believe that when you

> have a murder that's unsolved that the detectives cannot solve a murder that the community takes it into their own hands with street justice. And you have a lot of blood shed on the streets. That a lot of murders that haven't been solved that there's a lot of animosity, a lot of retaliation, a lot of revenge within the families that have separated themselves to come against each other. And that's where you have most of these assaults and the murders. They're a lot of retaliation, revenge from a prior assault. Then you have those that are targeted through with home invasion murders. The ones who are engaging in illicit drug activity. That other individuals have got jealous of and have taken it upon themselves to go in and commit murder or an act of robbery. I don't believe that there are a lot of murders that just are random in our community, but they are deliberate, targeted victims…Over half are gang related. And a lot of it is retaliation against each other. I believe that the gangs are controlling the drugs on the streets. And it's not a turf war no more.

Mike goes on to extrapolate even further about how the lack of hope and opportunity for young people in Stockton has propelled many of them to get involved in the gang lifestyle. He states:

> It's all about money…Money, greed, and envy. So when you have one street gang that's controlling the drug activity and is collecting money in one certain neighborhood and either another set gang tries to push their way in to that money that where conflict arises or you might have an individual. One individual goes in and robs an individual or even murders one without

> knowing that he's affiliated with a gang, and you got a gang war. And it just goes back and forth….That, its. Most of that is. That's most the time that's what happens. When an individual has conflict with another individual and they call their gangs up and that's where you have multiple murders that string along.

Participant Recommendations for Minimizing Youth Joining Gangs

Family

Every participant was asked, "What do you think parents can do to minimize the potential of their kids joining the gang?" Louie put the onus squarely on the parents, who he recommended had to put a full-court press on their children, stay on top of them to monitor all their progress and even deviations from the norm. And cultivate strong compassionate communication with their school-aged kids.

> [Parents] get involved with their teachers, go to school, stay on them constantly, educate them, talk to your kids. Not only about the gangs, but about sex too, about AIDS. Just inform them all around you know, because it's hard to make it out there. If a mother don't know what her child is doing, or a father don't know what his child is doing, that child could be doing anything, getting into trouble, hanging around with the wrong peers. But if they know what they're doing, the child is likely at an early age not to…get into so much trouble. That might minimize the trouble that they get into because they know where their child is at. They know the child's teacher.

> They know if his grades are good, if there not good; if he's having fights at school; what he's wearing.

Louie elaborates on the type and color of clothing he wore when he was young and the impact dressing that way had on him. More than anything, Louie stresses the importance of listening and showering the child with affection so that the youngster feels loved. He continues:

> Back in my day I used to wear Pendleton shits, khakis, black shoes and hard brim hats. I shouldn't have been dressing like that. I should have been wearing Levi's, Converse, V-necks or something like that, you know. So colors and everything, yeah, you know your child is starting to stray when you see him wearing too much blue or too much red, what kind of headband is he wearing or does he even need a headband, that type of thing. So they really have to get involved with the child. The child has to feel loved and secure. The parent has to listen to the child, and the child also has to listen to the parent. And the child has got to feel like, 'I could go talk to this person, because this person is going to tell me the truth, rather than I'm doing good or doing bad. He [the parent] is going to try and pull me away and intervene somehow, and save me.' Nowadays, you don't get too much of that. The way things are going now, the overall children are not getting taught by parents. It's usually by TV shows and you can't identify with the shows because you don't know that person.

Mario believes that a parent is supposed to model behavior that emphasizes a child's value, so the child will have strong self-worth, which Mario thinks can inoculate a child from being attracted to the morbid culture of gangs. For example, he took his daughter on a date and showed her how he thought she should expect to be treated by a man who respects her.

> I feel the parents could take a big role, you know, tell their children that's not the way to go. The fathers could do a whole lot of things, like show them that there's a better life than that kind of [gang] life. He could take them and show them this is what happens when you end up in gangs. Take them to the county jail, and show them this is where you're going to go. Like my daughter, for instance. I took her on her first date, and I showed her how a man is supposed to treat a woman. I opened the door for her. I treated her with respect. And after everything was done I pulled out her chair for her. I put it back in. I said when we were finished, "This is how a man is supposed to treat a woman. Nothing less. If he don't treat you like this don't date him. And that's how I showed my daughter how a man supposed to treat a woman.

Mike says parents need to accept the responsibility of diligently monitoring their children's activities in school:

> I think, today, that it's a parent's responsibility to not only monitor the children's schoolwork while they are at school, popping in [to class]. Going to the PTA meetings, that's good, but also monitoring your children after school. Monitoring their friends, monitoring their Facebook, Internet, all that stuff.

> It's a hard job, but the most important thing is spending time with your children. Connecting. Building that relationship so that you have the mom and dad relationship. It's unfortunate in our community today that a lot of parents are under the influence of illicit drugs. It just breaks the communication line with the children and then they wander off into the streets and they get caught up.

Pete concludes that parents need to place more value in the family unit than in the dollars they are earning to give their children things. He lays a heavy value-laden judgment on the economic system that forces both parent's to work out of the home to survive. Pete sees this has having a tremendous bad impact on the family.

> Number one, what they could actually do is be more a part of communicating with their kids, acknowledging them. I grew up in prison. I've learned that all we want is to be acknowledged, to take an interest in us. In today's society, or even when I was growing up, my mother was always worried about money. She was always worried about not having enough to clothe us. She got food stamps, but when it came down to money to buy clothes for six kids I noticed that she always focused on that right there, so that took her time out of actually, whole heartedly getting involved with our lives. She focused more on contributing to get money so we could have the clothes for school, but I never really seen her get involved with us in our PTA conferences, or ask 'What did you do in school, Mijo,' or nothing like that. She was just too focused.

Like Louie and the other participants, Pete believes parents need to pay attention to their children in every way and get involved in their school activities. He states that although money is important, a parent should never neglect their kids no matter what.

> I understand today that because of our economics that both parents neglect their inside family home. Sure, you can provide for all their necessities but in reality that's temporary. When you neglect your children cold heartedly in every area of their life it affects that child where they would find it somewhere else, whether it's in school, or whether it's in their neighborhood or communities because they're not getting it at home. You see, that's why when you leave your home, at least for me, I was always curious about everything outside me. So the illusions that I thought were right for me to do in life always limited my understandings, guidance and direction. Because nobody thought about it all. They just thought about making money and having good shoes on our feet, know what I mean? And then drugs, when that comes into hand you can't think straight. You think that's the normal thing in life. Parents go to work, now we got all this free time, and no one's there to direct us and guide us.

School Administrators/Teachers

The participants were each asked what they thought school administrators could do to minimize the potential of school kids joining a gang. Louie preached outreach:

> The school needs to get to know their students and parents better. [Regarding] the school, get to know the parents. Get to know the individual students. Have some kind of outreach support, community projects stuff like that, you know, where you can go to a center. They [schools] could counsel you, things like that. They really need to get involved, instead of just knowing your name. If they just know your name, then they don't know where you live, they don't know who your parents are, they don't know what you like, what you dislike, what's going on in your life. You [schools] have to sit down and talk to them [parents/kids].

Mario chides the schools for emphasizing rallies for football teams but not organizing school energies to deter kids from joining gangs. Education against gangs with a direct focused effort is Mario's best advice:

> Schools, they're not doing too much right now as it is. I mean my nephews and nieces don't tell me that their having prep rally's against gangs and stuff like. There's nothing like that going on. They [schools] could have rallies for football teams, basketball teams, why can't they have it against gangs. I mean, there's a whole bunch of movies they could show them [student body and kid's at risk] about gangs, they could have once a month showing of movies about you know, what's going on with gangs. I'm sure there are documentaries about gangs you know.

Mike gave an answer that was straightforward and succinct. Basically educate the kids and monitor them to see if they are displaying unhealthy habits.

> School administrators, it's very important that they find the resources to educate the children in the school. The dangers and the signs to look for at home of any type of illicit drug use or any type of behavior that might be an unhealthy environment at home. Educate the kids…about gangs. Anything that is not healthy.

Pete offers a strong heartfelt suggestion that teachers find a few kids and make a huge difference in their lives by staying focused and relentlessly offering mentoring.

> Schools should actually take an interest on those teachers whole heartedly that are making a difference in their [student's] life's, and share that with these kids, and not just one day, but continuously because it takes that for a person to actually change in one's life. You got to have that person to grab on to, and share that it's ok to be mentored to the fullest. Because they're looking for something, looking for some type of hope, or protection or security, you know what I mean, there looking, because they're not getting it from the parents, they're not getting it from society. They're acting out because they're not being acknowledged, they're being acknowledged because there doing wrong, there labeled because there doing wrong, but c'mon, the kids wasn't born to be bad. He was just neglected, because I know that my mom didn't teach me to be an addict, or a gangbanger.

Law Enforcement

Each participant was asked what law enforcement could do to minimize the potential of kids joining a gang. Louie's relentless pessimism about police being part of the anti-gang solution is fierce:

> I have no faith in the police, I really don't. There are maybe ten guys out of a whole 100 that really could make a difference. And ten guys with hundreds of people ain't going to do it. You know, that really are gone sit down and have a talk with you the right way. The majority just want to put the handcuffs on you, put you behind bars, and have you become someone else's problem, like corrections, or juvenile hall, or CYA or something like that. I have no faith in the police. They're there when they need to take somebody to jail and that's what they're good at doing.

Mike's attitude was less on fire that Louie's, but was nonetheless intransigent about law enforcement's efficacy in helping solve the gang problem:

> Well, to tell you the truth, I mean it's hard for me, because they're already looked at as bad, I mean, they're the enemy, to me. That's the way I look at it. I mean, just to me personally when they shoot somebody…I believe when they shoot somebody they could of took a different stance if the guy didn't pull a gun out. Which, you never heard of somebody pulling a gun out on a cop.

Mike was a voice of almost extreme good faith. He sees law enforcement as a willing and competent partner in the effort to solve street gang problems in Stockton:

> Well, you know what? I can testify, I've seen firsthand my police department actually get involved with some of the programs here. And actually go out into the parks. I've met the chief of police for the first time. The mayor is even out in the community. Rolling up his sleeves, feeding the homeless. Listening to the people in the neighborhood, instead of sitting up in his office in city hall, or the police department. They are actually coming down off their chairs and going down into the parks. Where the drug-ridden- homeless people are. They're meeting and greeting them and that's very important because it connects the community with the agencies here in the city and that. That's the healing process.

Pete emphasizes that law enforcement should behave more humanly to gang members if they wish to work together to solve the gang problem. Pete feels the maltreatment of gang members by law enforcement undermines the credibility of the police, which leads to resentment from the very crowd law enforcement needs to engage with if they intend to solve the gang problem.

> Stop treating us like we're animals. We're not. We're human beings that got misled and made mistakes. And I believe mistakes eventually lead to some type of direction, not prison. You don't learn anything good in prison. You become hateful, you become bitter, you become closed-minded. You become like a rock with no feelings, no hope, and no nothing. And it becomes embedded in you where you can't see beyond them walls because that's what you are; you're trapped in your mind. Because you're just labeled as soon as

> you get there. You don't have to be a gang member but you're labeled, a Northerner, a Southerner, a White brother, a Black brother, a Blood. You're labeled, and they segregate you, but yet they want us to function, and do all these things, but yet they label us, so we have to thrive on that because now we have to recognize, "Okay, were not like everybody else. We're Northerners; they're Southerners, like we're different. In reality, we're human beings. That just got some behavior issues, or misunderstanding issues. So the police should already acknowledge that since they go to school for it, since they have public skills, social skills, or whatever, knowing that they should address our needs.

Community

The participants were each asked, "So what do you think the community can do to minimize the potential of school kids joining a gang?" All four participants emphasized the need to offer kids more than what they are currently offered in terms of places to go and feel safe and hear positive messages. They all suggested that local government should sponsor community barbecues (or similar events) that could bring people together to enhance communal participation. But keeping kids from gangs, they all agree, is doable with a gargantuan village effort. The participants did not seem entirely hopeful.

Louie believes neighbors need to know each other better, and the community should provide places for the kids to be talked to about, presumably, the dangers of drugs and gang life, and maybe opportunities that exist for them beyond the streets:

> The community, right now you know, I could say there are more churches that go out there and try to get involved. They try to lead you in a religious way, but there's really no community centers in every neighborhood. I don't think there is, where you could go to. They got libraries, and things like that. But places that people could go talk to young kids, they really don't have that. Unless there were projects that were really funded by the government, but far as them supported by themselves they don't have that. So I really believe the community is failing because they don't even really know their next door neighbor. They don't knock on doors and say, "Hey, I'm your neighbor. This is my name, if you need me for anything. If I hear anything wrong going in your house, you know, I'll call the police, or you could do the same for me. You know, if you ever need me to go to the store." None of that you know. No cooperation. Maybe in some neighborhoods, in some educated neighborhoods, well-to-do neighborhoods, yeah there is that. But not in our neighborhood, no.

Mario was the most pessimistic. He has almost all but given up as he and his wife contemplate leaving Stockton to raise their son elsewhere. Still, he believes the community has one thing in its favor if it could learn how not to shove gang members away: The gang member, he suggests, wants to quit. He just needs help. The community has resources to seduce a kid away, if they could find a way to do so:

> The community could do a whole lot. I believe as a whole once a gang member is in a gang he regrets it. I know he regrets it because I know I did. He gets hurt, you know, after he sees all the violence and all the stuff that he

> was doing. He goes, “Man, what I get myself into?” And all the time he wasted in prison, or the county jail, that man regrets it if he has a level head on his head. He wants a way out sometimes. It’s hard to get out…The community pushes him away…They [the community] could have barbeques. They can have a lot of things to show that they care, especially about youngsters because that’s where it starts. The young people, to me, if they can get the young people to get their minds on something else, Stockton would have less gangs then it does right now. There’s nothing to do in Stockton. Nothing. No jobs. No nothing. I look at this town and me and my wife, were talking about moving out already, because I don’t want my son to grow up here.

Mike was strong in his belief that gangs exist because the community does not fight back hard enough to protect its kids. Either by literally creating and fighting for safe zones for children, as well as providing places for families to congregate as a whole.

> The community can band together and take their neighborhoods back. Either with a neighborhood watch. Not being intimidated by calling 911 and creating a safe neighborhood. A gang only exists because it’s allowed to exist…A gangs not going to operate or congregate in an area where its intimidated, in fear…being worried about any kind of repercussions or violence against them for calling 911. So the community has to unite and create some type of safety zones in the community for kids. So they can get back and forth to school, and

> get to play outside, in the parks, going to community centers. Also the communities they need to create safe places where the kids can go. In my city for instance, there's no more drive-in movies. There's no more skating rinks. There's no more any kind of recreational activities for the family. That pushes the child into a position where he's vulnerable to be offered drugs or hang around with the wrong crowd and gangs. Its just, an idle mind is the devils workshop. When you ain't got nothing to do all day your minds going to wander and usually in a negative place.

Pete's response to the community component of the recommendations was quite candid, and telling. He is over 50 years old, and yet the concept of community has only recently taken hold. Fathers and Families have modeled to him what a strong community organization can do to educate a person how to honor themselves, and, in that way, honor the community.

> Well, as for me, I understand community for the first time. It took me to be 50 years old before I understood what my word, whole-heartedly, means to honor. I have a position no matter where I'm at in life today. I got plugged in that, being here at Fathers and Families. I didn't understand that my word was at value, I didn't. Because if it did I wouldn't have took myself to them places, or put poison into my veins, or leave my daughter to get raped and beat up. Here I learned a father was supposed to take care of his kids and give them security and all that. There I was, giving the homeboys all the security and all the love while she's out here getting raped, or beat up, or left to understand

> that that's what life is all about. But when I came here [Fathers and Families] they gave me an opportunity to come here just as I was, broken down, without an image. I came here as an addict, and I got honest with myself, and I said I needed some help, because I don't have nothing behind my life right now. What they're [Fathers and Families] doing, being involved with me all day long, they got elders here, they got kids here, they got teenagers here, they got adults like me here. And it feels like home, you know. You got a pool table here, you got games here, you got classes' right here. It's time, good positive timing, everything you do has value in here, because it has a sense of home, the values of home, upbringing, you're directed, you're guided, you know what I mean, you're up, your encouraged.

Conclusion

This chapter examined how Stockton police and media uniformly blamed the majority of city murders and shootings in 2011-12 on gang related hostilities. The participants were asked to give their opinions on the matter, from their street point of view. The majority of the participant's responses contradicted what the police and news media claimed, and attributed less than 30 percent of the crimes to gang violence.

Each participant was also asked, "What do you think parents can do to minimize the potential for their kids joining the gang?" Then they were asked the same questions about their recommendations for schools, communities, and law enforcement. They provided thoughtful recommendations, each participant striking a

different note on the same theme: The participants all strongly believe that gangs exist because the communities do not fight back hard enough to protect their kids. Despite the ways that their families, schools, communities and law enforcement betrayed the participants in their youth, they still firmly believe that those institutions have the necessary resources to put healthy support systems in place to seduce kids away from choosing a gang. They recommend that Stockton must devise smarter support systems for families, and train teachers and police officers to better address the children's troubled reactions to the multiple traumas that exist in their lives.

The following chapter will summarize the conclusions of this study, and make recommendations based on the research.

CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND REFLECTIONS OF THE RESEARCHER

"It's hard to fight when the fight ain't fair." (Taylor Swift, 2008)

This chapter presents relevant information to the research questions and the significance of the research for participants in the study. This chapter also provides insights and possible social remedies for families, educators, law enforcement and community entities affected by gang involvement in their schools and neighborhoods.

Summary

The purpose of the study was to examine what role social control, in the context of school and community, played in the participant's decision to join a gang in their adolescent years. The research was a critical ethnographic study of four self-disclosed Mexican American/Chicano gang members aimed at uncovering the causes and conditions that perpetuate gang membership in the city of Stockton, California.

This type of research has shone a spotlight on inequality and domination of marginalized groups by those in power. The study provided an opportunity for the gang member to challenge the status quo and to openly present the multifaceted characteristics that make up their lives. It was an opportunity for the participants to reveal themselves, their personalities, needs, and their humanity, which is often neglected by schools, law enforcement and the communities where they live.

During the first segment of the study, four self-disclosed Mexican American/Chicano gang members were chosen as participants for this research. Each participant, of their own accord, consented to allow the researcher the freedom to tape record and take notes about the dialogues that took place on two different meetings between the researcher and participants. For the purpose of confidentiality, participants chose to be identified by fictitious first names.

As stated previously, the first interview with the participants involved questions concerning their family, schooling, law enforcement and their community. Each interview was conducted with the same list of questions, asked in the same order, and organized to fit neatly into four categories.

The first set of questions probed the participant's childhood family life. After those questions were exhausted, the researcher asked the participants to describe their childhood school experiences. Next, they were asked about their relationship with law enforcement and the community where they grew up and resided in during their formative years.

Conclusions

The following findings address the major research questions. The research question is identified and followed by the findings.

What are the lived experiences of four self-disclosed Mexican American/Chicano street gang members regarding social control by law enforcement, the educational system, family, and broader community?

The family was the prime mover in the lives of the participants in terms of a nudge toward gang life. As a control dynamic, it was the family, more than schools, law enforcement or community, that was most implicated as the social force that shaped the decision-making of the participants to join a gang in their adolescence.

Louie, Mario, Mike and Pete universally admitted that it was home life that created in them an emotional vacuum, turning them to the streets to find their purpose, comfort, and more meaningful family. Unfortunately, that search, while noble and understandable, was done by children, by adolescent boys who could not know that they were jumping from the frying pan into the fire. In fact, some of the most poignant moments in the interviews occurred when these ex-gang members, now grown men in their 50s, comprehended that the decision they made as confused, desperate angry young boys to join the gang had consequences that they regret and grieve over. Especially when they regard the collateral damage their choice has had on their families now, with some of their kids now grown and in gangs, lost to the streets in various ways, certainly now raising the participant's grandchildren the way they were raised, with few tools and resources, by parents acting out of compulsion rather than strong volition.

The family was the home, but the singular culprit in the home, regarding nudging the participant's toward gang life, were the parents. Their inabilities to cope, their level of emotional intelligences, and the value they place (or do not) on academics, all this plays a huge part in the way children are raised. It was clear from the onset of the interviews that most of the parents of the participants brought large

addictions into the marriages and/or other romantic relationships in the home. So the children were exposed to parents with obvious frailties. These addictions created the occasion for much volatility in the homes, like sleep interruptions on school nights when drunken parents came home bitter and violent. There were late-night arrests, parents hauled off to jail for domestic disputes. The beatings in the home by parents, indifferent pleas for mercy, the job losses, the horrible choices one mother made to sell her body for sex at the local bars. What was clearly missing in the home was a consistent level of care, which can only be provided by parents who consistently care for themselves.

In fact, a major conclusion of this study was how closely the men's emotional confusion as young adults hewed to that of the temper of the home they were raised in, how close they came to behaving exactly like the roles modeled to them by troubled parents, who it is clear grew up and subsumed their own set of unprocessed family grief's into their parenting ethos.

Consistent care in the home was substituted with turbulence, beatings or neglect, and crooked values. The only consistency in the homes was the fact that the parents could not meet the challenges of raising children with anything resembling maturity or emotional dexterity, which was needed first for them to overcome their own personal struggles and trials (addiction, bad marriages, etc).

Divorce and separation left the young boys with heartache and the loss of a role model when the father left the home. The suffering was two-fold. The boys, whose father left them behind, lost a father who they imagine they could have done

father-son activities with. Forget for a moment whether the father was even capable of that role, which is dubious in light of the fact that they left the boy behind in the first place and did not spend much time with them. Still, this fantasy was strong and the cause of much disillusionment. The boys began to harbor notions that they were not worthy of their father's love, and that they did not have enough male texture to be compelling for their fathers. The second component that made the loss of a father tough was that the boys were now left to be raised and disciplined by a woman incapable of understanding the unique challenges of being a single mother. These boys were left behind with manipulative or brutal women, in some cases clearly sick with either addiction or mental illness.

Each parenting unit began fractured at best, and finally became crippled and broken. So the participants ended up being raised in dysfunctional homes. By mothers and fathers who were either criminal with their abuse and neglect, or immature and incapable of helping their children navigate the tough terrain of a childhood rife with unpredictability and riddled with erratic emotions. It was the observation of this researcher that the home stories of these men when they were kids felt sometimes like reading 19th century stories of children asylums. The bedlam in the participant's homes was almost cinematic. The story that comes to mind is how Pete when age seven tried to revive his stepfather during a diabetic attack. Pete thought his stepfather just needed to eat some sugar so he found sugar in the kitchen, walked over to his stepfather's by-now-corpse, and started stuffing dry sugar into the old man's gaping mouth. Afterward, seven year old Pete ran in the streets looking for his mother,

finally finding her, screaming at her for leaving him alone while she was at the bar prostituting herself.

Parents set the tone of a life. Every child's interior compass gets calibrated to that of the parent's compass. In this way, the parents of the participant's in this study set their children's compasses to look in the direction of all points grubby and vile. Parents are supposed to model steadiness, strength, pass on strategies for surviving and living well, prosperously even. All this seemed lost on the parents who demonstrated fecklessness, even recklessness, in the child rearing.

One surprising find in the study was just how similar three stories were regarding the clothing the participants wore to school and just how profoundly their difference harassed them. Again, the choice of the parents, even in the type of clothes they put on their children's back, had major impact on the developing identity of the boys. One boy's mother brought home bags of second-hand clothing. The origin of the clothing was unknown. The boy imagined the church had gathered the clothing for his deeply religious and violent mother to pass on to him. He showed up school in clothes both unfashionable and ill fitting, and in some cases obviously discards. A second participant mentioned that his clothes were hand-me-downs from his sister. He had to choose the pants and tops that could pass as boys clothing. His hermaphroditic wardrobe embarrassed him and made him feel his difference from other children more acutely. A third participant wore clothing his mother made for him. So his clothes tended to be awkward, one pant leg longer than the other. In each case, the clothing episodes were humiliating memories that the men readily called up,

despite memory lapses about other areas of their lives. This was evidence that the event had tremendous impact on the evolution of their identity, possibly even source material for their eventual out-of-control rage.

The family was clearly the main reason these men joined gangs. The home could not provide something necessary, like recognition, unconditional love, or an I-got-your-back promise. The boys needed something powerful to give their lives meaning. They needed a place to feel like they could measure what it means to become a man, to grow into the fierceness that was growing in them. The parents helped create that dearth in the boy's hearts. But another factor in the family was also at work in some cases to guide the young men toward gangs: Brothers and extended family (Yablonsky, 2001).

As we saw earlier, in one case an older brother who was a gang member got together a Fight Club in the neighborhood and the other gang members lined up their brothers to fight each other. This was to prepare the young men to protect the neighborhood, to develop a pecking order. The participant whose brother did this looks back on that Lord of the Flies (Golding, 1954) moment and sees that he was being groomed for the gang. His parents could not intervene because they were too busy with their lives to notice. So the older brother betrayed the younger brother and set him on a path to self-destruction, gave him a formal introduction into gang culture with its macho posturing and addiction to violent conflict, it martial codes, its territorial disputes, and its local paranoia (De La Cruz, 2011).

The chief result of the study was the determination that the participants, as young boys, were clearly vulnerable to the distresses and unstable home environment in which they were raised. The parents did not console the participants, did nothing to dissuade the men from joining gangs, and in some cases could not see how their parenting styles and choices were actually incentive for the men to join gangs. While school, community and law enforcement played their part in the drama of these men ultimately choosing the gang lifestyle, it was the men's dysfunctional family life, ultimately, that bears the burden of responsibility.

These participants initially viewed school as a safe haven from the turmoil and roiling violence in their homes. Yet, they all experienced racial-tinged bullying in grade school and junior high. They expected the teachers and administrators to be fair, impartial referees of these sorts of schoolyard squabbles. What they found instead were teachers who did not intervene fairly, and often times, because of the times in the mid 60s in the Central Valley, favored the Caucasian students. The participants were forced to go look for reinforcements who could balance the scales in their favor. So they found young boys equally marginalized and bullied who became aggressors and outsiders, hanging out in parks, getting high, and often times committing crimes and violence (Yablonsky, 2001). Additionally, drugs became an avenue for escape with peers that would not judge, and were equally fervent to escape the maelstrom of their lives.

The stark reality is that they became disillusioned when they realized that the school was a swindle, robbing their rich futures by not providing them the necessary

tools to succeed. One participant does not recall that any teacher spoke to him about the possibility that he could attend college. No effort was made to alter his imagination about what was possible in his life. This was a sad reality for all the participants in this study. Had school administrators and teachers been better trained in the nuances of race as applied to education, the outcome could have been mitigated in favor of the participants. This notion is supported by research that shows how if a student is “invited, guided and supported” (Noddings, 1999 p.13), then that “student will be too busy and too happy to feel the need to join a gang” (Juarez, 1996 p. 32). The teachers did not interrupt the movement of the young men toward gang life. In fact, the teacher’s inept ways of addressing the participant’s maladaptive behavior ended up creating incentive to join a gang.

Did social control influence their behaviors in the educational system and the broader community that compelled them to join a street gang?

The researcher concluded that social control did indeed played a major role in driving the participants into the gang lifestyle. This was true of all the social institutions investigated. Family, school, law enforcement, and community all played a significant role in shaping each participant’s decision to join their prospective gangs.

A startling conclusion was just how almost pre-determined it was that these participants fail in life. With the multiple traumas mentioned in the previous chapters, the participant’s proved the adage that some kids are shipwrecked even before they are aboard. As Vigil (1988) pointed out after his Pinto Project study, Mexican

American/Chicano youth suffer from multiple marginalizations, which include poverty, racism, deplorable housing, inadequate educational opportunities, unemployment and substance abuse. These participants are perfect examples of individuals who are undervalued by the mainstream culture and institutional life. In this sample, not only were the participants physically abused and emotionally neglected at home, they were all victims of racial bullying, indifference, isolation, dislocated from promising futures with college on the horizon, and utterly disillusioned by the lack of positive adult interventions in school. The participants were constantly devalued largely because educators did not understand them and the teachers arrived ill-equipped for the realities of teaching in schools located in lower socio-economic areas (Ladson–Billings, 1995).

All the participants, as children, were looking for someone they could admire. The sad truth is that there was a dearth of adults in their early lives savvy enough to develop strategies that could guide them out of their squalor and give them the tools they needed to improve the quality of their lives. Instead, the participants were treated as outsiders, which in turn fostered negative self-worth and created feelings of powerlessness and inadequacy (Campbell, 1980).

Albert Einstein said, “No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it.” And although the family was the principle factor that drove the participants into joining a gang, the punitive measures of law enforcement also contributed to their decision to involve themselves in the gang lifestyle. The principal problem with law enforcement handling of the ‘gang dilemma’ is that law

enforcement has mainly created the gang problem with their propensity for handling everything with punitive measures. Which is understandable, since it makes sense that if the only tool you give a man is a hammer; well then pretty soon everything begins to resemble a nail. The punitive approach to handling young troubled men only exacerbated the problems and traumas already existing in the lives of the participants.

Law enforcement first approached the problem with gangs with the biases of the times back in the early part of the 20th century. More recently, law enforcement, with its addiction to the punitive measure over more supple approaches to crime and deviancy, have begun to use the schools as a way to stigmatize children to ready them for eventual time in prison. This School-to-Prison pipeline has all the feel of a Grimm Fairy Tale, where a predatory witch fattens children with sweets to make them better plump before she serves them up as dinner (Figlio, 2006).

In the mid 1990s, the phrase School-to-Prison-Pipeline was coined. However, this process existed long before it was identified by term, and it is clear that the participants of the study were victims of this socio-political phenomenon back in the mid 60s to early 70s. As previously noted, the participants were subject to corporal punishment with a paddle by school administrators. Corporal punishment in the late 60s and early 70s was designed to cause the deliberate infliction of pain as retribution for bad behavior. These participants were taken out of class, sent to be punished somewhere and often times suspended. This was a useless punitive approach because there were positive alternatives and interventions that could have been applied which

would have not humiliated the child, or taken him away from the crucial in-class instructional time that the participants clearly needed more of.

As a result of punitive practices applied during the time these participants were in school, the 'delinquent' label created a disconnect that ultimately gave momentum to the cycle of violent lashing out due to their acute sense of outsider status in the class. All of these participants behaved inappropriately, but nothing was done to prevent or ameliorate the problem, thereby further generating more aggression by the participants. Not only did they act out because they felt like outsiders, they were also angry that no adults took time to explain what was causing the distress in the boys in the first place.

In SUSD, where these participants went to school during their adolescent years, it appears that not much has changed as it relates to administrative responses to inappropriate in-school behavior. A quick perusal of the data clearly demonstrates by the sheer number of suspensions, 4,578 in the 2012-13 school year, alone, that the district still favors and utilizes the old tactic of out-of-school suspensions to deal with troubled student behavior (Ed. Data, 2010-2011).

In fact, in SUSD suspensions are clearly disproportionately impacting students of color more than their Caucasian peers (Ed. Data, 2010-2011). Across California, most suspensions are for non-violent and non-drug offenses. Most kids are given out-of-school suspensions for acts characterized as "willful defiance" (Martinez, Garcia, & Zimmer, June 28, 2012).

These practices mean that schools are sending students out of the school where they are losing both valuable in-class instructions, as well as opening them up to getting involved in activities on the street. Martinez, Garcia, and Zimmer (June 28, 2012) summed up the school suspension problem eruditely:

> Schools with high suspension rates tend to be inequitably resourced, have ineffective school governance, high student-teacher ratios, low academic performance data, administrative indifference to school climate, and/or reactive disciplinary programs…suspensions consistently result in poor outcomes for students…students who had been suspended even once were five times more likely to drop out and eleven times more likely to become entrenched in the criminal justice system…students who are suspended are often students who are least likely to have supervision at home resulting in unsupervised suspensions and a much higher likelihood of injurious and/or delinquent behavior…suspensions do not regularly result in improved behavior or socialization and can often exacerbate behavioral problems.

The American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force (2008) also weighed in with their findings on the inefficacy of school suspensions:

> There is little evidence that suspensions and expulsions benefit students or their communities, and that disciplinary exclusion policies can have harmful health impacts such as increasing student shame, alienation and rejection, as well as fracturing healthy adult bonds, thereby exacerbating negative mental health outcomes for young people.

This negative affect is clearly visible in the young lives of the participants when they all claimed that they felt shamed, excluded and alienated from the classmates by the punitive practices exercised by their teachers and school administrators.

Additionally, the American Academy of Pediatrics (2003) supported the argument that suspensions are a futile and detrimental exercise:

> Children most likely to be suspended or expelled are those most in need of adult supervision and professional help because they have witnessed or experienced violence/domestic violence and are likely to be experiencing major home life stressors and depression that may predispose them to antisocial behavior and even suicidal ideation.

Some school districts have recognized that punitive approaches to willful defiance and other behavioral infractions by students are ineffectual and so they have turned toward more preventive measures to foster a stronger school community. The Los Angeles School District is one example:

> An increasing number of highly effective, free or low cost evidenced-based alternatives to harsh disciplinary policies and practices are available for schools…The Los Angeles School District passed the Discipline Foundation Policy in 2005, thereby becoming a national leader through the District-wide adoption of the proven, evidenced based whole-school alternative discipline strategy, positive behavior intervention and supports…When whole-school strategies, like positive behavior intervention and supports, restorative justice,

and social emotional learning are fully implemented, struggling students are held accountable, the entire school population succeeds, suspension rates decrease, school attendance improves, and academic achievement rates increase. Generally whole-school alternatives result in a more positive school climate for students, administrators, and teachers (Martinez, Garcia, & Zimmer, June 28, 2012).

What is clear is that the punitive approach exacerbates the problem of gangs by setting up some kids for failure in school, making them more vulnerable to having detrimental interactions with truant and police officers. This early contact with law enforcement sets up the students to begin to imagine participating in an antagonistic relationship with the law enforcement, rather than a complimentary one (Rios, 2011).

This critical ethnographic study of four self-disclosed Mexican American/Chicano gang members clearly demonstrates that school was a place where the men felt alienated as boys, which increased their frustration and led to a Domino Effect. First, they misbehaved and acted out. Second, they got the attention of teacher and school administrators. Third, the misbehavior allowed the school to choose to quarantine the refractory boys. Fourth, this school punishment prompted the deviant boy to further act out in the schoolyard or after school. Fifth, the culmination of all these factors eventually led to police interventions. Given that the teachers and school administrators were not trained to utilize preventive measures to ameliorate these sorts of behavior issues, the school the only course of action available to them: to punish a troubled kid by quarantining a student from the other students, or simply

suspending them from school all together. Rather than deal creatively with the source of the participant's inner qualms—it was as if the school's action to suspend them was an invisible gun going off and the race to the front door of the local jail was on. The punitive approach to dealing with refractory children is clearly a failing policy (Martinez, Garcia, & Zimmer, June 28, 2012).

What do the participants believe can be done to ameliorate the violence in their communities?

All of the participants believed that in order to lower violence in their communities, families needed to do a much better job of protecting their kids. Moreover, the participants suggested that in violence ridden areas parents needed to monitor their children and be aware of the level of morbidity they are being exposed in order to provide the proper tools necessary to process the trauma. The participants also believed that parents need to take time out of their day to communicate with their children to help reduce the probability that their children becoming victims of violence, or become seduced into the gang lifestyle.

The participants all believed school administrators could minimize the potential of school kids joining a gang with directed efforts to educate students about the dangers of gang life. They believed that schools should organize school energies to deter kids from joining gangs even at the expense of a few less football rallies in the gym. The participants also felt a basic tactic of teachers could be to find a few kids and make a huge difference in their lives by staying focused, monitoring them for unhealthy emotional tendencies, and relentlessly offering mentoring.

While the participants varied in their confidence in law enforcement's efficacy in helping solve the gang problem, they all agreed that law enforcement should behave more humanely to gang members if they wish to work together to solve the gang problem. Past maltreatment of gang members by law enforcement undermines the credibility of the police, which leads to resentment from the very crowd law enforcement needs to engage with if they intend to solve the gang problem.

The participants are strong in their belief that gangs exist because the community does not fight back hard enough to protect its kids. The participants recommend that the community create and fight for safe zones for children, as well as providing places for families to congregate as a whole. The participants all agree that community has one thing in its favor if it could learn how not to shove gang members away: The gang member, they suggest, wants to quit. He just needs help. The community has resources to seduce a kid away, if they could find a way to do so. The community should provide places for the kids to be talked to about, presumably, the dangers of drugs and gang life, and maybe opportunities that exist for them beyond the streets. Every participant emphasized the need to offer kids more than what they are currently offered in terms of places to go and feel safe and hear positive messages.

It is important to note that some of the data in the findings section raised new questions about social control, rather than neatly answer this researcher's questions. For posterity sake, this researcher has chronicled these findings to add to the literature so that future scholars can pursue this compelling and provocative phenomenon.

The major finding outside of my research questions was a challenge to the effectiveness of the Critical Ethnographic model. The reason the research was difficult in places had to do with the expectation that the participants are always best qualified to offer understanding about their story. Their point of view has primacy. The problem with the interviews in this study was that these participants could not always offer a cohesive narrative, since their point of view periodically switched, or contradicted itself. Some of the story dislocations occurred because of residual effects of the various traumas in their lives. In fact, this particular age-group of gang members were chosen specifically because this researcher believed that since these individuals had lived their lives and had gone through their process of life change then they would be able to provide keen insight into the habits and patterns of thought that led them to choose the gang lifestyle when they were younger.

What was discovered instead was a group of men enthusiastic to continue their change, but unfortunately mired in narrative crisis. They had endured so much physical and grave emotional trauma, compounded by years of substance abuse, hard living on the streets, incarceration, and even in one case, brain damage, that their ability to communicate a coherent narrative was drastically impeded.

As mentioned earlier, the lived experiences as told by the participants were often incongruent and cloaked with many inconsistencies and contradictions. As a researcher, it was crucial to believe that listening to the revelations of firsthand lived experiences by the four participants would provide the clearest, most accurate accounting of what happened in the participant's youth and adult lives. It was

expected that since the participants were the ones who had lived through what they had survived, they would know better than anyone else the facts and meaning of the events that had occurred throughout their lives.

However, the findings proved more paradoxical. On one hand, the participants did have cogent access to information about their lived experiences. For example, they could provide the location where they served their prison terms, detail certain crimes they had committed throughout their lives and supply facts that could be substantiated by court transcripts. Truth telling on the other hand became more problematic when they were required to demonstrate a higher degree of self-awareness, as in the expression and interpretation of their tricky home life data, especially around trauma.

Given that all four participants suffered traumatic experiences throughout their lives, it is easy to see how their inability to sometimes not notice contradictions to their responses or even intentionally avoid cues that distract from a specific topic connected to a particular trauma they might have endured during their childhood. This intentional avoidance of cues and distraction from a hurtful subject are often symptoms associated with PTSD (Amaya-Jackson, 1998; Perry & Azad, 1999). The challenge for this researcher was to stay focused on getting the questions answered without taking the participant's on a psychological exploration of the deeper meanings of their lives. While it was important to have them answer questions and even clarify a few points of confusion, this researcher worked hard not to help them plumb their depths and cope with the paradoxes of their existences in order for

them to live more coherent daily lives. This was a challenge because the participants were clearly providing stories that could use some help. Dense stories that if unpacked well could help the participant's find more illumination about why they behaved the way they did, and maybe even release the participant's from too much shame and self-castigation. True and coherent stories about our identities are best suited for offering us an occasion for self-understanding and self-forgiveness.

However, while it was expected that the participants would enjoy some illumination during the interview process, that was always seen as secondary benefit, bonus even. The primary objective of the study was to elicit participant responses that could answer the research questions of the impact social control had on their decision to join the gang.

Recommendations

Further Research

This study was successful in generating rich data from the participants by using a critical ethnographic study model. There are a number of possibilities for further research that could benefit the field. Follow-up studies should consider assessing the effectiveness of this study process when applied to groups of individuals from other gangs and ethnicities. These groups should include African American, Asian, Central American, and Russian gang members. It is important that the same methodology and questions be used in future studies in order to insure the reliability of this research.

Further research should be conducted with incarcerated individuals in order to demonstrate the effectiveness of the dialogical approach as it applies to ameliorating gang involvement. Given that this country spends so much tax revenue on incarceration and public safety, it would seem logical to utilize research that would generate practical preventive alternatives other than incarceration. For example, had there been mechanisms in place to protect the participants of this study from the abuses they suffered in adolescence, they might not have had to endure all the degradation they encountered throughout their lives had someone intervened when they were young boys. Programs that aid gang members to disassociate themselves from the gang are greatly needed. Moreover, these programs could prove less costly and possibly decrease the number of incarcerated people in our correctional system.

It is important that this research study and any follow-up studies be made available to schools, law enforcement and institutions that interact with youth where gangs thrive. It is important so that effective county-wide gang prevention efforts and programs can be developed, which will educate families, teachers, policeman, and community members. It is also important to synchronize funding resources that will promote outreach programs for people who otherwise would never be noticed unless they are being arrested. Given the multitude of problems and the complexities associated with these groups, the voice of the gang member in this study screams out and provides insight that can guide us in the development of effective gang interruption.

Gang Intervention Efforts

The final word on the study, the take-away lesson, is that no child is born bad and there are no throwaway kids. Many environmental factors shape their lives and choices. It is clear that dysfunctional families and neighborhoods produce children who later become statistics in crime reports. All gang members were once an occasion where smart emotionally healthy adults with thoughtful caring policies in school, and in law enforcement, could have intervened and altered the trajectory of their lives. We need to be a more intelligent society that seeks to do a better job helping families grow stronger. There is an outcry that too many resources are already spent in troubled communities. The counter-argument is that resources are going to be used in the lives of these troubled folks eventually through lengthy incarcerations and mental health costs.

Since family seems to be the crux of the problem for creating young people more easily seduced by street gangs, the first solution for addressing the gang problem is to address the home environment of families at risk of losing a kid to the street gang. Research shows that the earlier we as a society intervene the more likely that kid will not end up in our juvenile justice system. Social workers should be provided to help the parents join and take courses on parenting, mental health of a child, and anger management, for starters.

The school is the primary public place where troubled kids show up with their issues made evident in the way they play and act in the classroom. Teachers already know how to identify the troubled child or children in class. Therefore, the teacher

should notify early the administration which children need attention, not for punishment, but for creative solutions. The schools should use out-of-school suspensions as a last resort only, for the most egregious violence where law enforcement must become involved, not for mere “willful defiance.”

The failure of a child in school should be seen as the failure of the creativity of school administrators. The school has as much responsibility for the kids acting out in class as they do for the well-behaved kids. Therefore, school districts should focus more on the development of teachers who can come into these classes and understand the community in which they work. This should be done in a more holistic fashion, more than simple workshops to enhance their knowledge base.

The parents need to be implicated in the success of the student. The school administrators should work closely with the parents to give them tools to help the child at home. Local resources should be afforded families where the parents are not skilled at raising children. The community should take the “all boats rise” approach to helping local families impaired by dysfunctional parents. Children should be taken from the home only for domestic abuse. Less than that the community needs to jump in and reenergize the home with resources, parenting training and neighborly care.

Reflections of the Researcher

Before I started graduate school, I asked myself what I planned to accomplish besides obtaining a doctoral degree. It wasn’t until I began to read about the escalating violence in Stockton and how it was supposedly connected to gangs that I decided to conduct a study that would use the gang member’s voice in an attempt to

shed light on the many misconceptions by society surrounding gang members and their behaviors. Given that I was involved in gangs for much of my adolescence and early adulthood, I believed the possibility existed that the media's interpretation of the increase of violence in Stockton could very well be inaccurate. As I delved deeper into the gang phenomenon with the participants of this study, and began to know these men on an intimate level, I saw myself in them and I felt honored that they would share with me their most private moments of being frightened children and their shame for growing up to become brutal victimizers.

Listening to them made me realize just how fortunate I am to have overcome many of the obstacles, which I had created, as a result of the treatment I suffered throughout much of my childhood and early adulthood. Like the participants, the pressure on my moral poise led me to become a victimizer of myself and everyone around me. On the other hand, my solidarity with their stories saddened me, to see that these men had been so damaged that sometimes they could not even tell their story coherently.

There were times during the interviews where they would get lost in their narrative, and I struggled with assisting them to get back on track. It was difficult for me to keep my researcher 'hat' on and not let the 'homeboy-shot caller' come out of me. I identified with the participant's childhood experiences with racism in school and with the manner in which each individual lashed out at the injustice they were experiencing back then. I remembered how I had once overheard a teacher tell another teacher that she believed Mexican students were lazy for not wanting to learn.

I became so incensed that I targeted the first White kid who I believed deserved to get beat simply because he was White and privileged.

I connected with Pete's confusion about having to sit alone in a separate classroom, segregated from everyone else because he was acting out. I recalled how my teacher would make me sit at the back of the classroom and position my desk to face the opposite wall when I was in elementary school. This punitive tactic made me feel as though I was a monster. I vividly remember wanting to cry out because I didn't understand why I was being treated so badly. I held in my emotions because I had been taught by my Mama that 'Men Didn't Cry.' The conversations with these men concerning their life experiences brought back painful memories that seem to be the norm for many Mexican American/Chicano youth both past and present.

Given that these men knew that I had been caught in the criminal system for many years and had suffered from heroin addiction for approximately 30 years of my life, it was easy for them to share their pain with me. In other words, they knew, that I knew, that they knew too. I was able to look into their eyes and see their pain as I am sure they could see mine as well. The only difference between these men and I was that I somehow was able to dig deep into the pit of my soul and unravel much of the damage that was inflicted on me by unresponsive, or latent racist, teachers. The underlying racist attitude of some teachers, coupled with their inadequate training, caused me great psychological harm. In fact, like the participants, it wasn't until I began the process of self-evaluation (while earning my Masters in Social Work) that I was able to clearly see that I had been a victim. Unlike the participants, education has

been, ironically, the key to helping me understand that I have value. The lower-education system once alienated me. Today, higher education was the engine for my self-renewal. I have worked diligently on myself for the past eighteen years, and now I understand that no one can ever degrade or dehumanize me ever again unless I let them.

There is no doubt that there are individuals who should be in prison, never to be released into mainstream society again. However, there is much that can be done before a person gets to the point where they are unsalvageable. The problem with the current system, however, is that it is so out of balance that our judicial system hands out life sentences for non-violent offenses without regard for the unintended consequences. As previously noted, the lock 'em up mentality by school administrators starts in the classroom where the same lack of gradation in punitive response to offensive behavior exists.

Sadly, the school system has not changed much from the 60s to today. In fact, we as a society continue to address the gang phenomenon in the same outdated and way that failed us before because we failed to account for unintended consequences. The only difference between then and now is that we have formally coined the terms School-to-Prison-Pipeline and Zero-Tolerance that clearly identify the marginalization of kids of color in our school systems, but we have done little to nothing at all to stop the punitive practices that have been used for decades to ensure kids of color fail at every turn.

I am sure there will be skeptics who will argue that I made it, therefore, kids of color do have the same opportunity as White kids. But, I am convinced that most White students did not have to endure the misery and squalor that I had to overcome in order to destroy the notion seared into my mind by teachers, law enforcement, and my community that I would never amount to anything except being a criminal.

Because I lived on the side of taboo for much of my life and have triumphed over many of the barriers society has placed in my path, I have a much different perspective on gangs than most people. It is because of my injurious experiences with teachers, law enforcement, and community during my adolescence that I work so diligently to educate people on the importance of documenting gang members accurately. I try to explain to school administrators, law enforcement officials and community leaders that documenting someone a gang member erroneously can have an immense negative impact on their lives.

I have known young men of color who were suspended or expelled from school, arrested and ultimately sent to prison with long sentences as a result of being labeled a 'gang member.' Sadly, some of those young men were not gang members. These young men were labeled gang members and sentenced to prison due in large part because of how they looked, where they lived, and their association to people whom they may have known for much of their lives.

Our government has implemented many laws that have impacted and continue to affect the lives of young men of color, but our legislators have seldom, if ever, asked former gang members to assist them in the development of these laws.

Certainly, legislators do not consult with ex-gang members to better understand the populations of color that the gang policies will most adversely affect. There are many young men who were once gang members who have changed their manner of living and are now productive members of their communities, but society continues to deny them access to the intellectual common space where they can exchange their ideas and provide their input into the judicial development of these laws. More often, their experience are devalued every step of the way and their voice is muted in a moment when their insights could help ameliorate this humongous problem. Until society begins to utilize their knowledge in the development of laws, school policies, and programs that will help reduce gang crimes and gang involvement, we will continue to suspend and expel students, and ultimately set them up to fail, perpetuating the mass disproportionate incarceration of young men of color.

This study supports the idea that devoting our energies in the early stages of a troubled child's life is better than spending more resources on that same life when they grow up and inflict pain on others and themselves. Better to help a struggling family to provide a kid love and support to keep them from joining a gang, rather than to watch that unlicked cub grow to grizzly size and eventually terrorize the neighborhood. In closing, the adage "You can pay me now, or you can pay me later" is clearly society's choice. It is the opinion of this researcher that preventive measures are always a more mature and sustainable approach to countering social ills.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT

Dear Participant:

You are invited to participate in a research study that will fulfill requirements for a Doctorate in Educational Leadership at CSU Stanislaus. This research seeks to increase understanding concerning three areas: 1) what role do gang members play in the increase of violence in Stockton, 2) how does the violence affect gang members, and 3) what can schools and communities do to ameliorate the violence. By volunteering, you will take part in three one hour face-to-face dialogues, lasting approximately an hour each. Discussions will be audio-recorded and transcribed. If you prefer, the researcher can take hand-written notes.

Some questions may remind you of painful experiences from your past. If at any time during the dialogue you feel uncomfortable with the questions, you can stop the dialogue, and/or withdraw from this study without any penalty. It is also possible that you will not benefit directly from this study, however, others may benefit from the information you provide about the long-term effects of gang involvement. In addition, your participation may help professionals provide better services to individuals who are gang members. The information collected will be kept locked and in a secure location. After June 2015 all confidential information gathered from participants will be destroyed to protect participants from inappropriate disclosure. To protect privacy and confidentiality only pseudonyms will be used in this dissertation; no participants' names or identifying information will be disclosed.

There is no cost to you beyond the time and effort required to complete the procedure described above. In appreciation for your participation, you will be compensated with a $10 gift card to IN-N-OUT Burger at our first meeting. The gift card is yours to keep whether you complete or withdraw from the study. Your participation is totally voluntary.

If you agree to participate, please sign below. Questions concerning this research can be directed to: Jesse De La Cruz, (209) 423-4794 or jdelacruz5@csustan.edu or my faculty sponsor, Dr. Nancy Jean Smith at (209) 607-4635. If you have any questions regarding your rights and participation as a research subject, please contact the University Campus Compliance Officer by phone (209) 667-3006 or email IRBAdmin@csustan.edu.

Sincerely,

Jesse De La Cruz
Doctoral Candidate
Ed.D. Educational Leadership Program

Participant Signature: ___________________________________Date: ___________

APPENDIX B LETTER

OF SUPPORT

338 East Market Street
Stockton, CA 95202
Ph: (209)941-0701

Dear UIRB Committee Members;
We of Fathers and Families of San Joaquin are enthusiastic about working with Mr. Jesse De La Cruz on his dissertation entitled: "Mexican American/Chicano Gang Members Voice on Social Control in the Context of School and Community: A Critical Ethnographic Study in Stockton, California." I, Sammy Nunez, Executive Director of Fathers and Families of San Joaquin have read the letter of consent which will be provided to our clients in the event that they wish to participate in this study and believe that Mr. De La Cruz has taken every precaution to ensure our clients are safe guarded at all times. I also believe Mr. De La Cruz's research is vital to Stockton schools and community and that it will offer the participant an opportunity to reflect on their lives and possibly provide solutions to the huge gang problem in this city.
We are pleased at having the opportunity in assisting Mr. De La Cruz with the identification of four Mexican American self-disclosed gang members currently in our program. The participants that will be chosen by Mr. De La Cruz and myself will have extensive criminal records and poor academic histories. We are also delighted to offer Mr. De La Cruz our site as a place to host his interviews. We understand he will be engaging with the participants both individually and possibly in a small group to conduct the interviews, which will then be transcribed. We are also aware that each participant will be referred to by a pseudonym of their choice to ensure their anonymity and confidentiality. We also understand that each dialogue will be transcribed and that each participant will receive a copy of the transcribed dialogue along with the draft write up of findings.
Once again, we are excited and look forward to working with Mr. De La Cruz and reading his final dissertation. We believe it will be important work for our community and the field of literature at large. Please contact us if there are any questions or concerns.
Most sincerely,

Sammy Nunez
Executive Director
Fathers & Families of San Joaquin
P.O. Box 30674
Stockton, CA 95213