

## ABSTRACT

ROBERTSON, HEATHER JEAN. Youth Gangs: Lived Experiences in an Emergent Area. (Under the direction of Edwin R. Gerler).

This qualitative research study sought to gain an understanding of youth gang members who live in area where gangs are beginning to emerge. Four gang involved youth males, ages 18-23, two black and two Latino, were interviewed, made a neighborhood map, and were part of a photovoice project. The four main goals this study hoped to discover were who the most influential people were in the youth's life and if they had anything to do with the youth becoming gang involved; if where the youth lived had anything to do with them becoming gang involved; how these youth were different than other gang involved youth who do not seek intervention programs; and finally what part of the intervention program they are involved in is helping them the most and what do they think would help other gang involved youth most in the future.

This research study utilized a phenomenological approach to accomplish its research goals. This study utilized the coding and thematic analysis method presented in Creswell (2007). Data analysis using the triangulation process combined the interview, map and photography data to discover the following themes: education; high risk lifestyle; language and language issues; life goals and dreams; living environment; monetary influences; negative issues, emotional repercussions, and coping mechanisms; positive human influences; pride and socially acceptable behaviors; role of women; and role of structured program intervention.

Youth Gangs: Lived Experiences in an Emergent Area

by  
Heather Jean Robertson

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty of  
North Carolina State University  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

Counselor Education

Raleigh, North Carolina

2008

APPROVED BY:

---

Chair of Advisory Committee  
Dr. Edwin R. Gerler

---

Dr. Stanley B. Baker

---

Dr. Sylvia Nassar-McMillan

---

Dr. Pamela Martin

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to three very special people in my life. First and foremost, to my parents, Russell and Judy Robertson. They believed in me from day one, and never gave up on me. Even during statistics. That says it all!

And in memoriam to my Grandfather, Frederick H. Johnson. While he didn't make it to see me graduate with my PhD, I know I am making him proud up there in Heaven.

## BIOGRAPHY

Heather Jean Robertson was born in Michigan. She and her family moved to Connecticut when Heather was in the first grade. Heather attributes her academic success in life to the well-rounded education she received in the Tolland Public School System, and to her parents who encouraged education as a number one priority in life.

Heather graduated from Tolland High School and headed to Keene State College in Keene, NH for her Bachelor's degree. Heather lived abroad during the fall semester of her junior year in Seville, Spain. She was afforded the opportunity to study with a full time academic schedule taught completely in Spanish at the Semester in Spain program, as well as the opportunity to travel. Some of the places Heather visited were Madrid, Barcelona, and Grenada in Spain; the Algarve Coast, Lisbon and Fatima in Portugal; Paris and Avignon in France; and Geneva, Switzerland. This part of Heather's life encouraged an appreciation of multiculturalism, and a love for the Spanish language, its culture, and its people.

During Heather's Keene State College experience she worked for two summers with the freshman orientation program; first as an orientation staff member and then as the student orientation program director. During her senior year at KSC, Heather was president of her sorority, and also team taught an intermediate Spanish II class with her professor and mentor, Dr. Donald Fleming. Heather also completed a high school teaching internship in North Petersborough, NH.

Heather graduated from Keene State College in 1992 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Spanish and a teaching certificate. She moved to North Carolina soon after graduation and accepted a high school Spanish teacher position. She taught for one year in high school, took a year off from teaching, and moved to Topsail Island, NC. Heather worked briefly for a weight loss company in Wilmington during that year off from teaching, and consistently held a top sales position for the national company.

Heather then moved to beautiful Emerald Isle, NC to work at a nearby elementary school teaching Spanish classes to children in grades kindergarten through fourth grade. Heather taught elementary school Spanish classes for 2 years, and was then accepted to East Carolina University to work on her Master's degree in counselor education. Heather completed her Master's degree in one year, while working as a graduate assistant in both teacher education and counselor education departments at ECU. Before she graduated, Heather accepted a job as an elementary school counselor at W. J. Gurganus Elementary School in Havelock, NC. She worked at Gurganus Elementary for six years under Mr. Pat Williams as principal. Heather learned everything important about being a respected school professional from her principal Pat Williams. He is like a second father to her, and even though Heather does not work for Pat now, she and Pat continue to stay in touch and he continues to inspire and encourage Heather both personally and professionally.

In the spring of 2003, Heather was accepted into the doctorate program at North Carolina State University in Raleigh, NC in the counselor education program. Heather moved to Raleigh in the fall of 2003 and began her doctorate classes while working full

time for Wake County Schools at Brentwood Elementary School as the school counselor. Heather also successfully completed her national board certification for school counselors during that school year.

During her second year in the doctorate program, Heather switched schools and job positions in the Wake County School System. She accepted the position of a student assistance program counselor at Cary High School, and remained there for two years while attending NCSU full time. Heather also began working on and completed her national certified counselor and licensed professional counselor licenses during her second and third year in the doctorate program at NCSU.

During the next three years, Heather moved around quite a bit, and had the opportunity to gain some valuable experience to help her with her future dream job of owning her own private practice specializing in treating troubled adolescents and children, and sexual abuse and assault survivors. Heather lived in Beaufort, NC; Hatteras Island, NC; Raleigh, NC; and finally moved back to Morehead City, NC-which she considers home. Heather worked as an adolescent counselor/advocate for the Carteret County Rape Crisis Center while she worked on her negotiated exam and her dissertation proposal, then in Wake County Schools as a transition counselor, then at New Bern High School as the drop out prevention counselor, and she currently works as the school counselor at Bridges Alternative School in Morehead City, NC.

Heather's professional experiences and services have included working with at-risk children, adolescents and their parents. Heather specializes in working with gang

involved youth, and has presented at professional conferences and smaller local settings to educate communities about the issue of gang involved youth and what communities can do to help these youth move away from gangs to more positive lifestyles. Heather is a member of the American Counseling Association.

Heather intends to complete 20 years in the NC public school system, and as soon as she completes her doctorate, she will pursue opening her own private practice counseling center specializing in at-risk children, adolescents, and sexual abuse and assault survivors. Heather also intends to write several books, including some children's books and perhaps one about her unique experience in obtaining her doctorate degree with as much a humorous perspective as possibly allowed. Her final dream will be to kick back, relax, and chill out on her new boat to take her out to Shackleford Island entitled, "Liquid Therapy". With everything she's been through to get this degree, she certainly deserves a little liquid therapy-the salty ocean water and perhaps a nice cold drink.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I will be forever grateful to my parents for emotionally and financially supporting me throughout this entire graduate school process. They were never further than a phone call away when I needed them. And I sure did need them! A lot! Thank you both for all your hugs and kisses and support. I would never have been able to get through this degree without your help and your love. I know you have always been so proud of me.

Thank you to my brother Mark, his wife Heather and her family, and my niece and nephews. You always acted interested in my education, and never seemed to tire of hearing about Heather and her doctorate degree.

Thank you Grandma and Grandpa Johnson, who provided a little financial support over the summer and every Christmas, and for always talking about how proud you were to have a granddaughter who was pursuing her doctorate degree.

Thank you to my two very best girlfriends, Michelle and Susan. You have loved me through the entire six years of my degree. We have laughed and cried together over the years, but mostly we have just had fun and kept each other sane. I treasure every memory, and the many more we have coming! I am so blessed to have the two of you in my life. Thank you Laura, for continuing to make me a better and more creative counselor every year, and for always being my partner in furthering ourselves professionally. Together we accomplished our master's degree, our NBCT, NCC and our LPC! I cherish your friendship. Thank you to my classmates at NCSU-Jeannie, Millie,



Brett, Ken, Arlene, Song, Heloisa, Laura, Diane, Jane, Lori Ann, Latoria, Cassandra, and anyone else I may have forgotten. I learned so many wonderful things about each of you and from each of you. You will always hold a special place in my heart. Heloisa-thanks for helping me with all the final dissertation prep and graduate school requirements. I don't know what I would have done without you!!!

Thank you to the little and quaint Beaufort library in downtown Beaufort for providing me with a quiet and supportive environment. The staff was so wonderful and helpful. Oh, when I think back to all the hours I spent there...Thanks to the Beaufort Cru Wine Bar and Coffee shop. I wouldn't have passed my statistics class without the help of Wanda-my research assistant ☺

Thank you to all of the wonderful teachers and professors I have had in my life. Thank you to Mr. Vostinak, my middle school science teacher. Thank you to Mr. Leeds, my creative writing teacher in high school. Thank you to Dr. Donald Fleming, my friend, advisor and mentor at Keene State College. Thank you to Dr. Gerler, my wonderfully patient advisor at NCSU. I truly appreciate all your advice and support over the years. Your kind words helped me through some very challenging times. Thank you Dr. Nassar-McMillan for being such a wonderful and strong feminist woman. I thank you for all your supportive talks over the years. You helped me grow as a professional and I am grateful for that. Thank you to Dr. Martin, for advocating for your students and appreciating each one of us for our individual ideas and talents, and for being a strong advocate for qualitative research. I wouldn't be where I am today without your support.

And to Dr. Baker, thank you for just being who you are. You have such a special soul. I cherish every word and piece of advice you have ever given me. Remember my IEP for Research class? Thank you to Dr. Ware at Chapel Hill, who supercharged my self esteem about mathematics and statistics. Remember mountain people may be wise, but I'm at the beach and I'm happy! Thank you to Dr. Sutton, who also inspired me and befriended me. You were such a gifted teacher in the classroom. You challenged me in ways no other professor ever had before. Thank you to Dr. Ting for always making sure we knew about any professional opportunity that came available to us. And for our field trip to the coffee shop! Thank you to all my ECU professors, Dr. Joseph Ciechalski, Dr. James Pinkney, Dr. Jack Schmidt, and Dr. Florence Weaver. You have all inspired me to become the confident professional counselor I am today. I look forward to more professional presentations with you all, and in working more with you all in the future.

Thank you to all of my bosses and co-workers during my years in this program. My bosses at Brentwood Elementary School, Myrna and Carrie; at Cary High, Dr. Coley, Bonnie, and Rachelle, Michael, Natalie, Stuart, Magda, Julia, Erin, Madeline and Donna; at the Rape Crisis Center, Bryan and Jane; and in the Wake County Public School administration office: Henrietta and all the Transition Counselors, Eric, Portia, Mary Ellen, Rick, and my friends and co-workers at Longview School; Stuart, Lee, and all the counselors at New Bern High School-CA, Renea, Lisa, and Linda. You all made my pathway to getting this degree much more pleasant. I have been so blessed with all the supportive and wonderful people in my life. Thanks again to each and every one of you.

Thank you to Haven House in Raleigh, NC for allowing me to perform research at the Second Round program. You allowed me to research a population I might not have been able to reach any other way. A special thanks to Alan and Matt, and the 4 participants.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1 – YOUTH GANGS: LIVED EXPERIENCES IN AN EMERGENT AREA .....	1
Rationale for Study .....	2
Problem Statement .....	4
Purpose of the Study .....	5
Research Questions .....	6
Need for the Study .....	7
Definition of Terms.....	8
Organization of Chapters .....	10
CHAPTER 2 – REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND THEORIES.....	12
History of Youth Gangs in the United States.....	14
Demographic Characteristics .....	15
Youth Gang Proliferation.....	16
Contemporary Youth Gangs .....	19
Modern Day Gang Characteristics.....	19
Public Stereotypes and Scientific Findings.....	20
Criminal Behavior in Youth Gangs .....	21
Combative Strategies Against Youth Gangs.....	23
Youth Gang Prevention.....	24
Youth Gang Intervention .....	24
Youth Gang Suppression .....	25
Related Theories and Model .....	25
Ecological Systems Theory.....	26
View of Human Nature and Development.....	28
Postulates, Assumptions and Hypothetical Constructs .....	29
Relevancy to Youth Gangs .....	31
Critique of Ecological Systems.....	31
Related Empirical Research on Ecological Systems Theory .....	33
Ecological Systems theory: Synthesis in Regards to Youth Gangs .....	39
Social Disorganization Theory .....	40
View of Human Nature and Development.....	40
Postulates, Assumptions and Hypothetical Constructs .....	43
Relevancy to Youth Gangs .....	44
Critique of Social Disorganization Theory .....	44

Related Empirical Research on Social Disorganization Theory.....	45
Synthesis in Regards to Youth Gangs.....	50
OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Prevention and Intervention Model.....	50
Five Strategies of the OJJDP Model.....	51
Critique of the OJJDP Model.....	52
Related Empirical Research on OJJDP Model.....	53
OJJDP Gang Prevention and Intervention Model: Synthesis in Regards to Youth Gangs.....	58
Gaps in the Literature and Future Research Needs.....	58
CHAPTER 3 – METHOD .....	60
Research Design.....	62
Participants.....	64
Researcher as the Interviewer .....	65
Instrumentation .....	65
Semi-Structured Interview .....	65
Neighborhood Map .....	66
Photovoice.....	66
Procedure .....	67
Data Analysis .....	67
Coding and Themes .....	68
Validity .....	68
Summary .....	69
CHAPTER 4- RESULTS.....	70
Participant Biographies.....	70
Common Themes .....	79
Research Question One Findings.....	81
Research Question Two Findings .....	89
Research Question Three Findings .....	92
Research Question Four Findings.....	95
Triangulation.....	99
Summary .....	100
CHAPTER 5- DISCUSSION .....	102
Summary of Results .....	104
Question One .....	104
Question Two.....	106
Question Three.....	106

Question Four.....	107
Integration of Findings with Existing Literature .....	108
Comparing to Existing Literature .....	108
Relation to Ecological Systems Theory and Social Disorganization Theory .....	113
Relation to the OJJDP Gang Prevention and Intervention Model ....	115
Limitations .....	116
Implications for Future Research.....	118
Concluding Remarks.....	119
REFERENCES .....	120
APPENDICES .....	128
Appendix A. Consent/Confidentiality Form for Participants .....	129
Appendix B. Consent Form for Adults Who May Appear in Photographs ..	131
Appendix C. Consent Form for Guardians of Minors Who May Appear In Photographs .....	132
Appendix D. Assent Form for Minors Who May Appear in Photographs ...	133
Appendix E. Outline for Research Sessions .....	134
Appendix F. Semi-Structured Interview Questionnaire.....	149

## CHAPTER 1

### YOUTH GANGS: LIVED EXPERIENCES IN AN EMERGENT AREA

Public school systems and communities in many areas across the United States are just beginning to wake up and notice gang activity. “A gang is a visible group of youths who engage at least some of the time in behaviors that are troublesome to the community of which they are a part and sometimes are illegal” (Griffin & Meacham, 2002, ¶3). Gangs are no longer just in big cities and instead “... increasingly exist in medium sized and small towns and in suburban communities” (Griffin & Meacham, 2002, ¶2). What is the reason behind why so many young, especially minority males, are feeling the need to join gangs? Does it have something to do with the media and how popular rap artists/actors like Snoop Dogg receive so much attention? Snoop Dogg proudly proclaims himself a gangster and highly publicizes his affiliation with the Crips gang. The message the media portrays about gangs being cool and that you can be successful and wealthy while being a member of a gang is clearly giving a mixed message about what being in a gang really means for the majority of youngsters that get involved. The purpose of this research study was to do a qualitative analysis of data from youth gang members on what the lived experiences are like for the youth in an area where youth gangs are an emerging issue.

Developing a qualitative research study involves a thorough process of discovering a methodology suitable for both the researcher and the topic, as well as making sure the research framing process encompasses quality in its design. To develop

this qualitative research study, the author utilized a technique discussed by McCaslin and Scott (2003) involving the five-question method for developing the framework for a qualitative research design. This process involved the following steps, and informed this study's introduction. First, a method of inquiry was chosen which allowed the researcher to associate a particular tradition of qualitative research to her particular study or desired form of obtaining knowledge and data. This study used a phenomenological approach. Next, a problem statement was developed, which can give a study value more than any other factor while establishing the entire reason behind why one would need to conduct the study (McCaslin & Scott, 2003). From a defined problem, one develops a purpose statement, and finally the research questions can be developed by taking into account the problem, the purpose, and what will hopefully be answered in the study. All of these steps assisted the author in framing this research study design and hopefully led the way towards a high quality research design.

#### Rationale for Study

There are many reasons as to why so many adolescent males and females are becoming involved in gangs. "All kids want to belong to something bigger than themselves" (Rollins, 2005, p. 12). Adolescents may think that gang membership will give them power, and provide them with the excitement of taking risks in carrying out the illegal activities associated with gang activity (Rollins, 2005). It doesn't appear to matter that the adolescents realize that some of the gang activities could get them into trouble with the law, or even hurt another human. Instead, it gives them a sense of power over



others in a world where they may not otherwise be presented with that feeling.

According to Rollins, adolescents may feel that “if you are not successful in mainstream society-in school, on the job-and you have an opportunity to go out on a mission and your gang tells you how great you did, that’s where you’ll want to be” (p. 12). In Twemlow and Sacco’s (1998) article, a 16 year old gang member gives the following reasons as to why he felt the need to join a gang: to be affiliated with a group, to have power, physical security, activities to keep from being bored, role models to look up to, and the need for aggressive play.

Gangs are a problem in our schools and our communities. Gangs in schools became an epidemic problem in the 1980’s and 1990’s, and continue today to be a huge concern for school systems throughout the United States (Griffin & Meacham, 2002).

Griffin and Meacham continue on to discuss this problem by stating:

Small gangs, unattached to larger organizations, have proven to be a deadly problem as evidenced by school shootings and violent levels unheard of a generation ago. Larger, more organized gangs may become violent threats as well, but also may be behind much of the illegal drugs, thefts, intimidation, extortion and increases in armament in schools today.

(¶1)

It is time for communities, along with schools, to take a look at why gangs seem to be so effective in providing the identity needs of many youth that live in either low socioeconomic or otherwise difficult environments. Rollins’ (2005) article discusses

gang prone students as students who receive bad grades, that teachers have low expectations of these students, and that perhaps many of these students have undiagnosed learning disabilities or simply had not received the needed academic interventions to keep them performing successfully in school. Juarez (1996) states, “these youngsters have repeatedly been labeled by schools as failures” (¶11). Juarez goes on to say that these students who perform so poorly in school take on a valueless existence in their school, their home, and their community. How terrible that must be for these students, and no wonder so many turn towards gangs that willingly and openly grant them acceptance and opportunities to feel successful.

Many of the students that live in the low socioeconomic and difficult environments qualify for free or reduced cost breakfast and lunch programs at school, and many also come from single parent homes (Juarez, 1996). These students face many struggles in their home environment, and the struggle continues at school with failing grades and the general feeling that they cannot be successful. One gang member bravely told a new principal at a middle school in Texas, “Miss, in school we are ‘nothings’. In a gang, we are somebodies” (Juarez, 1996, ¶7). When a gang appears to offer youth in today’s society more than what a school can offer, it means it is time for some eyes to open and some changes to be implemented in the public school systems, as well as the surrounding communities.

## Problem Statement

Youth gangs continue to persist and expand throughout the United States. We need to know more about who the most influential people are in these youth's lives, and whether they have anything to do with them becoming gang involved, or if they may have been able to prevent them from becoming gang involved. We also need to hear from the youth about what is really going on in their neighborhoods, and if this plays any part in their becoming gang involved. Finally, we need to find out how can we facilitate more youth to become involved in intervention programs by discovering what they think is really working for them in a current program, and what it is about them that is different from their other gang involved peers who have not sought out intervention programs.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of youth who become gang involved in an area where gangs are an emerging issue through the discovery of who has most influenced them, positively or negatively; whether or not where they live played any part in them becoming gang involved; and how some youth decide to seek intervention while others do not. It was an exploratory study, hoping to discover some new revelations about what youth look like in an area where gangs are an emerging issue. Hopefully, the study allowed a better understanding of the lived experiences of these youth, and from this knowledge, perhaps prevention and intervention can be reviewed specifically for areas where youth gangs have not infiltrated as of yet, or have just become an emerging problem. The qualitative study was

conducted with a phenomenological perspective, which hopefully allowed the reduction of personal bias of the researcher and instead allowed the voices and perspectives of the participants to emerge. Due to the use of a phenomenological research perspective, no research hypothesis was formulated ahead of time. The goal of phenomenological research is to discover themes that emerge from the participants in order to gain a better understanding of the phenomena being investigated. The use of a qualitative study was essential for this research study, due to the fact that in an area where gangs are an emerging problem, many stakeholders in the community were extremely hesitant to get quantitative style data, as this may have given awareness of just how serious and large the community gang problem may be. This study sought to assist the community in becoming more aware and more open to the idea of researching further the emerging issue of youth gangs.

### Research Questions

The five question method (McCaslin & Scott, 2003) allowed the research design thus far to develop a method approach, a problem and a purpose statement, and now encompassed these aspects altogether to develop the research questions for this study.

The following questions informed this research study:

1. What is the deep, rich, lived experience of youth who become gang involved in an area where gangs are an emerging issue, and how do the people that influence them the most contribute to their gang involvement?

2. What is the deep, rich, lived experience of youth who become gang involved in an area where gangs are an emerging issue, and how do the places they live in contribute to their gang involvement?
3. What is the deep, rich, lived experience of youth currently involved in a gang intervention program, and from their perspective what is helping them the most in the program and what do they see most helping other gang involved youth in the future?
4. What is the deep, rich lived experience of gang involved youth currently involved in an intervention program in regards to how they see themselves as different from their other gang involved peers who are not choosing to get into intervention programs? What makes them seek help towards a more positive future, while others choose not to do so?

All of these questions will hopefully further the current research on youth gangs, with the specific attempt to target an area where gangs are emerging as a growing problem.

#### Need for the Study

Many areas in the United States, like Chicago or Los Angeles have a long, well-known history of gangs. But what about places like Raleigh, North Carolina? Does this part of the Research Triangle really have a problem with gangs? It appears that this city is quickly becoming one of the top media scapegoats in regards to dealing with an emerging gang issue (see Dealey, 2006). If gangs are not part of the recent history in an

area, and suddenly become a growing problem, how does this happen? What should a community do about these signs? While there are some ideas for helping communities with an emerging gang issue, it is also an essential step in the research on youth gangs to hear from the youth about what is really allowing them access to more and more organized gangs. One must begin to wonder if the most significant and influential people in the lives of these youth are a part of this growing problem of gangs, or if perhaps these significant people could have assisted in swaying these youth away from becoming gang involved had they been more informed or involved in the youth's daily life. Another interesting aspect to look into in an area where gangs are just beginning to emerge as a problem is does gang involvement have anything to do with where a youth is living? Are they being forced to become involved for safety reasons, for acceptance, or is it a personal choice? Does the way their neighborhood functions allow for choice in regards to gang involvement, or are these youngsters not able to make personal decisions about their future and well-being? Finally, a most intriguing issue we need to become better informed of is what makes a youth decide to voluntarily partake in a gang intervention program? How do they make this decision, and how do they stand out from their other gang involved peers who choose not to seek intervention? If this issue could be better understood, perhaps we would have a key to success in getting more kids involved in alternative activities and seeing the way towards a brighter future, rather than having to deal with the need for more and more intervention and even suppression of gangs and their members.

## Definition of Terms

Following is a list of terms essential to understand in the development of this research project and paper. They are defined here by the author or as noted in the citations.

1. Youth Gangs: “a self-formed association of peers having the following characteristics: three or more members, generally ages 12 to 24; a name and some sense of identity, generally indicated by such symbols as style of clothing, graffiti, and hand signs; some degree of permanence and organization; and an elevated level of involvement in delinquent or criminal activity” (National Youth Gang Center, 2006).
2. Gang Prevention: Refers to activities directed at youth who are not current gang members.
3. Gang Intervention: Refers to activities directed at youths who are gang members.
4. Gang Suppression: Refers to a law enforcement and court system perspective, in regards to enforcing laws, making arrests, and putting delinquent youth in juvenile detention or other forms of adult prison systems.
5. Phenomenology: “...the study of the shared meaning of experience of a phenomenon for several individuals”, creates ‘a central meaning’ or ‘essence’ of the experiences” (McCaslin & Scott, 2003, p. 449).
6. Interpretive/constructivist framework: Stems from phenomenology and other

interpretive philosophies called hermeneutics, knowledge is socially constructed by all involved in the research process, and research is a product of the values of the researcher (personal communication, Dr. P. Martin, 2006).

7. Hermeneutics: Beyond a general descriptive look at core concepts and essences in data, to discover meanings within everyday life practices. Focus could be considered to be on what humans actually experience rather than what they are aware of consciously (Lopez & Willis, 2004).

8. Epistemology: Concerned with the nature of knowledge and the relationship between the knower and the would-be knower (Racher & Robinson, 2003).

9. Codes: Tags or labels given to units of meaning to descriptive or inferential information gathered in qualitative research, attached to chunks of words, phrases, whole sentences or paragraphs (Basit, 2003).

10. Emic Codes: Codes that emerge from the data as a result of the reviewing of the data for inherent concepts and patterns (personal communication, Dr. P. Martin, 2006).

11. Descriptive Codes: Ideas that lean toward the concrete, such as actions, definitions, events, and settings (personal communication, Dr. P. Martin, 2006).

12. Themes: Themes are derived from the many codes found in the raw data, and are more definitive categories of the overall information of the research.



13. Validity: In qualitative research, validity occurs with the procedures a researcher would use to give the study credibility, and refers not to the actual data itself but instead to the inferences drawn from the data (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

14. Reliability: Again, in qualitative research, reliability is determined by procedures used to help establish how reliable one could consider the inferences made from the analysis of the raw data.

15. Triangulation: A strategy for improving validity in research, and hopefully aids in the elimination of bias to allow a truthful proposition to be made about the phenomenon being studied (Mathison, 1988).

16. Researcher Reflexivity: Validity procedure in qualitative research whereby researchers self disclose personal beliefs, assumptions, and biases (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

17. Thick, Rich Description: Validity procedure in qualitative research; describes the setting, participants, and themes in rich detail, allows researcher to be transported into the particular setting or situation being researched (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

### Organization of Chapters

The dissertation has five chapters. Chapter One consists of an introduction to the topic of interest, the rationale for doing the study, a problem statement, a purpose statement, the research questions, the discussion of the need for the study, and a section on definitions of special terms that are used throughout the dissertation. This section on

the organization of the chapters concludes chapter one. Chapter Two is a literature review and critique of that literature and includes: a history of gangs in the United States, demographic characteristics of gang members, gang proliferation, contemporary youth gangs, public stereotypes versus the real scientific data, criminal aspects of gangs, and a discussion on prevention, intervention and suppression of youth gangs. Following the background information on gangs there is a review and critique of two chosen theories and one related model. The theories discussed are ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and social disorganization theory (Shaw & McKay, 1969). The related model is the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's Gang Prevention and Intervention Model (Institute for Governmental Research, 2002). Chapter Three includes the qualitative procedures that were utilized in the study. The process of data analysis, which included code and theme development, as well as validity issues, is also addressed in Chapter Three. The results of the study are presented in Chapter Four. Themes are presented, and examples are given directly from the data obtained from the youth gang members. Chapter Five discusses the results and gives a summary of all discovered in the data. An evaluation of the study and the author's own interpretation is given in relation to the original research questions and hopes of discovery, and is discussed in relation to or in differentiation to already existing literature. Limitations of the study and implications for future research and gang prevention and intervention practice are also discussed.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND THEORIES

The problem of the continual growth and spread of youth gangs across the United States is just now becoming an issue people are willing to talk about. Unfortunately, one of the biggest issues against figuring out what to do about gangs has to do with the fact that the definition of youth gangs has not, as of yet, been figured out. This is evident in the actual stating of this fact in many articles throughout the past decade or so (see Howell, 1994; OJJDP, 1997; Huff, 1998; Howell, 2000; Miller, 2001). While all of the previously listed articles discuss the continuous issue with the unclear definition of youth gangs, the National Youth Gang Center website in 2006 says it best with:

There is no single, accepted nationwide definition of youth gangs. It has been firmly established that the characteristics and behaviors of gangs are exceptionally varied within and across geographical areas and that a community's gang problem—however affected from other areas—is primarily and inherently homegrown. Thus, state and local jurisdictions tend to develop their own definitions. The terms youth gang and street gang are often used interchangeably, but use of the latter label can result in the confusion of youth gangs with adult criminal organizations (National Youth Gang Center, 2006).

If we cannot come together as a nation and develop a standard definition for youth gangs, we will continue to see the same issues and problems regarding research on youth gangs for another decade.

For the purpose of this research paper, the term “youth gangs” will coincide with the accepted definition given by the National Youth Gang Center, a part of the Institute for Governmental Research, and be considered to be:

A self-formed association of peers having the following characteristics: three or more members, generally ages 12 to 24; a name and some sense of identity, generally indicated by such symbols as style of clothing, graffiti, and hand signs; some degree of permanence and organization; and an elevated level of involvement in delinquent or criminal activity (National Youth Gang Center, 2006).

Most of the literature in this review was derived from the most reputable collection of information and publications on youth gangs, the publications available through the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP). The search for this comprehensive literature review comprised of searches on the interlibrary website, NCLIVE, and extensive internet searches from the governmental websites offering the most recent and empirical research available on youth gangs, and other reputable internet websites. This comprehensive literature review gives the reader a walk through the beginnings of youth gang history in the United States, a clear view of what a contemporary youth gang member may look like, how gangs are continuing to grow,

what a contemporary gang looks like in comparison to the past, public stereotypes versus current scientific findings, criminal behavior in youth gangs, and prevention, intervention and suppression of gangs. All of this will give the reader the background on youth gangs so as to comprehend the extensive problem youth gangs have become in the past decade or so, as well as to gain an understanding of how the problem of youth gangs has taken a different pathway from the past, traditional style of gangs to new, contemporary youth gangs. This literature review will also help the reader see the need for this proposed research study, the need for continued research on prevention, intervention and suppression, as well as evaluations of these, along with many other needs for future research on youth gangs. To end the comprehensive literature review, two theories and one related model are discussed and critiqued, again lending an understanding of the youth gang issue and the theoretical background involved in many of the leading empirical research that has been done on youth gangs.

#### History of Youth Gangs in the United States

No one really appears to be sure about when and where youth gangs appeared in the United States. Some research speculates that youth gangs began to appear just after the American Revolution, around 1793 (Sante, 1991; Sheldon, 1898; Howell, 1998). Other research suggests youth gangs may have emerged after the Mexican migration towards the Southwest following the Mexican Revolution in 1813 (Redfield, 1941; Howell, 1998). Still others feel gangs may have come about due to the problems of acculturation Mexican youth encountered as they moved to America, as well as

encountering extremely harsh living and economic conditions in the southwest (Moore, 1978; Vigil, 1988; Howell, 1998). European ethnic background gangs formed as early as the 1800's in cities like New York, Boston and Philadelphia, just after the Industrial Revolution was beginning (Finestone, 1976; Sante, 1991; Spergel, 1995; Howell, 1998). During the Industrial Revolution, cities such as Chicago, and other largely populated cities, had a large increase in youth gang activity (Finestone, 1976; Howell, 1998). These gangs were mostly from Irish, Jewish or Italian backgrounds (Howell, 1997).

Before the 1970's, gangs fought mostly for territorial rights, and these fights usually involved fists or brass knuckles. Gangs back then were all about a particular barrio, or neighborhood (Fagan, 1990; Klein, 1995). But in the 1970's and 1980's, gangs became much more dangerous due to easier access to handguns and other more lethal firearms (Howell, 1998). Gangs now have many more older as well as younger members than they had before, there are now more members with prison records and close ties to members who are incarcerated, they use alcohol and drugs much more than ever before, carry more lethal weapons, and are more involved in drug trafficking (Howell, 1998). Hand to hand fighting of the past has turned into lethal gang shootings and drive-by shootings. Many researchers share the opinion that the crack cocaine epidemic of the mid 1980's allowed this transformation of the traditional territorial youth gang to turn into entrepreneurial drug trafficking criminal organizations (Sanchez-Jankowski, 1991; Taylor, 1989; Howell, 1998). One must be careful in the consideration of how the new

modern day youth gangs are viewed, as public perception is not always reality, and this discrepancy will be covered later in this literature review.

### Demographic Characteristics

At this point, demographic characteristics discussed will be of a traditional school of thought. A typical gang member is a male, living in an inner city area, and who is of a racial or ethnic minority group (Esbensen, 2000). In an OJJDP article in 1997, entitled *Youth Gangs in America*, statistics available on the ethnicity of gangs in the year 1996 were as follows: 48% African Americans, 43% Hispanic, 5% Caucasian, and 4% Asian. Youth who are of minority backgrounds that live in single parent families are at a much greater risk of becoming a gang member than those who are Caucasian and have a two parent family (Esbensen, 2000). The typical youth gang member is around 17-18 years of age, but youth gangs can range from the ages of 12-24 years (Howell, 1998). A traditional style of gang, which refers back to the territorial, large, and long enduring type of gang, has typically around 180 members; where a more specific type of gang, like a gang involved mostly for drug trafficking, would have only about 25 members. Some gangs, especially in large cities that have had an enduring gang problem, may have gangs ranging from the thousands to the tens of thousands in membership (Howell, 1998). It is important to note that the available literature is very strong overall in its depiction of what is considered to be a stereotypical statistic or belief about youth gangs, and what is to be taken carefully, especially in regards to the ethnicity and racial composition of

youth gangs. This is a great strength of the literature available on youth gangs, and it will come together in the modern day gang explanation section.

While youth gang members are predominantly male, it is imperative to note the rising growth of the female gang member (Howell, 1994; 1997; 1998; Esbensen, 2000). While female youth gang members are a rising topic in the area of youth gang research, and much more research is needed on this topic, this particular research study did not focus on females in gangs, and will therefore only be briefly mentioned.

### Youth Gang Proliferation

The term gang proliferation is the word used to describe the increase in the number of communities that are reporting the presence of gangs and gang problems in the United States (Knox, Houston, Tromanhauser, McCurrie, & Laskey, 1996; Maxson, 1998). Howell (2000) states the reasoning behind why the issue of gang proliferation is such a huge problem for this area of research best with, “Gangs emerge, grow, dissolve, and disappear, for reasons that are poorly understood. This lack of understanding impedes efforts to prevent gang emergence, disrupt existing gangs, and divert youth from them” (p. 6). One of the best ways to see whether gangs are increasing in our nation is to follow the reported statistics from year to year. However, one must keep in mind the debate about these statistics that is brought up by Miller in 2001; are there really more gangs or are there just more people reporting the information now? This debate centers on the “significant versus the insignificant relationship” (Miller, 2001, p. 17). According to Miller, the insignificant relationship argues that when the amount or number of gangs



is low, the attention brought on to the issue of gangs is also low, which leads to the inaccurate underestimates of gangs at that time period. Miller also gives us the flip side of the argument, the significant relationship, as being when the increased amount of gang numbers increases to a particular amount, the issue of gangs gets so much attention that it outpaces the actual increase in number, which in turn stirs up even more attention to gangs, which increases the number of areas counting gangs, which can lead to exaggerated numbers of gangs at that period in time. Thus, keeping this debate in mind, here are some of the statistics over the last two decades: 4,881 gangs with 249,324 members (Howell, 1994), which stated no number of law enforcement districts sampled, to a sample of 286 jurisdictions with around 2,000 gangs and close to 100,000 members in 1980 (Miller, 1992; Howell, 1997), to around 2,000 jurisdictions with more than 23,000 gangs and more than 650,000 members in 1995 (Howell, 1997), to 4,800 jurisdictions with more than 31,000 gangs and around 846,000 members in 1996 (Howell, 1998), and finally to an estimate of 21,600 gangs with 731,500 members active in the entire United States in 2002 (Egley, Howell, & Major, 2006). Therefore, if one takes a look at the trend in these statistics, one will notice that while these numbers appear to be rising as the years progressed, we must take into account the irregularity of these statistics. First, different organizations gathered these statistics. Second, some reported how many jurisdictions they sampled, others did not. Third, what parts of these numbers reflect youth gangs and adult gang studies? Therefore, while these can offer us some preliminary ideas about the gang problem in the United States, it certainly is not a

clear or even remotely accurate picture of what may really be out there as far as accurate numbers of gangs and their membership totals.

What might be the reasoning behind why more jurisdictions are reporting? Maxson (1998) suggests the increased amounts may be due to more awareness of the gang problems in the nation, more attention brought about by law enforcement, more gang awareness trainings, and some national education based campaigns directed at the gang problem. Miller (2001) discusses a multitude of reasons behind why he thinks the reasons for such a dramatic increase in reporting has occurred as “drugs, immigration, gang names and alliances, migration, government policies, female-headed households, and gang sub-culture and the media” (p. 9). Certainly, the reason for more reporting must be a combination of more than one of these per area to cause their need to report as higher than in years previous.

Finally, regarding proliferation trends, some final thoughts on this can be summed up with the enlightenment of the drastic changes in the regional locations of gangs over the past three decades (Miller, 2001). Miller points out that in the 1970’s, the West was the region with the largest reports of the numbers of cities reporting the presence of gangs, and the South was the lowest. However, by 1998, Miller reports that the South ranked second with the largest number of cities with gang presence, with the increase being a substantial one of 33% since the 1970’s. This is an example of how the gang problem is spreading from large urban cities with a long history of gang problems to

many more states, cities, suburbs, and even rural areas that had never before seen the presence of gangs.

### Contemporary Youth Gangs

Youth gangs of today are very different from the traditional style gang of the past. This is a continual issue brought up in the available literature on youth gangs, and this section attempts to show the reader the more contemporary style of gang, as well as what challenges lie ahead for research in this field of study.

### *Modern Day Gang Characteristics*

Youth gangs of today are spreading out into many previously uncharted areas. They are moving into large cities that have never faced gang problems before, as well as smaller cities. They are no longer just in cities like Los Angeles and Chicago, which have had gang problems for many decades. They are also moving into the suburbs and even into some very rural areas. This is very different from the traditional gang, thought to exist only in large, urban cities. Howell, Egley and Gleason (2002) also mention the recently developing gangs are more likely to be in less populated areas. Besides modern day youth gangs spreading outward, they are also much more multicultural than ever before (Howell et al., 2002). It's interesting to note that the more multicultural a gang is, the more apt they are to be located in either a suburban area, a small town, or a rural area (Starbuck, Howell, & Lindquist, 2001).

The Bloods and Crips of California were said to be strictly black gangs, but many modern day youth gangs taking on the name of the aforementioned gangs may have

mixed racial composition, with white, black, and multi-racial members. Some modern gangs are still centered around racial or ethnic barriers, such as many of the Latino, (like Sureno 13 and Mara Salvatrucha 13, or MS13), Asian, Philippine, Vietnamese, or other Asian gangs. Youth gangs of today still see a disproportionate number of male minorities from African American and Latino backgrounds, but also have many more white members than the traditional style gangs that are stereotyped so often.

Modern day youth gangs are much less territorial than the traditional gang from the past. Many modern gangs may be considered autonomous, and exist in smaller areas like housing projects, schools, shopping malls, and small neighborhoods (Starbuck et al., 2001). Modern day gangs also seem to have popped up out of nowhere in the last ten years, have many more younger members, slightly more numbers of females, more Caucasians, and again, more racial and ethnic mixtures (Starbuck et al., 2001). Finally, these later onset modern day youth gangs also appear to be less involved in serious violent crimes and property crimes than the earlier onset, traditional style of gang (Starbuck et al., 2001). This brings to attention one of the biggest challenges for law enforcement, as well as public perception, in that modern gangs cannot be assumed to be the old, traditional style of gang, and cannot be enforced with strategies that worked on those traditional styles of gangs.

#### Public Stereotypes and Scientific Findings

During the past 30 years, American society has become increasingly aware of the increased levels of violence by juveniles, as well as drug use, trafficking, and other

delinquent behavior (Esbensen, 2000; Howell & Decker, 1999). This public perception of increased gang numbers and rising violence was widely spread among both society and public officials. However, this perception was based upon false public stereotypes rather than scientific evidence (Miller, 2001). Popular movies, television, and rap music videos all play a part in how modern society views and stereotypes youth gangs. During the 1980's and the 1990's, movies like "Boyz in the Hood" and "Colors" gave Americans the fuel to continue the stereotypical view of what a modern day gang member looks like (Esbensen, 2000). Rap music artists, like Snoop Dogg and Fifty Cents, both contribute to the negative stereotype of young minority youth, whether they are gang involved or not. Snoop Dogg writes and raps about the Crips gang, while Fifty Cents was a known Blood member. Snoop Dogg's popular song, Drop it Like its Hot, is about shooting cops (personal communication, A. Muriera, 2005). Snoop Dogg also includes lyrics that include how to dress like a Crip member, as well as lyrics about physical abuse towards women. Many rap music videos glorify gang involvement by flashing gang signs and representing different gangs by the clothing worn in the videos. With all of the images of youth gangs constantly being presented, as well as the gangster style clothing being fashionable for all of today's youth, it is no wonder our youth are so consumed with gangs. If only these media influences were actual reality of today's modern gang; but, indeed they are more than usually not a realistic picture of what modern youth gangs really look like.

## Criminal Behavior in Youth Gangs

Youth gangs participate in criminal activity. This is one of the main differences between what constitutes a clique of youth just “hanging out” together, and is essentially what metamorphasizes them into a youth gang. This is clear in the definition of youth gangs, where it clarifies the youth are engaged in “an elevated level of involvement in delinquent or criminal activity” (National Youth Gang Center, 2006). Youth gangs portray patterns in their criminal behaviors, and these patterns reflect chronic social issues that can be connected to social class position, racial composition, and whether the youth has immigrated to the United States (Howell, 1994). Howell also points out that these reflective patterns can also be attributed to modern conditions in the economy, the easy accessibility of weapons, drugs and trafficking, as well as the places where gangs seem to develop.

Criminal patterns are also reflective in the racial background of gangs that are considered more homogeneous in composition. African American gangs are said to be more involved with drug trafficking than other ethnicities, Hispanic/Latino gangs are said to focus mostly on territorial boundaries, and Asian and Caucasian gangs are more apt to commit property crimes than other gangs as a whole (OJJDP, 1997). It is worth noting that this issue of a specific criminal relationship to a particular racial makeup appears throughout the literature, yet has not been clarified as to its continued existence as a fact in the modern youth gang; which has been said to be increasingly multicultural. This would be an interesting research question for future research.

The progression of criminal activity by intensity as well as by offense is a question that has been previously researched and is available in the current literature. Huff (1998) takes the reader through a process of how long it takes on average for a newly involved gang member to have their first criminal offense. The process begins as a wannabe, at around age 12-13, becoming a gang member at about age 13-14, and anywhere from 6 months to a year of becoming a gang member the youth has their first arrest at approximately age 14. Huff adds that data from a study done in Ohio allows us to see the progression of actual criminal offenses. The first offenses are usually property crimes, and then progress to drug related crimes and then violent crimes within a 1.5-2 year span.

#### Combative Strategies Against Youth Gangs

In the article entitled *Youth Gangs in America* (OJJDP, 1997) the historical efforts put forth to deal with the problems of youth gangs are detailed. It begins with the statement that many forms and combinations of forms of strategies have been tried to deal with the youth gang problem, yet none have been deemed as the cure all for the gang issue in the United States. The OJJDP article gives the following examples of prevention strategies previously tried: recreation, community mobilization, and advocacy. The OJJDP article also gives the following as intervention strategies previously tried: outreach and street work, and the attempt to provide alternative activities that are more prosocial for gang involved youth. The effort put forth in outreach and street work in the past never amounted to much, and therefore recent years have made suppression

strategies the number one choice in dealing with the challenge of youth gangs (OJJDP, 1997).

In order for any type of gang reduction program to be remotely effective, the OJJDP (1997) stresses the necessity for the following to be present in a community: recognition and admittance of a gang problem, an understanding of the local gang problem-not a fictional problem stereotyped in the media, common definitions among the principal leaders on gangs, targets specific to each agency and inter-agencies, and an assessment of the local problem needs to be done. These are all important issues in any research related to youth gangs, as everything we learn about youth gangs will eventually be utilized as information to assist the nation in how to prevent youth from joining gangs, how to better intervene in the lives of those who have become members, and how to suppress the most dangerous members.

#### *Youth Gang Prevention*

Youth gang prevention incorporates any activities or strategies done in a community to help youth stay out of gangs. Huff (1998) goes over what he calls windows of opportunity that can make all the difference in helping youth who are either already gang involved or who are on the fringes of becoming gang involved to make better future life choices for themselves. These windows of opportunity and intervention occur at specific intervals in time, according to the empirical findings in the Huff (1998) study, and occur first in the approximate year between the “wannabe” stage and becoming initiated into the gang-which would be considered the prevention stage. Youth



gang prevention strategies are said to be the most cost effective in the long run (Coolbaugh & Hansel, 2000). There are many ways to combat youth gang activity, but if prevention of gang membership is the most cost effective, then this is the strategy that should be getting the most attention.

### *Youth Gang Intervention*

Youth gang intervention programs have a focus on youth who have already become gang involved. To follow up from the Huff (1998) study on the windows of opportunity that can make a difference in a youth who actually becomes gang involved and is no longer in the preventative stage, the second significant opportunity to intervene occurs when the youth becomes initiated to when the youth has his or her first arrest. This second window of opportunity appears to have a time period of 1.5 to 2 years, and if the intervention is effective, can provide the youth with a future free of criminal offenses. This is a huge issue for gang involved youth because once a youth has a criminal record; many opportunities are closed to them. Opportunities such as financial aid for college are no longer available to students who have a criminal record, and the ability to apply for and be accepted to jobs becomes much more difficult with a criminal record. Certain careers would also be closed to any youth who have criminal records, like law enforcement and some military career choices. Therefore, the process of intervention needs to be carefully looked into and empirically tested for significant results.

### *Youth Gang Suppression*

Youth gang suppression is directed at reducing criminal activities associated with gangs, and its goal is to make arrests, prosecute in court, and completely remove troublesome gang members from the public to the jails, with long prison sentences (Howell, 2000; OJJDP, 1997). It's important to note that suppression strategies are an important part of all community programs dealing with youth gangs, but are known not to be entirely successful as a single component against gangs (Howell, 2000). Instead, suppression strategies appear to work best when used as part of a comprehensive program to deal with youth gang problems.

#### Related Theories and Model

The two related theories covered are ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and social disorganization theory (Shaw & McKay, 1969). The related model is the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's (OJJDP) gang prevention and intervention model (Institute for Governmental Research, 2002).

#### *Ecological Systems Theory*

Ecological systems theory differs from most human development theories because of the way it views development. Instead of focusing on the traditional psychological processes of perception, learning, thinking and motivation, it instead focuses on the content of development, and how that development is changed as a function of the person's exposure to its environment and its interactions with its environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The ecology of human development is scientific study

involving progressive and mutual accommodation that takes place between an active, constantly growing person and the always changing properties of the settings in which the developing person lives. This developing process is also affected by the relationships between these different settings, and also by any larger contexts in which any or all of the settings are encompassed (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). An ecological environment is “conceived topologically as a nested arrangement of concentric structures, each contained within the next” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 22). This environment consists of different components, the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem.

Bronfenbrenner describes a microsystem as any pattern of activities, different roles and interpersonal relations a developing person would experience in a given setting, with particular physical and material characteristics (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The next level of the ecological system is the mesosystem, or the area comprised of the interrelations among two or more of the settings that the developing person would actively participate in (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Examples of the mesosystem for a child would be home relations, school relations, and neighborhood peer relations. Following the mesosystem, the exosystem exists. An exosystem would refer to one or even more settings that do not actively involve the developing person, but whose events affect what happens in the settings which contain that developing person (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). An example of the exosystem would be the local school board, or the parents’ place of employment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The last and most outer part of the ecological system is the macrosystem. The macrosystem “refers to consistencies, in the form and content of

lower-order systems (micro-, meso-, and exo-) that exist, or could exist, at the level of the subculture or the culture as a whole, along with any belief systems or ideology underlying such consistencies” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 26). An example of a macrosystem would be how different states may have different sets of expectations for high school graduates, but all states have basically the same idea as to what really encompasses a high school graduate level student.

While this theory includes over a dozen definitions, there are a couple words one must become familiar with to fully comprehend this theory. These words are ecological transitions, and roles. An ecological transition occurs in a person’s life whenever their position in their ecological setting changes due to a change in roles, setting or both (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). An example would be getting married, having a child, or changing a job. A role is a set of activities and relations that would be expected of a person in a particular position in society, and of others in regards to that person (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). An example of roles would be the basic standards of honesty and integrity we may expect from a public official serving our local county, and how county residents would react to an encounter with a public official that is living up to those expected standards by shaking their hand and making a positive comment on how they were respected in the local community.

#### *View of Human Nature and Development*

Bronfenbrenner has a positive outlook on human development. He sees the humans’ capacity to adapt to, tolerate, and even create their own environments in which

they grow and live in. He also believes that public policy has power to effect the development and well-being of humans and the environments they live in (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

According to Miller (1989), in order for a theory to be considered well developed, it must consider three tasks in regards to the developments of humans. First, it should describe changes that occur within one or more areas of behavior (Miller, 1989).

Ecological systems theory does this, as it describes the many behavior changes that take place within a particular setting, and how that setting influences these behavior changes and psychological growth of the developing person. Second, a theory must describe changes in relationships among several areas of behavior (Miller, 1989). Again, ecological systems theory also does this, as it has thorough explanations of dyads of people developing, and many of its theoretical hypotheses deal with people developing because one person's behaviors change and how this directly influences the other person in the dyad to also make those same behavior changes. The third task a well rounded theory should handle is whether or not the theory actually describes the course of development and how one moves from one point of development towards another point of development (Miller, 1989). The hypotheses are stated clearly and build upon each other in ecological systems theory. An example is hypothesis 2 states: "Once two persons begin to pay attention to one another's activities, they are more likely to become jointly engaged in those activities. Hence observational dyads tend to become transformed into joint activity dyads" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 59). Hypothesis 3 builds

directly upon hypothesis 2 and states: “Once two persons participate in a joint activity, they are likely to develop more differentiated and enduring feelings toward one another. Hence joint activity dyads tend to become transformed into primary dyads”

(Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 59). The course of development is therefore made clearer from hypothesis to hypothesis.

#### *Postulates, Assumptions and Hypothetical Constructs*

The theory of ecological systems has 50 hypotheses. The hypotheses become more developed and exact as they gain numbers. Hypothetical constructs, assumptions and postulates are all part of a well developed theory (Miller, 1989). Not only does the theory encompass 50 hypotheses, it also incorporates 14 definitions, and 7 postulates. The postulates begin with stating that in ecological research, the properties of a person and the environment, the structure of the environment, and the processes that take place within and between the settings must be viewed from systems terms, meaning they are interdependent (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The postulates end with the thought that if different settings have different developmental effects upon the person, then these effects should somehow reflect the major ecological differences between the settings, as they would be revealed by different patterns of activities, roles and relations (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

A developmental theory should have value, meaning it should organize facts and give meaning to the facts, and it should guide future research (Miller, 1989). The theory of ecological systems has value in that it was seen as the wave of the future in regards to

new ideas in science when it first came about. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) did a study related to youth gangs. This study was discussed in the Bronfenbrenner and Evans (2000) article and summarized the study's findings with one word: chaos. The idea that our modern society continues to have growing chaos, for example, many more single parent families, schools are seeing more violence, and less direct parent participation in child care and rearing, is an idea that definitely seems worth investigating more in the future, especially in relation to youth gangs (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000).

A well developed theory must also cover the mode of interaction between theory and fact (Miller, 1989). This theory's interactive mode can be considered both deductive and functional (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Bronfenbrenner states that while some of the many hypotheses are deductive in nature, many of the ideas in the original theory derive from the application of the theoretical work in empirical studies. Deductive theory is said to be a logical and organized set of propositions, which are stated formally (Miller, 1989). Much of Bronfenbrenner's theory consists of formally stated hypothesis, propositions, and definitions. Deductive theory also seeks further and continual testing of the hypotheses and results, and from there modifications to the theory can occur (Miller, 1989). Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory has undergone a number of changes and improvements as the years have passed, especially with the new model. The new bioecological model is said to replace the ecological systems theory as a more modern application of the original theory. A functional theory is more informal and modest, comprised of hypotheses that lead to general statements. These general statements are

then continually tested (Miller, 1989). The bioecological model would encompass this idea, as it is much more concise and open than the previous theory. The new bioecological model opens many new doors for research, and again shows this theory and model to be strong and open to changes of the modern world.

### *Relevancy to Youth Gangs*

Bronfenbrenner discusses an issue that would directly effect the proliferation of youth gangs in our society in his chapter on the mesosystem. He calls the modern public school "...the most potent breeding grounds of alienation in American society" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 231). Bronfenbrenner goes into detail about how he sees kids being moved from neighborhood schools to communities they are unfamiliar with, with peers whom they may not relate to due to cultural, economic, and other essential differences, and into schools outside of their comfort zones and local communities. The distance the families live from their child's school, according to Bronfenbrenner, creates an environment where parents and teachers may never know each other or even come into contact, the child would not socialize with the kids in the school because of the distances the different kids all live from each other, and that due to all of this, the public schools are basically creating an impersonal community at the school that gives free rein to the disruptive forces in today's society (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). These disruptive forces, although never specified, could certainly be youth gangs.



### *Critique of Ecological Systems Theory*

There are many strengths in the ecological systems theory, especially in regards to the topic of youth gangs. According to Miller (1989), the ecological systems theory incorporates many of the ideal considerations a theory should encompass. It describes changes that occur within one or even more areas of behavior (Miller, 1989). The theory believes behaviors are taken on by a developing person because of who they come into contact with, how the encounter occurs, and even how the encounter's setting effects the developing person. Regarding gang youth, behaviors, attitudes, and actions are all developed by the "wannabe" gang youth because of their involvement and close contact with gang members. The theory also describes changes in relationships within several areas of behavior (Miller, 1989), as in how others continually effect the growth and development of a person, effect areas of growth such as language development, health and physical well-being, and even educational growth. Gang youth may turn towards gangs because of the lack of a supportive ecological system surrounding them at home or at school.

A sound theory would also describe the course of development, or how one would move from one point of development to another more advanced point of development (Miller, 1989). The hypotheses describe almost exact pinpoints of how one would move from a lower point of development to a higher point. This theory relates well to youth gangs, as it almost seems to be utilized in how a youth would start as a

“wannabe” and eventually go thru initiation and the process involved in becoming a full gang member.

Another strength in regards to utilizing this theory in relation to gangs is the topic of chaos. Youth gangs can certainly be considered to be chaotic with all the violence, crime, drugs, and firearms that are often a part of the gang life.

While ecological systems theory has many strengths, especially when relating it to the topic of youth gangs, it also has a weaknesses that need to be mentioned. In order for the ecological systems theory to truly be applicable to researchable populations, one must focus on certain aspects of the theory; because if one attempted to utilize the theory as a whole, with its 50 hypothesis, 14 definitions and 7 postulates, it may be nearly impossible to create research projects utilizing the entire theory. The theory can almost be considered exhaustive. Therefore, while particular parts of the theory can be considered extremely applicable and useful in empirically researching particular topics, it may not be applicable as a whole.

Another serious issue to consider when using ecological systems theory is the issue of white privilege and racism that stands out in the original work by Bronfenbrenner (1979). Bronfenbrenner has long dialogues on very sensitive subjects, such as public school bussing and integration of schools, and comes across rather strongly with his views. The views express strong white privilege style views on families, and how they are disintegrating in modern society, and how even society itself is falling apart in its moral development. Therefore, if one chooses to use ecological systems theory, it should

be done so with a more open and certainly more multi-culturally sensitive frame of reference.

*Related Empirical Research on Ecological Systems Theory*

The first study to be examined will be by Dalla (2000) and was chosen because of the related issues of sexual violence and prostitution involved in youth gang culture, as well as because it is a well developed qualitative study. The second study to be examined is by Spencer, Fegley, and Harpalani (2003). This article was chosen because it focused on research on comprehending and improving developmental outcomes for African American adolescents, who represent a disproportionate percentage of youth involved in gangs. These studies are examined to gather and inform this study's research methodology, as well as to increase the awareness of sexual violence involved in youth gang culture, and the need for more research on how to continually improve life outcomes for minority and at-risk youth.

Dalla (2000). The main topic of this article was prostitution, and the author defines this term as "one who exchanges sex or sexual favors for money, [drugs], or other desirable commodities" (Dalla, 2000, ¶2). The article discusses stereotypes and assumptions associated with prostitutes that are commonplace in our society due to the media. The two assumptions many have about prostitutes are that they are either leading the life of Julia Roberts in the movie "Pretty Woman", with a rags to riches, American dream theme, or they are the deadbeat, drug addicted, woman in high heels, lots of makeup, and short skirts flagging down cars in the streets at night (Dalla, 2000).

The research goals were clearly stated and intended to “examine, in depth, ‘the game’ known as streetwalking prostitution’ (Dalla, 2000, ¶4). In this goal, the researcher desired to expand upon previous research by incorporating the very personal and unique developmental experiences had by women who eventually became streetwalking prostitutes, and from these very personal histories to discover similar themes between the many different stories of the participants. The primary goal of this research project was to see these women as real individuals, with real lives and histories, not as just figments of what the media has made them out to be.

The study was informed by two theories, Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems theory and family systems theory. The theories helped the researcher guide her direction on development and perhaps give reason towards understanding how these women eventually became involved in prostitution.

The selection and description of participants is important in qualitative research, and was clearly discussed. The participants mostly came from an intervention program designed to keep women from prostituting on the streets. All participants in the research study were voluntary, and ethical issues were also addressed, including informed consent.

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with 43 participants, and five of those were selected for a subgroup that obtained more detailed, rich descriptions of the participant’s developmental histories. The questions were predetermined and the interviews were informal and non-threatening. While the actual questionnaire was not given, many of the questions asked during the interviews were discussed throughout the

article. The research method certainly seems replicable, and applicable to other population groups with similar issues and problems.

The data analysis process used was the Phenomenological Descriptive Methodology created by Colaizzi in 1978. The methodology is presented and participant checks followed the procedure. This shows strength in the researcher's plan, as more than one person checked the thematic overtures before the final manuscript was written. Strength also lies in the fact that the participants were again asked about the final analysis and were given the right to discuss their thoughts on the data, as well as give further input that was added to the final manuscript.

The presentation of the findings is logical and clear, beginning with the five brief biographies from the subgroup which capture the reader's interest, and delve into the developmental aspects common among the women. All 43 interviews delved into the following three areas: historical events that led the woman into prostitution, life as a prostitute, and life in the future for these women. The presentation of the findings moves onto the common themes found in the 43 participant interviews. The thematic presentation is logically broken down into the three category areas, with the historical events including the themes of sexual abuse, parent or family abandonment, and runaways. The second category included many themes, some of which were age and involvement in prostitution time, drug abuse, pimps, kids and condom use. The third category included themes about leaving the streets, prison time or those who were forced

of the streets, and those who left voluntarily. Their dreams, which had many similarities despite their differences, were also included as a theme.

The implications section discussed the gaps in the existing literature in regards to streetwalking prostitutes. The author indicates that more research needs to focus on the internal, rather than the external forces, and events that cause a woman to become involved in prostitution. Future research suggested a focus on activism for these women involved in prostitution. Limitations pointed out were that the sample was nonrandom, the women in the study were no longer prostituting, and each participant was also only interviewed one time; therefore their true beliefs and attitudes may not have been fully captured.

Future research suggestions were clear about the fact that “activism is necessary, particularly with regard to developing policy changes in women’s employment and the feminization of poverty...” (Dalla, 2000, ¶53). However, a weakness to point out is that never once is critical race theory mentioned, which appears to be another theoretical approach of this article.

This article involved many controversial issues, like sexual abuse, prostitution, human trafficking, and drug abuse in which the researcher may have had some strong opinions about, and these biases may have been reflected upon the participants during their interviews; therefore effecting the data. However, there was no mention of personal reflection on how the researcher either needed to reflect upon these issues, or if any

methods were taken to help deter her own biases, like journaling or going over her thoughts and writings with another colleague.

Gang members have many issues to deal with, each separate, yet each a huge influence that seriously impacts the outlook for their future. If prostitution affects lives this seriously, and it is only one small part of being gang involved, it is no wonder that intervention and prevention are such important contemporary issues.

Spencer, Fegley, and Harpalani (2003). The article utilizes Spencer's (1995) phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory (PVEST), which is a theory that stems from Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979). The PVEST integrates the various issues of context, coping skills and mechanisms, and identity in human development (Spencer et al., 2003). Cultural socialization and spirituality are the coping mechanisms included, and are related to the adolescent's psychological well-being in the study's sample of African American youth who have low access to resources. Both coping mechanisms mentioned were discovered to be significant in the healthy development of self and in relating to others for African American adolescent males.

The article states clearly that exploratory common factor analysis was utilized, and this seems appropriate for the intended research goals. The goals were to discover ways to integrate the attending processes of identity pursuits with coping responses, and these would be linked to varying levels of the ecosystem from Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979).

The detailed sample was taken from a longitudinal study of 562 African American adolescents, 70% were male, from a southeastern part of the United States. The schools in the study were involved in the Promotion of Academic Competence Project, which was a study conducted during the years of 1991-1994, as the students sampled progressed through grades 8-12. The ages of the sample ranged from 14-17 years, and 498 adolescents were reported in this study's data. This sample appears to be large enough to make some preliminary assumptions from any data obtained for the males, yet may be considered too small for the females. The steps of the analysis process are clearly described as utilizing an "exploratory common factor analysis using squared multiple correlations as initial communality estimates and using varimax and promax rotations" (Spencer et al., 2003, p. 185). The analysis description continues, making it even more replicable.

The different derived factors, which they call variables, were described thoroughly. The following variables were presented: self variables including perceived emotional well-being, perceived unpopularity with peers, feeling valued by others, and good feelings about the future; coping variables including the importance of religion and spirituality, and the importance of teaching black pride. All of these variables were discussed as to how males versus females had reported.

There was no mention as to whether ethical principles such as evaluation apprehension was taken into account for the students sampled or if any type of informed consent took place with the parents of the students or the students themselves.



Explanations of the data were reported only in narrative form, yet tables are clearly the easiest and most accepted format for readers to see the actual data presentation. Other considerations included that data was obtained only by self report, and only particular coping methods were surveyed. There may be other coping mechanisms the youth utilize, and consider helpful, but these were not investigated.

This article was interesting in regards to what one can learn about how African American boys utilize coping mechanisms, and will assist the author in the preparation of research with youth gangs.

*Ecological Systems Theory: Synthesis in Regards to Youth Gangs*

Utilizing ecological systems theory in a research study involving youth gangs seems appropriate when considering the deep, rich, lived experiences of gang involved youth that led to their gang involvement, and the ideas of prevention and intervention. Ecological systems theory incorporates how outside influences, whether they be human or circumstantial influences, effect a growing and developing person. A qualitative study, focusing on gathering information to discover the ecological systems each participant develops in, while considering how perhaps different interventions may prevent future gang involvement, appears to be greatly needed in the area of research on youth gangs.

These two articles by Dalla (2000), and Spencer, Fegley, and Harpalani (2003) allowed information to be gathered on not only appropriate qualitative forms of research to perhaps utilize with youth gang populations facing many of the same issues as women

prostitutes, but also on how future research needs to focus on coping methods for youth, in so that they may be able to make better life affecting choices in dealing with peer pressure and intrinsic motivations that may be constant invitations in some minority and at-risk youth's lives.

### *Social Disorganization Theory*

Social disorganization is the inability of a community or a neighborhood to understand and realize common goals and from there to solve continuing problems or issues occurring in the area (Kubrin & Weitzer, 2003). The main issue the theory discusses is delinquency, which is defined as an adaptive behavior where adolescents usually act as members of adolescent peer groups in an effort to find the way toward meaningful and respected adult roles, essentially unaided by an older generation, yet under the influence of many criminal models, usually in an inner city area (Shaw & McKay, 1969). While social disorganization theory is about development, this theory focuses more on the ways in which a place, specifically a neighborhood, would develop. Due to the unique interactive functions and layout of a particular neighborhood, the theory's base leads towards the discussion of how people in the neighborhood may develop and change in ways they may not if they were living somewhere else (Kubrin & Weitzer, 2003).

### *View of Human Nature and Development*

In social disorganization theory, human development is essentially formed due to the particular area of a city one may grow up in, depending on many variables such as:

“physical deterioration and proximity to industrial land usage-and with other human problems, e.g., adult crime, poverty, disease, suicide, and family instability” (Shaw & McKay, 1969, p. xxvii). In fact, the entire Area Project program, which was the program where most of the data was received for the foundation of social disorganization theory, was based upon an optimistic view of human nature, and that the concern of the prevention of delinquency and the rehabilitation of the delinquent was possible (Shaw & McKay, 1969).

A well-constructed theory gives an explanation of human development, and should encompass three tasks, according to Miller (1989): a description of changes within one or more areas of behavior, a description of changes in the relationships among several areas of behavior, and it should explain the course of development as one moves from one point to another point of development. The theory of social disorganization gives an explanation of why certain areas in a city may encompass larger amounts of delinquent youth, giving us a specific behavior of delinquency, which in and of itself incorporates many different forms of behaviors. Examples of delinquent behaviors could be stealing, violence toward others, and selling drugs. The theory then moves on to discuss how delinquent behaviors are the result of social disorganization in the neighborhood, or vice versa, that delinquency causes social disorganization in the neighborhood. Therefore, the theory continues to show how changes in relationships between several areas of behavior can effect human development. Finally, the theory makes an attempt to account for the transitions from one point of development to another,

as the research involved in the development of the theory sought to gain an understanding of whether delinquency is a cause or the result of social disorganization.

An understanding of Clifford Shaw's background helps one comprehend why social disorganization theory came about, as well as Shaw's conception of human nature. Shaw had been a probation and parole officer, and then moved on to become a research sociologist at the Institute for Juvenile Research. Shaw was interested in helping young offenders, and became increasingly concerned as to why many inner city males began to join gangs (Shaw & McKay, 1969). Because of the background of Clifford Shaw and his desire to help young people and their communities, social disorganization theory could be labeled as a functional theory, according to Miller (1989). A functional theory is more modest than deductive theory, and its propositions are related to the data and are often restricted to a particular experimental problem (Miller, 1989). Social disorganization's experimental problem would be the two issues of social disorganization and delinquency, and how they inter-relate to effect the development of the neighborhood as well as its people.

Another interesting point on human nature to consider with social disorganization theory is its opposing views of human nature. Social disorganization theory utilizes a mechanistic view of human nature. The mechanistic view, according to Miller (1989), encompasses the idea that the world is seen like a machine composed of many parts, and that development is caused by external forces and events in life; or in social disorganization theory, the life of the community, which in turn effects human

development. The whole idea behind social disorganization theory is that the people in a particular community are without choice, especially in the lowest of economic areas, and especially in regards to how their young develop due to the outside forces of crime and delinquency in their neighborhood. There is almost an acceptance of delinquency as a means to getting ahead. People are unable to control their development because the outside influence all around them is too strong. Their path in life is almost pre-set towards criminal behavior. This idea leads into the second, opposing view, of human nature. Capitalistic views of human nature incorporate competitiveness, strive for success, and survival of the fittest notions (Miller, 1989). Delinquency in the work developing social disorganization theory is described as an alternate pathway for lower income society to gain the material wealth and respect that the media and current American world seem to focus on, and lead youth to believe that no matter how you gain the wealth and status, you will be successful (Sham & McKay, 1969).

A well constructed developmental theory has value, in that it organizes and gives meanings to facts, and it guides further research (Miller, 1989). Social disorganization theory gives organization to over 60 years of research to many facts about neighborhoods and lower income areas in cities, how the rates of delinquency seem to change very little despite population, social or other economic changes, and has definitely sparked much future research. Social disorganization theory led to the development of the OJJDP's gang prevention and intervention program, as well as many curriculums to be utilized with this program.

### *Postulates, Assumptions and Hypothetical Constructs*

To understand more about social disorganization theory, one must first see what questions were sparked before beginning the research that led to the development of the theory. Questions pondered in this theory can be said to be its postulates and assumptions and are necessary, according to Miller (1989), in a well rounded theory. The theory asks what exactly in modern day city life seems to create delinquency. Even today, regardless of the city's continually changing population by areas, the business cycle or any other social or economic changes, why are so many young males from inner city areas continually getting into trouble with the law? Why are so many joining gangs? (Shaw & McKay, 1969).

### *Relevancy to Youth Gangs*

The theory of social disorganization is extremely relevant to youth gangs. Shaw and McKay (1969) continually discuss youth gangs and their criminal intentions throughout their book. Because social disorganization theory was the theory utilized in the development of the federal government's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's (OJJDP) gang prevention and intervention plan (Institute for Governmental Research, 2002), it shows just how valuable this theory has become.

### *Critique of Social Disorganization Theory*

Social disorganization theory has many strengths. First, it is unique in that it focuses on how people develop because of outside influences within their neighborhood. This theory utilizes the idea of delinquency in its foundation, and as youth gangs are

involved in delinquent acts, this theory can certainly be considered useful in the development of new research on youth gangs. The theory's use of a mechanistic and a capitalistic view of human nature coincide with the ideas involved in becoming a gang member. Due to the fact the mechanistic view allows for development through external forces, that a common risk factor for becoming a gang member is being exposed to gangs, that lives may almost be pre-set for criminal behavior depending on where one lives, and that gang members commit criminal acts, again, allows this theory to be considered useful and valuable in gang research. Finally, social disorganization theory has massive amounts of data to support its original beginnings and foundation, and can therefore be considered to be an empirically sound theory. Thirty years of data collection began the foundation for this theory, and by 1969, and the second edition of the theories' original work being published, the theory had over 60 years of empirical data to support and back up its foundation (Shaw & McKay, 1969)

Social disorganization also has weaknesses that must be taken into consideration. Because development in this theory is not actually on the human itself, and instead focused on the place where the human actually lives and grows, some may be uncomfortable utilizing this theoretical framework in research on human development. This theory does involve detailed explanations of how neighborhoods change and develop, and how the way a neighborhood looks and functions changes the place itself and from there changes its people. It can be confusing and overly detailed on issues completely unrelated to an actual human being, therefore deterring some from seeing its

usefulness. In relation to its confusing and detailed areas in the places and neighborhoods, there is also the confusion about the opposing views of human nature; as this theory is certainly both mechanistic and capitalistic in its viewpoints. While these would normally cancel each other out, or simply not exist comfortably together, in this theory they certainly can and do exist together because this theory is about being disorganized. Finally, as in ecological systems theory, the issues of white privilege and racism exist. To state that people in poor economic areas are without choice in how their young will develop because of their living conditions, and that many poor areas find acceptance in the use of delinquency as an acceptable means of living are poorly thought through, and certainly not considered to be culturally sensitive.

*Related Empirical Research on Social Disorganization Theory*

Pattillo (1998). This article appears to focus on crime and the theory of social disorganization, however, the article delves into a neighborhood that is trying to live harmoniously with gang leaders and members as well as the top black city officials and the average, hard-working, middle class black family. It proves to be an interesting dilemma, and one that definitely sparks more research interests.

The article's strengths begin with an extensive review of relevant topics surrounding the issue of crime and the middle class, African American neighborhood. Social disorganization theory's strengths and why it was chosen as a theoretical perspective for this study are included, as well as where the theory has gaps in regards to its lack of ties to public forms of social control (Pattillo, 1998). The literature review



continues with information on organized crime, and comments on how in a middle class African American neighborhood organized crime can provide resources to both law abiding as well as not so law abiding citizens (Pattillo, 1998). The article points out that the immediate needs and glamour offered by a life a crime are surprisingly not necessarily frowned upon in this particular neighborhood. An interesting quote the author used sums up this notion of criminals and law abiding citizens living together comfortably with, “Poverty and powerlessness are the root of both community acceptance of organized crime and recruitment into its networks” (Pattillo, 1998, ¶7).

The primary demographic data was collected from the Comparative Neighborhood Study done by the University of Chicago, over a 2.5 year time period. Data collected was from participant observations and interviews, all conducted by the primary researcher, in informal settings in Groveland, such as parks and churches. All of the observations and interviews were then coded by the primary researcher, and put into over 30 different themes.

The research was done based upon a grounded sociological community study basis, specifically utilizing the theories of social disorganization and other social organization theories. The researcher utilized three different experiences to become familiar with her data. These were the actual social interaction of watching during the observations, the process of doing the interviews, the writing of the field notes and the transcription of those, and finally the re-reading that was done continuously to develop the codes and themes. The author was clear in stating how using “methods of grounded

theory...existing sociological theories and categories were used as sensitizing concepts'' (Pattillo, 1998, ¶30).

Actual dialogues of conversation were given in the data presentation. Everyone in Groveland knew who the gang leaders were, and that how they made their living was illegal and indecent. Yet, somehow, despite how the idea is controversial and confusing, the gang leaders were contributing positive social control and positive social networks for the young and old alike in the community.

This study helped ameliorate the dearth of research on black middle class families, and advanced the research on social disorganization theory by adding the idea that something considered to be a negative part of society, gangs, can now be looked at in a different light in regards to social controls in a neighborhood, at least in the community of Groveland in Illinois.

Weaknesses, unfortunately, were plentiful in this study. The goals of this research were stated in very general terms, despite having some clear grounded theory goals, which definitely left room open for clearly stated research questions. The selection of participants would be difficult to replicate, and cannot be considered a strength in this article. The participants of the 28 in-depth interviews were from one of these categories: gang leaders, social service representatives, grandparents, and toddlers. It is concerning that the author included toddlers in her in-depth interview data collection. Ethical considerations, such as informed consent for the participants and power differentials between the researcher and the participants was not disclosed, and no mention of whom

the author was, her biases and how these may have affected the research and/or the writing of this article were included.

The validity of this article is difficult to determine, as there were some significant weaknesses in this article. The author did become extremely familiar with her own data, yet she neglected to include anyone else in developing her codes. The author could have utilized more methods to help the validity of this study.

Osgood and Anderson (2004). This article utilized social disorganization theory and investigated the idea of unstructured socializing time among adolescents and how this may cause an increase in delinquency among them. Unstructured time could be seen as the time where an adolescent could become involved with gangs, due to lack of supervision, and from there inevitably become delinquent.

This article was well-done, provided lots of self-critique, and plenty of suggestions for future research and implications for practioners. The analysis of data was easily understood. First, it was presented in the introduction paragraph to the results section, and then broken down part by part as the different levels of data were analyzed. The use of the Poisson, Raudenbush, and Bryk's (2002) HLM techniques were discussed and why they were selected. There was obvious careful consideration put into why these two particular types of regression/linear modeling were used for the analysis of the data in this study.

The sample consisted of 4,358 eighth graders from 36 different schools, from 10 different cities. The information gathered in this study was part of an overall evaluation

of a school based gang prevention program, where gang membership ranged from 3 to 26 percent per school. The data came from questionnaires completed at schools in class, and the response rate was 90%. Data collection was relatively unobtrusive, as teachers were not present, and the student had an individual choice as to whether he or she filled out the survey. Therefore, evaluation apprehension was considered, and students were given a choice without penalty. The response rate was excellent, and the sample size is abundant enough to give the researchers ample statistical power to study relationships at the individual level.

The article does an exceptional job of discussing the relationships and predictions that can be made from the data on both the measures done on unstructured socializing and then delinquency, and then in the relationship between the two of these variables. The results of the study strongly supported the researchers' question that a particular population's rate of unstructured socializing would be related to its rate of delinquency.

The results and discussion section clearly discussed the beginning predictions and the end result for each of the research questions and also discussed the support of social disorganization theory, in that having routine activities, like sports or band, rather than unstructured social time with friends, does inform and complement the theory of social disorganization.

A weakness in the study was the possibility that variables other than unstructured social time could influence delinquency, but were not included in this study. The authors also state that it would be interesting for future research to study more about the routine

activities perspective, and how much this really influences less delinquency, and from there why this is such an important issue in criminology.

*Social Disorganization Theory: Synthesis in Regards to Youth Gangs*

Utilizing social disorganization theory in a research study involving the topic of youth gangs is a positive step towards looking at the problem from a holistic perspective. Any counseling practitioner taking an interest in working with gang involved youth needs to become informed about the different perspectives that human service workers and criminal justice workers have, and social disorganization's criminal justice ties allows for this to occur.

The article by Pattillo (1998) allowed for the discovery of appropriate research methods for qualitative research. It also raised the uneasy situation of gangs being considered almost acceptable in a particular community, and how this community coexisted with gangs. The Osgood and Anderson (2004) article discussed the essential issue of unsupervised time for adolescents, and how this may be a central issue of focus for future prevention and intervention programs.

*OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Prevention and Intervention Model*

The OJJDP gang prevention and intervention model was developed from social disorganization theory because it focuses on the innate idea that the lack of social opportunities available to the youth who become gang involved and the degree of social disorganization in their communities lead to the development of youth gangs (Institute for Governmental Research, 2002). The model also suggests other factors may be included

in the formation of youth gangs, such as poverty, social policy deficiencies, institutional racism, and misdirected or a complete lack of social controls (Institute for Governmental Research, 2002). Dr. Irving Spergel and his associates from the University of Chicago collected and analyzed national data from agencies working with the suppression of gangs in the early 1990's and came up with the basics of the OJJDP's gang prevention and intervention model (Institute for Governmental Research, 2002). The model was developed to assist communities in gang prevention and intervention in a comprehensive and intensive fashion.

#### *Five Strategies of the OJJDP Model*

The model incorporates five core strategies: community mobilization, opportunities provision, social intervention, suppression, and organizational change and development (Institute for Governmental Research, 2002). Community mobilization incorporates the involvement of local people, perhaps former gang members, community organizations and agencies, and involves the coordination of both programs and staff functions within and across different agencies (Institute for Governmental Research, 2002). The opportunities provision strategy involves the development of many specific educational, employment and training programs for the targeted population of the youth involved in gangs (Institute for Governmental Research, 2002). Social intervention involves the youth serving agencies, schools, any grass root organizations, faith based organizations, the police, and any other criminal justice organizations to reach out and link the gang involved youth and their families to any needed services (Institute for

Governmental Research, 2002). Suppression is both the formal and informal social control procedures, including the supervision or monitoring of the gang involved youth done by the different agencies in the criminal justice system as well as the local community agencies, grass root agencies, schools and faith based organizations (Institute for Governmental Research, 2002). Finally, organizational change and development consists of the development and implementation of the procedures and any policies that would result in the most effective use of the local community's available resources, both within and across the different agencies, to more consistently and comprehensively address the local gang problem in their individual communities (Institute for Governmental Research, 2002). The model also notes a specific process that needs to be carried out before the gang prevention and intervention model will truly be successful and includes the following: the community must acknowledge the problem of youth gangs as denial is not an option, the problem must be assessed, goals and objectives for the community must be developed which are based on the individual community's assessment of their local youth gang problem, and relevant services and activities involving all of the key agencies in the community need to be articulated and then implemented as needed, for each of the five strategies of the OJJDP plan (Institute for Governmental Research, 2002).

### *Critique of the OJJDP Model*

A model is a basic framework that is developed in a field, which can then be utilized in other fields as deemed appropriate, and seeks to guide future research on

specific topics (Miller, 1989). The OJJDP model's research was done by leading professionals who are well respected in the field of criminal justice and youth gangs. The model has been implemented in many communities across the United States since 1995, with government funding to support the implementation and evaluation of this gang prevention and intervention model (Institute for Governmental Research, 2002). This model is the leading contender for the reduction and hopeful elimination of the youth gang problem in our country. The model points out that each community needs to do a local assessment of its gang problem and from there work with the model to develop a specific community based intervention plan. The model goes over a general plan of strategies and issues that need to be dealt with before a community can begin to implement the model, and gives the community a local responsibility to develop their own targeted plan. This model has sparked much added research, and will continue to in the future.

#### *Related Empirical Research on OJJDP Model*

Gottfredson and Gottfredson (1999). The purpose of this survey study is clearly presented and seeks to discover the types of approaches being utilized by schools to either prevent or reduce gang involvement. The study points out four goals. The first is to “describe what and how much is being done in the nation’s schools to prevent or reduce gang-related problems” (Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 1999, p.2). The second goal is “to assess how well these prevention and intervention activities are being done” (Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 1999, p.2). The third goal is “to identify and describe



promising programs and practices for local schools and communities to consider for adoption” (Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 1999, p.2). The fourth and last goal is to determine “guidelines on developing programs” (Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 1999, p.2).

The survey development process was clearly presented throughout the article. First, principals were surveyed, and students and teachers followed. After discovering through surveys which activities were being utilized, the next step of surveys sought to measure the quality and quantity of the programs being implemented.

The population was defined well. The first surveys went out to principals in a probability sample of 1287 schools. The response rate for this first series of surveys was 66 %, or 848 schools. In the second phase of surveys, they obtained information about over 3700 types of activities in the schools, from persons considered to be the “activity coordinators”, from over 550 schools. In this same phase, principals were asked to provide information on three other issues: school-wide activities relating to the last 8 categories on the taxonomy list, extent of criminal activity in their school, and whether the school had problems with gangs. Responses for this survey part were obtained from 636 principals. Finally, over 13,100 teachers from 404 schools, and over 16,000 students from 310 schools returned survey responses that gave information on problem behaviors, and participation in prevention and intervention programs. The populations were broken down for further evaluation and information by elementary, middle and high levels, and rural, urban and suburban locations.

One issue for consideration would be that the survey questions never specifically focused on particular programs being used in the prevention and interventions in the schools sampled. This type of question could have added value to any previously developed program, for example the G.R.E.A.T. or the GRIP programs, and may have been a factor that actually made choosing a program for schools looking for programs that had research backing much easier than just looking at all the different types of strategies a school could be using to prevent and intervene in their gang problem.

Weisel (2002). This article utilized a multi-method form of research. The first form was a nationwide mail survey to police agencies, and the second part was a qualitative study, including the use of structured, in-person interviews with gang members from four different gangs in two separate cities.

To completely understand gangs and to work cohesively with gang members, as well as the community, one must gain an understanding of the two ways in which gangs are thought about and understood. This article does a thorough job of helping counseling practitioners understand ways to comprehend and help a gang client, as well as how to acknowledge the perspective the police and criminal justice system take upon gangs.

An important insight this article intended to focus upon was the idea that gangs start out loosely organized, yet over time they can become more structured and have more leadership. This usually means the gangs are becoming more violent, involved in more illegal activities, and this article seeks to discover how that transformation actually takes place over time.

The goals of the survey study were to identify the various types of gangs and to bring out the distinct differences between the gangs. The survey items were developed from Fagan's 1989 typology of gangs, which is a typology based upon gang member's behaviors. The types of gangs included in this research study are: violent, drug-dealing, entrepreneurial, delinquent, and social. The survey also asked questions about the way the gangs evolved over time, such as questions about the changes in leadership, the organization's characteristics, and the gang's duration. The population sample is clearly defined as 385 large municipal police agencies. The "large" police agency was described fully as agencies that serve over 100,000 or more. To make the survey even more comprehensive, the study also included a randomly selected third of all police agencies that served between 50,000 to 100,000. The response rate can be considered excellent, with an overall 82 % of the large agencies and 57 % of the smaller agencies responding. A total of the sample was also included as 286 agencies. Seventy-four percent of all the agencies surveyed responded to this research study survey. This surely makes this study have more reliability and validity than other surveys that usually cannot attain such a high response rate.

The data scoring and reporting was broken down into the police perspective and then the criminal activity of gangs. It was interesting to see how the police reported their perspective on gangs, and then later when the gang perspective was covered from the qualitative interviews, to see what even the researchers considered to be a surprising agreement between the two perspectives, in so far as what criminal activities the gangs

were involved in, as well as how the gangs would move from unorganized to more organized gang structures.

An important implication for professional practice for the police perspective was the finding that showed police are careful not to stereotype all gangs into one specific type. Another implication pointed out for police was to make sure to take into account the information presented in the second part of the study, the qualitative interviews, as the author points out that police can tend to be closed minded about how they view gangs and what they feel needs to be done to suppress them.

The qualitative research part of the study will now be discussed. The literature review points out why gangs have become such a huge topic throughout the last 20 or so years. A gap in the available literature was also pointed out, and was one of the goals of the research study; to discover how and why gangs change over time.

The goals for the qualitative part of the study were to discover the organizational structure of these gangs, including the changes that take place over time, such as transformation, and transition into groups that at times resemble organized crime groups. The authors also state that “an examination of these mature gangs may therefore provide unique insight into the effect of organizational processes on an important subset of contemporary gangs” (Weisel, 2002, p. 31). The qualitative study followed the survey study, as the information gathered from the surveys provided a “context for examining the organizational evolution of serious gangs from a different perspective-through the eyes of gang members” (Weisel, 2002, p. 37).

The analysis of the qualitative data was done utilizing two theories, organizational theory, which is related to social disorganization theory, and the FBI's Enterprise Theory of Investigation. The gang members chosen for the semi-structured interviews were identified through probation and prison sources in each city. Researchers attempted to interview only intensively involved gang members, and also kept track and attempted to keep as even as possible the number of members interviewed from each of the four gangs. Each participant was assured of confidentiality, and shows the researchers took time to give informed consent to each gang member who participated.

This article presented the picture that the researcher may not have been familiar with qualitative research format and methods, as there was no mention of who the researcher was, what his or her own personal biases may have been, no attempts to reduce the bias influences, and no mention of how the researcher's personal biases can influence the data obtained. There was also no mention of the power differential that may have existed between the researcher and the gang member, and how this may have played a role in influencing the data obtained. The actual interview process and collection of data was not clear in the article. There was no mention of where the interviews took place, how long the interviews were or exactly what questions were asked. The presentation of the data collected in the interviews did not mention coding of the interviews, or of having the data formed into common themes. This would make the qualitative part of the study difficult to replicate.

*OJJDP Gang Prevention and Intervention Model: Synthesis in Regards to Youth Gangs*

Utilizing the OJJDP's gang prevention and intervention model in a research study with youth gangs is undoubtedly essential. This model stresses the essence of looking at youth gangs as a holistic issue within a community, which relates directly back to the ecological system a child grows up in that may have somehow encouraged a youth to become gang involved, as well as the social disorganization of a youth's community and how it effected the development of the youth. Therefore, tying both a holistic view of the youth, as well as a holistic view of the youth's community influences, seems worthwhile as a new perspective for this proposed research study.

#### *Gaps in the Literature and Future Research Needs*

There are many gaps in the research on youth gangs. First, we must develop an agreement on exactly what a youth gang is, and whether or not they should be studied as a separate entity from adult criminal gangs. Second, research must begin to focus more on empirically testing the available programs in prevention, intervention and suppression. Once this is done, we can begin to replicate successful programs in other areas, and test for their generalizability. These programs also need to be related to academic theories, so the world of academia will consider these programs seriously and then begin that ever so needed empirical research. Next, there needs to be more internally focused research on the youth gang members, rather than always trying to blame external forces on the youth's gang involvement. Risk factors have been identified, but what about resilience factors? What else can we be doing as a society to keep kids away from gangs, and what is really working in particular programs they are already involved in? What makes some

kids in impoverished areas join gangs, and many others choose not to join? And again, what makes some kids in gangs think they have a chance with help from intervention programs for a better life, while other kids provided with the same opportunities for intervention choose not to try this route? All research on youth gangs has one goal in the end, that whatever we learn about gangs needs to be considered in making the programs we have available on prevention, intervention and suppression more effective.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHOD

The main goals of this research study were to discover what the lived experiences of youth gang members are like in an area where gangs are an emerging issue. Most research done on youth gangs has to do with prevention, intervention, and suppression of the gang. While this is important, this study sought answers that were more interpersonal, and dealt more with the developmental aspects involved in a youth gang members life that may have led up to them becoming a gang involved youth. All of the information gathered will hopefully lead to suggestions for improvement in gang prevention, intervention and suppression programs, but was not the overall intention of this research study. Instead, this research study sought to hear the voices of youth gang members, and see them as real people who are struggling with many issues in their lives. Due to the fact that this study used a qualitative approach, much of this chapter is an explanation of qualitative research and how it was specifically utilized for this research study.

This research study utilized a phenomenological approach to accomplish its research goals, keeping in mind that whatever information flowed from the data is what was discovered in this study. There were no preconceived notions about what type of data or answers to research questions came about from the research investigation. Instead, what was discovered was found from whatever the participants allowed us to discover. This study utilized three forms of data collection. First, semi-structured



interviews were conducted. Next, neighborhood maps were drawn by the participants. Finally participants were given disposable cameras to take photographs of issues related to the research questions. The study involved examining reported perceptions and behaviors, developmental histories, neighborhood settings, and photographic pictures related to the research questions. Explanations of the three sources of data collection are discussed in detail in the next section on research design.

Phenomenological research has no preconceived ideas about what will be discovered, therefore the only areas utilized in this research proposal from the literature review were the background ideas associated with each research question. Questions one and two can be related to ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and social disorganization theory (Shaw & Mc Kay, 1969); and questions three and four can be related to the OJJDP Gang Prevention and Intervention Model (Institute for Governmental Research, 2002). Hopefully the research from this study provided further insight into the lives of youth gang members in emerging areas, and led to some helpful suggestions for emerging area prevention, intervention, and suppression programs for youth gang members. The design of this research study was developed to provide insight into the following qualitative research questions:

1. What is the deep, rich, lived experience of youth who become gang involved in an area where gangs are an emerging issue, and how do the people that influence them the most contribute to their gang involvement?

2. What is the deep, rich, lived experience of youth who become gang involved in an area where gangs are an emerging issue, and how do the places they live in contribute to their gang involvement?
3. What is the deep, rich, lived experience of youth currently involved in a gang intervention program, and from their perspective what is helping them the most in the program and what do they see most helping other gang involved youth in the future?
4. What is the deep, rich lived experience of gang involved youth currently involved in an intervention program in regards to how they see themselves as different from their other gang involved peers who are not choosing to get into intervention programs? What makes them seek help towards a more positive future, while others choose not to do so?

#### Research Design

This study utilized a phenomenological approach, meaning it sought the shared meaning of experiences for several individuals on what the life of a youth gang member is like (McCaslin & Scott, 2003). Using a phenomenological approach was well suited to this research study because, despite the extensive literature review in Chapter 2, according to Lopez and Willis (2004), a researcher who is knowledgeable about available literature on a proposed topic allows the realization of what particular areas have been understudied in a subject area, and is therefore able to design a useful research study and

produce meaningful and needed knowledge. At this point, the three types of data collection are discussed in detail.

The first collection of data involved a semi-structured interview that was done individually with each of the 4 participants. The second type of data collection was a neighborhood map. In an article called *Revealing the Cues within Community Places: Stories of Identity, History, and Possibility*, by Nowell, Berkowitz, Deacon, and Foster-Fishman (2006), there is an important discussion on the issue of the quality of the place where you live, and how this issue can have an effect on the children regarding their overall well-being and even their health. Nowell et al. (2006) further discuss the social issues that influence a neighborhood, and how there are many different levels and ways these levels connect, all of which have an effect on the human development in that neighborhood. The research in the Nowell et al. article utilizes photovoice, and allows us to see how the drawing of a neighborhood map by gang members for this research study would compliment the use of the photovoice method.

The third form of data collection, the photovoice method, needs to be discussed thoroughly, as it is a relatively new form of research and data collection. The photography involved in this study utilized photovoice as its model to gain qualitative information on the research questions. Photovoice is defined as a “process by which people can identify, represent, and enhance their community through a specific photographic technique” (Photovoice, n.d.). Photovoice is a useful way to obtain data in a qualitative research study, as again the main focus is to allow the voices of the

participants to be heard. Photovoice is a blend of social action and photography, and allows “the possibility of perceiving the world from the viewpoint of the people who lead lives that are different from those traditionally in control of the means for imaging the world” (Photovoice, n.d.). Photovoice has three goals: it allows people in their community to record and reflect both the strengths and the problems from their point of view-not an outsider’s, it promotes dialogue about issues of their communities through photographs and discussions of them, and it hopefully engages policymakers to eventually make changes and better the lives of those in the studied community (Photovoice, n.d.).

Other research articles give value to the use of photovoice as a reputable form of data collection. In Perry (2006), the discussion as to why photovoice is such a useful technique is addressed as it allows the participant to become active in the research as an expert in their world. This compliments the idea behind phenomenological methods of research, as well as qualitative research, in that they both desire for the participant’s voice to be heard. Photovoice allows the participant to inform the researcher of significant and important data through visual images they choose to photograph (Perry, 2006). Perry also gives reference to many reputable research articles previously utilizing photovoice with populations such as rural Chinese women, homeless and low socioeconomic African American women, and Bosnian refugee youth (see Bender, Harbour, Thorp, & Morris, 2001; Berman, Ford-Bilboe, Moutrey, & Cekic, 2001; Gallo, 2002; LeClerc, Wells, Craig, & Wilson, 2002, in Perry, 2006). Another article, *Using Methods That Matter:*

*The Impact of Reflection, Dialogue, and Voice* by Foster-Fishman, Nowell, Deacon, Nievar, and McCann (2005) also mentions the previously listed articles in Perry (2006), as well as others, and states that photovoice has proven itself as an important and flexible research tool, especially in regards to asset mapping, which is similar to this study's neighborhood map, as it sought out the positive as well as negative components of each gang member's neighborhood. Perry also goes on to discuss how photovoice allows additional information that would not be available in interview form to come out, therefore complimenting the use of interviews and photovoice in the same research study.

### Participants

The 4 participants were all male, and included 2 Latinos and 2 African Americans. The ages of the participants were 18-23 years of age. All of the participants are currently involved in an at-risk, gang prevention and intervention program being run by a local community service organization that is located in an area where youth gangs are considered to be an emerging issue. The community is a large Southeastern city where the population is constantly growing. All participants volunteered to be a part of the community program, and participate on their own, not because they have been forced by the courts or other terms. Coaches selected 4 participants who provided a racially mixed balance, keeping in mind youth who came regularly enough to be available for interviews, as well as who would be willing to open up in an interview style research project.

## Researcher as the Interviewer

The researcher was an outsider, meaning she was different in gender, ethnicity, and life circumstances from the participants. The positives in this outsider status were the interviewer kept a non-judgmental position with the participants, and was able to obtain data that an insider may have obtained but could have written about with personal knowledge involved, therefore possibly tainting the information and/or the way in which the research may have been written.

In order to reduce any personal bias associated with interviewing or interpreting the research data, the researcher kept a journal that kept her aware of her personal feelings or biases that were present during the process.

## Instrumentation

### *Semi-Structured Interview*

A semi-structured interview was done individually with each of the 4 participants by the researcher. Interviews were conducted in the same facility as the program, in a separate, private room, to ensure confidentiality and quality taping of the interviews. The interview began by obtaining consent to tape the conversation on the audiotape, continued with demographic information questions, and finished with the interview questions relating to the research questions. Appendix F is a list of all the interview questions. Interviews were audio taped and later transcribed by the researcher.

### *Neighborhood Map*

All participants were asked to draw a neighborhood map in a group session with the researcher. The neighborhood map allowed each gang member the opportunity to show where they live, where gangs exist in their neighborhood, where gangs hang out, where parties take place, and where drugs or other illegal activities exist in their neighborhood. Gang members were also asked to show where any helpful adults exist, and perhaps to describe how that helpful adult or structure plays a part in positively affecting that neighborhood. Appendix E includes the directions utilized for the neighborhood map drawing session.

### *Photovoice*

The final assignment the participants had in this research study was the use of the photovoice technique. Photovoice allowed for a third form of data to be collected and interpreted, therefore allowing for a triangulation of interpreted data to occur. Participants all went through training on photovoice and its ethical issues, as well as in how to use a disposable camera, what types of photos the research hoped to obtain from each of them, and how to obtain consent from any people they photographed. Appendix E includes the directions utilized for the photovoice training sessions.

### Procedure

Appendix E includes a detailed outline of each session that was held with the researcher and the participants. There were five sessions from start to the finish, and these included obtaining consent from the participants to participate in the study. The

outline in Appendix E also includes a timeline of approximately how long each session was and what each session accomplished. The objectives for each session and materials needed for each session are also included in Appendix E. Consent forms for the participant to partake in the research study, as well as the 3 different photovoice consent forms, are available in Appendices A, B, C, and D.

### Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis is a time consuming but interesting process for those who are committed to its usefulness. First, the interviews were transcribed by the researcher. Next, the process involved coming up with codes, and then themes. Coding was done utilizing multiple coders, and assisted with the validity of the process. The semi-structured interview transcribed data was all coded by hand on paper.

An interpretivist/constructivist framework was used to interpret the qualitative data. This type of phenomenology stems from hermeneutics, whereby knowledge is socially constructed by all involved in the research process, and research is a product of the values of the researcher (personal communication, Dr. P. Martin, 2006).

Hermeneutics goes beyond a general descriptive look at core concepts and essences in data to discover meanings within everyday life practices. Focus could be considered to be on what humans actually experience rather than what they are aware of consciously (Lopez & Willis, 2004).



### *Coding and Themes*

This study utilized the coding and thematic analysis method presented in Creswell (2007), which is a simplified version of the Moustakas (1994) method. Creswell's method is easy to understand and put into usage to analyze data (see Creswell, 2007, p. 159-160). Codes are tags or labels given to units of meaning to descriptive or inferential information gathered in qualitative research, attached to chunks of words, phrases, whole sentences or paragraphs (Basil, 2003). The specific type of coding that was used in this project was emic coding, which are codes that emerge from the data as a result of the reviewing of the data for inherent concepts and patterns (personal communication, Dr. P. Martin, 2006).

### *Validity*

Many forms of validity were used in this research study. Qualitative data involves many issues in validity, reliability, and biases, therefore, the researcher kept a journal throughout the entire process to discover any preconceived biases before the interviews began, as well as to continually evaluate her own biases about gang members, the process of interviewing, the use of two newer forms of data collection of photovoice and neighborhood mapping with gang members, and any other concerns that may have arisen during the process. Whenever a researcher makes certain to continually reveal her own personal biases and how this may effect the research, the researcher is utilizing a process of validity called researcher reflexivity, which is a validity procedure in

qualitative research whereby researchers self disclose personal beliefs, assumptions, and biases (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Triangulation was used as a qualitative type of validity, as the neighborhood maps and photographs helped give reliability and validity to some of the issues brought up in the qualitative interview questions. Being able to discover if all three forms of data collection encountered similar codes and themes was the reasoning behind the use of the triangulation method for validity purposes. The thick, rich description looked for in the responses during the interviews again gave more validity to the proposed study.

Collaboration between the researcher and the research participants in deciding what to label on their maps, which photographs to take, and whether or not they choose to share viewing opportunities for their photographs provided yet another strong showing of the many attempts to validate any data obtained. Multiple coders and consensus coding were utilized, and again, is another attempt this study sought to incorporate to improve validity in the study.

### Summary

The qualitative data has been written up in a story format, in an easy to read and easy to understand format. Much of how the researcher wrote up the findings of this study was based upon the Dalla (2000) article on streetwalking prostitutes. The article was well presented, beginning with the developmental life histories of each participant, following with common themes well depicted and discussed. This researcher utilized

similar write up procedures in this study, as the method clearly depicted the daily lives of its participants.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

A biography of each of the 4 male participants will be presented first. Next, common themes discovered from the data will be introduced and then examples of the theme's descriptions from the three types of data will be given in accordance with the research question for which they coincide. The researcher was careful to continue journaling throughout the entire research process, from the beginning of the data collection, through the coding and then the thematic development. This allowed the researcher to continually keep aware of her biases and to keep these biases from entering into the interviewing, mapping and photovoice processes, the coding and thematic development processes, and finally the writing and analysis process.

#### Participant Biographies

##### *Participant Mosco*

Mosco is an 18 year old Latino male. He is currently attending high school. He is a junior, and hopes to graduate next year. He works at a fast food restaurant, and likes his job. His first language is Spanish. He speaks English well, but his confidence level with speaking the language is low. He states, "I wish I could talk it." He is not a gang member, but has acquaintances that are gang members. He has been coming to the intervention program for about 7 months now because he hopes to become a professional boxer. His nickname means fly, and he chose that name because he is very light and quick on his feet in the boxing ring. He is thin, muscular, and clean cut in appearance,

and is friendly but a bit shy to start the interview. He found out about the program from a high school social worker. He admits he mostly hangs around with American friends, and seems to be trying to acculturate into the American teenage population. His total time in America has only been about a year and a half.

Mosco was born in Mexico City, Mexico. In Mexico he lived with his mother, his brother, sister, and his little brother. His father left when Mosco was 3 years old, and he admits he “hurts about it.” They have had no communication. Mosco describes his childhood as happy, but that they lived in the “ghetto” of Mexico City. He describes “ghetto” as a neighborhood that is very poor and dirty. He describes his mom as a very hard worker, who managed to take her family from the ghetto of Mexico City to what Mosco describes as a nice townhouse still inside the city, but in a nice and newer part of the city. His oldest sister took care of Mosco and his other siblings while his mother worked long hours. His mother bought the townhouse when Mosco was 13, and still owns it today. Other family living in Mexico resides there currently. It is a large townhouse, with 4 bedrooms. When asked if Mosco intends to stay in America or not, he admits if he can make it professionally in boxing here in the US, he may stay.

Mosco has had continuous and steady education, both in Mexico City and here in America. He attended one elementary school in Mexico City, one middle school in Mexico City and one here in the USA, and one high school in the USA. He reports he does well in school, but as he is getting older he finds it more challenging and worries as

to whether he'll be able to graduate on time or at all. Mosco admits the language barrier makes school challenging.

Regarding gang involvement, Mosco discussed in detail his early beginnings in Mexico City with fighting and concealed weapons. He said there were no formal gangs with names like the Bloods or Crips, but instead groups of family members that would call upon each other to fight or hang out together.

This intervention program was the second program of its type that Mosco has attended. The first program was in Mexico City, and also consisted of boxing. He says he is most proud of his physical shape after attending this intervention program in America, and dreams of becoming a professional boxer.

Mosco's interview ended with him stating he has a friend that is in a gang and that he intended to start bringing him to this program to see if his friend could get away from the gang and stop hanging around with his old buddies.

#### *Participant Fuerte*

Fuerte is an 18 year old Latino American male. He had dropped out of high school a couple times, and last year dropped out for good. He is currently unemployed, but is looking for a steady job. He has been attending the intervention program for about 5 years now. He comes because he enjoys boxing and getting in shape. He heard about the program from some friends at school. He is not a gang member, but does hang around with friends who are gang members. His first language is Spanish, but he can

speak English, although he does struggle with his second language. He speaks Spanish with his family and his friends, and all his close friends are Latino.

Fuerte was born in California, and moved to North Carolina when he was around 8 years old. He lives with his mother, his mother's boyfriend, and his younger siblings. Fuerte admits that his mom's boyfriend used to be his best friend and that at first the situation was strange and uncomfortable, but seems now to be just fine. Fuerte's dad was in the home a few years ago, until his mom found out that his dad had a girlfriend, and he moved out. Fuerte states he never really sees his father, but they do have some communication because at one point in the interview Fuerte stated he had bought a vehicle from him.

Fuerte's educational background was consistent and steady, until he attended high school. He attended one elementary school in California, and then one here in North Carolina. He attended only one middle school and only one high school here in North Carolina. It's obvious he really struggles with the English language, and he stated that this was the cause of him dropping out of high school.

Fuerte did not speak much about his gang involved friends. However, he spoke a lot about his cars and the intervention program. His first car was an Expedition, and he seemed very proud of it. He was working at a restaurant, and wasn't making enough to continue to pay for the Expedition, so he had to sell that. Now he has a mustang.

In regards to the intervention program, Fuerte admits he is most proud of his muscles, and even shows me his arm muscles with a big smile on his face. They are

indeed muscular. His interview nickname means strong in Spanish, and he decided on that nickname after the researcher pointed out that the Spanish word for strong was fuerte. He also talks a lot about the coaches and how helpful they have been to him over the years. He says his favorite coach is trying to get him into a GED program, although he comments he isn't sure about following through with his high school equivalency.

Fuerte's interview ended with him talking about his girlfriend. He says he wants to get married now, but that his favorite coach keeps telling him to wait until he's older and has a better job. He seems to be in agreement with this advice for now.

### *Participant Alto*

Alto is a 20 year old African American male. He graduated from a public alternative high school about 2 years ago. He currently works at a prison cafeteria, and has had this job since he was 16 years old. He enjoys the kitchen prep work and preparing the food, and the women who work with him. Alto has only been attending the intervention program for about 3 months. He briefly states he boxes some with the other program participants. He talked a lot about the mentors and coaches in the program and how helpful they have been to him. Alto is not a gang member, but admits he got "beat in" a couple of times, but says he just thinks they knew he wasn't "going to be cool with the whole gang thing" and let him be. Perhaps it's because his nickname Alto means tall in Spanish, and he most certainly is tall and even daunting in appearance.

Alto was born in New Jersey, near Compton. Alto grew up with his mom. She is a single mother, and at times would send Alto to live with his grandmother because he



admits his behavior would get out of control and his mom would need the help with him. Alto states his dad wasn't around when he was growing up, but that he has just started a relationship with his father and it is going okay for now. He lives now with his mom and his younger brothers. Alto moved to North Carolina when he was in middle school, just after his grandmother noticed he was hanging around with some bad kids. His mother moved him to North Carolina to get away from the bad situation he had gotten himself involved in.

Alto's educational career was spread out in many different schools. He attended 2 elementary schools in New Jersey, and one middle school in North Carolina. Then his high school experience included 2 different regular public high schools, and ended successfully with graduation from an alternative high school designed for kids with behavior and attendance problems.

Regarding Alto's gang involvement, he admits the bad kids he began hanging around with in New Jersey were Bloods, and that he became heavily involved in selling drugs with these kids and on his own. During middle school he was able to buy himself lots of clothes and jewelry, and this was when his grandmother stepped in and told him he could no longer stay with her because she didn't want all that trouble in her home. Alto said he greatly respects his grandmother for sticking up for herself and the safety she demanded in her own home.

Alto's intervention program experience appears to be different from the other 3 participants because his main reason for attending the program seems not to be for the

boxing and physical fitness, but instead for the role models available and the advice he gets regarding his future. Alto also admits it is amazing to have someone to actually listen to everything he has to say about where he is now and where he hopes to get in his life. His plans include attending a local community college and getting a 2 year degree in culinary arts. Alto says he lives in a nice neighborhood and he'd like to be able to stay there. He realizes he needs to keep out of trouble and get on a healthy pathway for his life.

To conclude the history regarding Alto, it is interesting to point out that Alto had an entrepreneurial spirit from a very young age. As a youngster after having sold candy bars for his church, Alto broke out on his own with another friend and they would buy candy bars in bulk and then re-sell them individually. He said he made a lot of money for a kid back then. He was able to buy himself video games and clothes.

#### *Participant Stamina*

Stamina is a 23 year old African American male. He dropped out of high school his senior year, right after spring break. He was taking AP Biology, AP English, and Honors American Studies. He is obviously very bright, and states he completely regrets his decision to drop out of school. Stamina is extremely well-spoken, with a wonderfully colorful vocabulary; switching back and forth between street slang and highly educated vocabulary words. He says he got involved in selling drugs, and never looked back. The money was incredible, and Stamina admits it actually scared him because the amount of money he was making was beyond belief. Stamina is currently unemployed. At the

beginning of the interview, Stamina explained he had some quick business to take care of, stuff he probably shouldn't elaborate on, and left the interview saying he would return. One of the coaches confirmed that Stamina was still involved in selling drugs, and was told to never conduct deals on or near the program site. The coach assured the researcher that Stamina would return, as he was a man of his word. He did return, was apologetic for the time the researcher had to wait, and was more than accommodating to the researcher and participating in the interview session. He also admitted he was still involved in selling drugs, and that the money was just too good to give up at this point in his life. Stamina stated it was next to impossible to get a legally paid job because he has 2 previous felony convictions and had spent a lot of time in the prison system.

Stamina was born at Camp Pendleton. His father was in the military, so they moved around a lot. He states they lived for a long time in California, and then they moved to a couple of different places in North Carolina. Stamina makes it very clear many times during the interview that he is "very different from his family." He talks a lot about how people perceive him upon first glance, that all they see are the tattoos. He agrees many see him as a "thug."

Stamina's mother was physically abusive to him and his sister while they were growing up. Stamina talked about how the stress of having a dad that was in the military and who was gone all the time frustrated his mom greatly, and she took out her anger and frustrations on both he and his sister physically. He shows the researcher a visible scar on his lip from one beating. He went on to say the cycle of abuse changed when he and

his sister got old and big enough to fight back. He states he “is over it all now”, and that he and his mother are trying to work on a relationship at this point in their lives.

Throughout the interview it is unclear as to whether he has either a great respect for women or a great disdain, and specifically talks about the power women possess over men, especially in regards to sexual power. He talked at great length about how he prefers to date older women because he can have intelligent conversations with them, but later in the interview did a complete 360 degree turn and said that he “doesn’t want to waste his time on a woman right now.” He said he has bigger and better plans right now for his future, but that someday in the future he hopes to have a family.

Stamina had a lot to talk about regarding his educational career. Much of his learning appears to have been self-taught. He first began talking about how he loves to read, and said, “Yeah, that’s like my biggest thing, like, reading for me, it takes me out of reality.” He would take his drug profits and go to Barnes & Nobles and buy books. He talked about enjoying reading books on Egyptian mythology and science fiction, and how he loves to watch the history channel and Nancy Grace on cable. His favorite classes were English and American History because he loved to read, and foreign language classes, but he struggled greatly with math. He said “Numbers has always looked backward to me...I was even tested for dyslexia.” A direct quote was, “I was a smart kid in school but I would sum it up with I was a troublemaker cuz I had a lot of family problems.” Stamina is looking into a GED program so he can complete his high school equivalency and continue onto a community college.

Stamina has been heavily gang involved since the age of 15. When asked which gang he affiliates with he stated, “The one that wears red.” He is what they call a “Piru for Life”, which means a Blood for Life. Stamina describes this phenomena as, “I got laid down, they let me know right then and there, ya know, do what you gonna do, but it for real, it ain’t no out, it ain’t no get none...Its till the casket drops.” Stamina said he joined the gang here in North Carolina, but had family members growing up in California that were gang involved.

Stamina’s appearance stands out among the participants. Because he is in work out gear of a tank top and shorts, his clothing allows one to see many of his tattoos. He is covered from head to foot in tattoos; arms, chest, back, neck, hands and legs. One program coach said if we hit it off that Stamina would very likely be willing to talk about and show his tattoos. One coach stated that every single tattoo on his body has some sort of association with his gang. Stamina was sharing many private issues in his life, so the researcher did approach the subject of the tattoos later in the interview. He willingly showed all the tattoos, including ones stating Piru and one for his uncle that was killed in a gang shooting, and the one that identified which set his gang was.

Stamina talked about the intervention program as being a place that gave him something to look forward to. He said he doesn’t have too many dreams he can realize, so that when he steps in the ring, he feels like there could be a future for him in professional boxing. He says, “You lookin’ at 8 million dollars right here. I know I’m

just that good.” Stamina has been attending and working out with a favorite coach in the intervention program for around 7 years now, off and on.

Stamina shared many private times about his life, and how being gang involved had played a part in these times. A very touching story he shared was about how his first love had gotten pregnant, and was going to have his child. He beamed with pride about this idea, but his demeanor quickly changed to sadness when he admitted she had a miscarriage. He admitted she was “down” too with the gang life, and had gotten “rolled up on”, and the baby had been beaten out of her. Stamina admitted he hasn’t dealt with this loss in his life. “I still haven’t dealt with I...cuz the only thing I was used to was, you know, you gotta suck it up, you know, no cryin’. But when you are responsible for a life not bein’ here, ya know, eventually I’ll burn for half the shit I done cuz I know I should be in prison right now.” It seems gang life is a hard habit to break, no matter what circumstances it seems to bring into one’s life.

#### Common Themes

The themes that emerged from combining all three different forms of qualitative data, (the semi-structured interviews, the neighborhood maps and the photovoice pictures), together were *education; high risk lifestyle; language and language issues; life goals and dreams; living environment; monetary influences; negative issues, emotional repercussions, and coping mechanisms; positive human influences; pride and socially acceptable behaviors; role of women; and role of structured program intervention.*

*Education* is a theme that includes both positives like the value of education as well as issues that affect the quality of the education the participants received, like truancy and academic struggles. *High risk lifestyle* is a theme that includes such phenomena as weapons, criminal behavior, criminal records and what the participants described as a bad attitude perhaps causing all of these issues to lead to a type of lifestyle that was indeed dangerous in nature. *Language and language issues* is a theme that includes the issue of English being a second language, and the issue of acculturation. *Life goals and dreams* is a theme that includes pathways for the future that are being thought about at this stage in life, as well as any life philosophies the participants may be trying to live by. *Living environment* is a theme that includes all types of living situations and settings, like the ghetto or apartments. *Monetary influences* is a theme that includes the issue that money gives you a higher form of status, the issue of legal versus illegal types of employment, the issue that some of the participants were rather entrepreneurial in spirit, and the rewards of selling drugs. *Negative issues, emotional repercussions, and coping mechanisms* is a theme that includes issues like adultery the participants parents were involved in and how this affected the participants lives, the cycle of physical abuse, lack of male role models, emotional trauma, and finally issues of escape and fear of violence. *Positive human influences* includes issues such as extended family support, having an older sibling acting as a parental figure, positive peer and role model influences, racial appreciation and how listening done by these positive human influences can be helpful. *Pride and socially acceptable behaviors* includes issues like pride,

positive body image, higher level of thinking processes, accomplishments and appropriate aggressive releases. *Role of women* is a theme that includes positive aspects on single mothers, the value of women in the participants' lives, and even sexual power women possess. Finally, the *structured program intervention* theme includes first and second interventions, length in the program, and the idea of having a safe haven or safe place to get off the streets and away from gang influences. Next, common themes discovered from the data will be described in further detail with direct examples in the participants' own voices, in accordance to the research question for which they coincide. Auditing of the researcher's journal kept during the study's process determined that the researcher had done everything possible to eliminate her personal biases from the study process, as well as in the analysis and writing up of the results. It instead allowed for the participants' voices to be heard as clearly as possible.

#### Research Question One Findings

Research question one asks about the deep, rich, lived experiences of youth who become gang involved in an area where gangs are just emerging, and whether or not the most influential people in their lives have anything to do with them becoming gang involved. In order to answer this question, triangulation of the qualitative data was used. Below are four of the common themes discovered in the data which assist us in answering the first research question; *negative issues, emotional repercussions, and coping mechanisms; positive human influences; role of women; and high risk lifestyle.*



### *Negative Issues, Emotional Repercussions, and Coping Mechanisms*

This theme helped us hear through the voices of the participants' what people related issues impacted their lives negatively, the emotional repercussions that followed those negative issues, and how each participant coped with problems and problem people in their life. Research question one was concerned with how all these issues may have tied into the participants becoming gang involved. Two of the four participants had father figures somewhat available to them during their younger years. Fuerte had a father in his home until about the age of 15. His father left as a result of having an affair, and appeared to have all but disappeared from his life once he moved out. Stamina had a military career father, who was gone most of the time for his service requirements. This stress, he makes clear, was the cause behind him being a physically abused child. He stated, "Yeah, my father was hardly ever there" and "My parents they didn't care." Both Fuerte and Stamina suffered emotional repercussions from these person related events, Stamina both physically and emotionally, and Fuerte emotionally. The other two participants, Alto and Mosco, did not have a male role model of any sort while growing up that was mentioned. While not necessarily stated outright, one wonders what sort of emotional impact Alto and Mosco had as a result of not having a father figure in their life. Both made sure to mention in their interviews that they were either currently attempting to form a relationship with their father (Alto), or that they were aware their dad was trying to find them and talk with them (Mosco).

Another person related issue one participant went through growing up was adultery. Fuerte's mom discovered his dad had a girlfriend, causing the dad to move out, which in turn caused great stress on the family. Fuerte's own words show the hurt this caused in his own life: "He didn't love my mom anymore. He left to be with his girlfriend." A third person related issue was Stamina's physically abusive mother. "This wasn't no like... belt, this was like a man whoopin' on a man." Stamina seemed to have it particularly rough in his family, with a dad gone all the time, and an abusive mom. He is also the only participant who admits heavy gang involvement.

A fourth person related issue that arose from the data was the issue of who was the most negative person that impacted your life. Two of the four participants, Mosco and Fuerte, both went with their fathers as being the worst influence while they were growing up. Both made references to the fact that it was because they are and were not available to them as role models. The other two participants, Stamina and Alto, both stated they were their own worst influences. They took a lot of self responsibility for getting involved with the negative influences themselves. However, when we look more closely into the data they provided, it is clear there were definitely evidences of people close to them in their life that certainly may have played a part in them eventually becoming gang involved. Alto talked about some bad kids he began hanging around with in New Jersey. "I was startin' to hang with some Bloods, and get involved in all the sellin' stuff." He relates all his drug selling activity and gang beat in's to hanging around with these kids, and perhaps if he had not met, or if someone had interfered with these

newly forming relationships with these “bad kids” he may not have gotten involved in selling drugs and hanging out with gang members. Stamina mentions a favorite uncle as his most positive influential person in his life; the same uncle that was killed in a gang related and drug related incident.

In regards to coping measures discovered in the data due to the negative human interactions, Stamina mentioned how he loved to read and that reading was his escape. He talked incessantly about reading helping him greatly; therefore this aspect of the theme could not be overlooked as unimportant.

### *Positive Human Influences*

This theme allowed us to see from the viewpoint of the participant who had made a positive impact on their life. While some people may not regard the following people as positive role models in the lives of some of these participants, it is not up to us to say so. Instead, we need to hear what these participants said about their choices as positive role models, and learn from this information. Not long after the separation of his family, Fuerte had to deal with his mother taking his best friend in as a live-in boyfriend. This best friend was an older male role model in Fuerte’s life, and still is to this day. Fuerte states, “My mom’s boyfriend lives with us too. He used to be my friend. But now he’s my mom’s boyfriend. It was [weird] at first, but now it’s cool.” It appears Fuerte suffered emotional repercussions, even if temporary, from losing his best male friend to his own mother. This issue is what the research team considered to be a major life role reversal.

Stamina talked about his favorite uncle, whom he is named after, and that was killed in a gang/drug related death. This uncle was his favorite person when he was a younger child, because, “he spent time with me, and I always wanted to go everywhere with him.” While Stamina discussed his uncle as a positive role model in his life, this researcher was hard put to add this uncle into the theme of a positive human influence in this young man’s interpretation of his life. So far, in following his dead uncle’s footsteps, the results of selling drugs, breaking and entering, stealing, and spending time behind bars with 2 felonies, does not appear to have made this uncle a very positive figure in Stamina’s life. However, in making sure not to put the researcher’s own bias into the interpretation, we must hear instead what Stamina said, that his uncle simply spent time with him, and he looked up to him. Perhaps we can learn something from this event in Stamina’s life history.

Alto talked about the teachers in his alternative school and how hard they worked to help him to graduate on time at age 18. Mosco also discussed how a school social worker helped him find out about the intervention program he now attends. Mosco’s photographs depicted many pictures of his younger family members. There were two children, about age 2 and four, and an infant. Many of the photos showed interaction between the family members, or between Mosco himself with one of the young children playing or hugging. Alto also discussed how “I thought all the guys selling were all cool, they had money all the time.” It is interesting to discover that a child can have such positive influences like teachers, but also be equally, or even more so, influenced by what

most people would consider to be very negative influences. For example, the kids selling drugs that Alto thought were “cool.” Instead of placing our own values on what many people may consider to be negative influences in a child’s developmental years, we instead need to take in and truly listen to what these four participants all said about positive role models, the roles these people played in their lives, and how these role models changed the lives of these children.

### *Role of Women*

This theme gave us insight into the role that women play in the lives of these four participants, and from there we can perhaps look into why or how these women may or may not have played a role in these participants becoming gang involved. This theme deals with a positive outlook on women, respect for women, and the power they possess. Stamina had some interesting perspectives on women and their roles in his life. Despite the information we now have on the abusive childhood he endured at the hands of his mother, Stamina still seeks out and even respects an opinion from his mother. “I asked her what she would say if I brought an older woman home.” She went on to say it was his decision, but that she needed to have “some type of respect about herself.” Stamina also talked about how he feels the political race could “use another point of view.” He was referring to his support for Hillary Clinton, because she is a woman. He went into this topic further by discussing a book he had read called “Sex for Kings.” Stamina said it had to do with women at the time of kings and queens, and how many women were actually the ones making many powerful decisions of the wars between kingdoms

because they were sleeping with the kings and would use their sexual power to gain what they wanted politically. He even went as far as saying “Women have power between their legs.” He also spoke extensively about how he prefers to date older women. “I basically like older women simply because of the fact that I don’t have to beat around the bush...as far as sexually as far as mentally as far as bein’ comfortable with their own bodies...Its just I feel more comfortable with older women, the conversation is what turns me on.”

Alto, Fuerte and Mosco all chose their mothers as the most influential people in their lives. All three moms were single moms, Fuerte’s mom at a later date than the other two, but all were said to be very hard workers who encouraged their sons to stay in school and work hard. All three also stated that despite how challenging a single mom’s life can be, that there mom’s were “always there for them.” Alto also had great respect for his grandmother, even though she ended up kicking him out of her house due to the gang activity and drug selling. Mosco had two important statements that seem to describe the role of women in his life, specifically his mom, “If she couldn’t make it, then I couldn’t make it either” and “I could never live without my mom.” The photographs Mosco and Fuerte took both had many pictures of women, moms and either girlfriends or sisters.

The role women play in the lives of these young men was specific enough that the theme of the *role of women* certainly deserved a separate title from the more general *positive human influences*.

### *High Risk Lifestyle*

This theme describes the attitudes, behaviors and criminal issues that encompass what the coding team described as a high risk lifestyle. Stamina had a couple of statements that fully encompass the aura of this theme: “You take the sugar with the shit. That’s the life of it” and “I mean what come around go around and eventually you gonna either catch a bullet or catch some time-one or the other. So if you think your shit don’t stink and sugar is sweet, you feel me? The truth is a hard pill to swallow.” These two statements give a thorough description of this theme’s meaning. Taking the “sugar with the shit” refers to you reap the rewards of drug selling and gang affiliation, but you also take the repercussions with it. For example time in jail and the loss of loved ones due to gang activity are some that Stamina himself has faced. More examples of the criminal behavior Stamina described were, “Yeah...I actually worked at a movie theater. And then I robbed it...I robbed it twice. I broke into the place and held a gun to the manager’s head.” One interesting code the team found that is encompassed into this theme of a high risk lifestyle was fatalistic behavior. An example of this was when the researcher asked Stamina if he was always looking over his shoulder due to his constant criminal behavior and the risk it possesses over his life, he responded, “Well I don’t cuz if its gonna come its gonna come...it is what it is.” Stamina has moved past keeping watch over his life to a point where he no longer even worries about a possibility of death associated with this high risk lifestyle. A final example of Stamina’s association with gangs and the high risk life this offers is, “You don’t outgrow...I mean I love Blood. I love bein’ a Blood.

That's my lifestyle. Everyday that I wake up I eat, sleep, and shit it. I think that's what separates me from others. You don't outgrow it. I mean if you feel like its something in your heart, then I mean its gonna be a part of you." Stamina's life revolves around being a Blood gang member, and he's willing to take all the good it offers along with all the bad as well.

Alto said it simply with, "I had a real bad attitude." He also took full responsibility with the idea that it was his choosing to live a life involved with gangs and selling drugs. "It was just me choosing to get involved with bad influences." This whole idea of "bad attitudes" and bad behavior are what appear to make an individual more likely to want to live a high risk lifestyle. Another interesting code that merged into the theme of a high risk lifestyle was dual lifestyle. Alto gave the best example by saying, "No, I don't want to live where I hang out with the guys. Got to keep that all separate from where I live." Alto is referring to a part of the interview where the discussion led to the fact that Alto's involvement with the gang members he associates with and where they, or he, sells drugs is most certainly not in his own neighborhood. He even states he wants no part of that in the neighborhood where he actually lives.

Mosco and Fuerte do not currently seem to be highly involved in a dangerous high risk lifestyle. However, that could change as they both currently hang around with friends that are gang involved. We must remember the case of Mosco, who said that in Mexico City he participated in fights that included concealed weapons.



## Research Question Two Findings

Research question two asks about the deep, rich, lived experiences of youth who become gang involved in an area where gangs are just emerging, and whether or not the places they have lived or are currently living in have anything to do with them becoming gang involved. In order to answer this question, triangulation of the qualitative data was used. Below are two of the common themes discovered in the data, which assist us in answering the second research question; *language and language issues, and living environment*.

### *Language and Language Issues*

This theme allows us insight into how language, which directly relates to where participants were born or where their family was born, may play a role in these participants becoming gang involved. The two participants that had data associated with language, specifically English as being their second language, were Mosco and Fuerte. Both spoke Spanish as their first language, and both still speak Spanish with their families. All of Fuerte's friends speak Spanish, while Mosco has stated that he has all English speaking friends. Both Mosco and Fuerte have said that English being their second language has made school in the United States very challenging, keeping in mind that Fuerte was born in the United States. Fuerte has dropped out of regular public high school for good, and has no sure plans to finish high school through some sort of completion program, despite a coach who is pushing this decision as a positive for his future. Mosco is still in public high school, but admits its becoming a difficult chore. He

has a little more than a year left to complete his high school career, depending on how he continues to progress and pass his classes. No questions were specifically asked about English as a Second language classes offered to assist them in school. This may be an interesting area of further research. While Fuerte demonstrated his language abilities as being more challenged during the interview process than Mosco's, Fuerte appears not to struggle internally as much with the issue of English being his second language, perhaps due to the fact that he appears to spend almost all his time with Spanish speaking individuals. He had what appeared to be very good comprehension of English, but truly seemed to struggle with speaking it. Mosco, on the other hand, had good comprehension and speaking abilities, yet in his own words, he stated: "I wish I could talk it" and "Well, you know, the way I pronounce it is sometimes hard." Perhaps his interpretation of his language struggles is because he seems to spend much of his time with English classmates and friends.

### *Living Environment*

This theme allows us to see through the eyes of the participants whether or not where they grew up or where they live now could have anything to do with them becoming gang involved. Stamina moved around a lot due to his father's military career. He mentioned that just when he would begin to feel settled somewhere; it was time to move again. When asked if where he lives now is safe, he replies, "Hell no!" He references his sister not being safe to even walk down the street. It's also important to remember in Stamina's case that he has been behind bars twice due to two felony charges

he has accumulated. The researcher never asked exactly how much time Stamina spent incarcerated, but realizes it's a number of years, according to reports by the coaches.

Alto talked about growing up near Compton, New Jersey. This is where he began to hang out with Blood gang members, and also began to sell drugs as well. Mostly, Alto talked a lot about how nice the neighborhood is where he currently lives, and how much he wants to be able to stay in a neighborhood like it. "I live in a real nice neighborhood. It has an elementary school, and lots of trees and flowers and kids are always playin' in my street." He exuded pride whenever he talked about his current neighborhood and how he lives in a separate, private area of his mom's home. Fuerte describes where he lives now as, "I live in a house in a kind of quiet neighborhood. It used to have a lot of gang activity, but then it went away." Mosco first lived in Mexico City. His first place was in a one bedroom apartment in the section of Mexico City he refers to as the "ghetto." "We used to live in the really, really ghetto part." He explains "ghetto" as being very poor and dirty. "I lived in the ghetto until I was 13" and "It was pretty ghetto. It was bad." His next dwelling was a huge step up into what he says was a nicer and newer part of Mexico City. His mom bought a four bedroom townhouse. She still owns it today, even though she lives here in the United States, and other family stays in her place in Mexico City. He describes his current house as very big, in a nice neighborhood, and that it's near a high school. Many of the photos taken for the photovoice part of the project depicted apartments buildings kept clean and neat outside, with lots of developed and beautiful foliage all around. There were pictures of a home, appearing relatively new, and lots of

action shots of a sister cooking dinner in a clean, neat kitchen. There were lots of photos of well furnished living rooms, comfortable and inviting, with family members sitting or doing homework. There appeared to be great pride in the living environments, as so many of the pictures surrounded this topic.

### Research Question Three Findings

Research question three asks about the deep, rich, lived experiences of youth currently involved in a gang intervention program, and from their perspective what is helping them the most in the program and what do they see helping other gang involved youth most in the future. In order to answer this question, triangulation of the qualitative data was used. Below are two of the common themes discovered in the data which assist us in answering the third research question; *pride and socially acceptable behaviors: and the role of structured program intervention.*

#### *Pride and Socially Acceptable Behaviors*

This theme includes issues like pride, positive body image, being able to think at a higher process level of thinking, accomplishments and appropriate aggressive releases. All of these issues associated with pride and the development of socially acceptable behaviors helps us to understand how this program is helping these young men progress. Stamina takes great pride in his intellectual abilities. “All my teachers knew I was smart and they would just always tell me I was articulate.” His higher level thinking skills were proudly shown off while he discussed that after being with a woman he wants to have an emotional and intellectual relationship as well, seemingly to increase the intimacy

between the two of them, by discussing such academic issues as credit reports, 401 K's, the presidential race, party affiliations, and other intellectually stimulating issues.

Another area Stamina takes great pride in is his boxing ability. "I got natural ability...I can actually box." While he has certainly gotten himself into trouble with the law numerous times, he has accepted responsibility for his actions, definitely a socially acceptable behavior, and gives notice of this during the interview by saying, "The life that I chose...I don't try to make anybody else responsible for my actions...I take responsibility for my own actions and everything that I do. I don't sit around throwing pity parties...asking for handouts." Stamina also shows he comprehends the reasoning behind why he has been and may still go to jail, as well as possibly having to face a greater power someday regarding his actions he chose to do during this lifetime when he said, "I know I'll burn for half the shit I done...I know I should still be in prison." This position he takes about his spiritual and lawful beliefs seems to demonstrate socially acceptable behaviors in a young man who continues on a pathway that winds continuously around law abiding desires and continued illegal activity surrounding his gang affiliation and drug selling habits. Stamina also demonstrates appropriate aggression release through boxing in the intervention program. "Boxing...it just gives me an outlet. I get out all my frustrations." This is another demonstration of a socially acceptable form of behavior, an appropriate release of aggressive behavior. Alto is very proud of the fact that he has graduated from high school. He also shows great pride in his job at the prison cafeteria, as well as in how long he has been able to stay in the position.

The fact that he also desires to further his education in the field he currently works in- culinary arts-is also something for which he is very proud. In regards to socially acceptable behaviors, Alto makes reference to accepting the responsibility for his own actions by stating, “I got myself into all that trouble” and “I chose to hang with them.” Alto furthers his socially acceptable behaviors by explaining, “It takes a strong person to make changes to see their future in a better way...and not to keep making bad choices.” Fuerte and Mosco were both most proud about their physical appearance in regards to how fit they have become after enrolling in the boxing part of the intervention program. Some of the photos turned in for the photovoice part of the research project by Mosco were photos that family members had taken of his upper body showing off arm and shoulder muscles and “six pack” stomach muscles. Fuerte was most proud of his mustang car, and many of his photos were of the exterior and interior of his car. He obviously takes very good care of the car, both inside and out.

#### *Role of Structured Program Intervention*

This theme includes the topic of whether this program was the first one the participants had been a part of for intervention purposes, length of time they have been in the program, how the program has helped them and how it could help other gang involved kids. Stamina describes the intervention program as “my safe zone.” He says it “keeps him from goin’ back to doin’ something crazy.” Stamina also said it gives him something to look forward to and helps remind him that he wants things out of life, and “this place helps me see that.” When asked about how the program could help other gang

involved kids in the future, Stamina said, "...it gives them another way to see this side-the side of life where they get to do something good." When Alto is asked about the program, he states, "It has really helped me with a lot of problems and to make a plan to have a better future." Alto said he feels the program would help other gang involved kids because it "gives them a place to get off the streets" and "the boxing would keep them interested and coming to get in shape, and the coaches are really good mentors." Fuerte had quite a bit to say about his own personal reaction to the program, as well as to how he feels the program would benefit other gang involved kids in the future. Fuerte made sure to discuss how long he has known his favorite coach-for five years. He also said, "I get motivated when I box" and "I've gotten in real good shape...that's the best part." Fuerte also admits he stays out of trouble when he is involved in boxing. In regards to helping other gang involved kids, Fuerte said, "It gives the kids a place to hang out other than the streets. They could get themselves in shape and be proud." Mosco's participation in this program is his second intervention style program he has been involved in. The first was in Mexico, and also involved boxing. Mosco's goal is to become a professional boxer, and he thinks the program can help kids to stop "hanging out with gangsters...I think it gives them something else to do." Many photos turned in for the photovoice project were of the kids boxing in the ring, medals they had won, and group photos with different kids and coaches. Some photos included were of a speaking engagement some of the coaches and kids in the program had done. It shows them going out into the community to talk as a team.

## Research Question Four Findings

Research question four asks about the deep, rich, lived experiences of gang involved youth currently involved in an intervention program in regards to how they see themselves as different from their other gang involved peers who are not choosing to participate in an intervention program. What is it that makes them seek out an intervention program while others do not choose this path? In order to answer this question, triangulation of the qualitative data was used. Below are three of the common themes discovered in the data which assist us in answering the fourth research question; *education; life goals and dreams; and monetary influences.*

### *Education*

This theme includes both positives, like the value of education, as well as issues that affect the quality of the education the participants received, like truancy and academic struggles. Stamina dropped out of school in the spring of his senior year. He was a gifted student, taking mostly AP and honors level classes. He deeply regrets his decision to drop out and not finish high school, but he had gotten himself into selling drugs and decided the immediate satisfaction he was receiving by making substantial amounts of money was enough for that time in his life. He “liked to read, [and] loved English and American history.” He had “always had a problem with math...numbers has always looked backward to me.” Stamina said he had been tested for a learning disability in math, and told the researcher he was dyslexic, but only in regards to numbers. He made no mention of taking special education classes or receiving any sort of special math



help in school. Stamina said he was looking into a GED certificate so he could finish his high school degree. Alto was successful in graduating from an alternative high school. He said his mother valued education, and always hoped he would graduate. He remembers liking school, and hopes in the near future to get into the local community college and get started on a two year degree in the culinary arts field he has been working in since age 16. Fuerte also dropped out of high school. While he was still in school, he missed quite a bit because he was either scheduled to work or worked late the night before causing him to miss school the next day. Mosco is the only participant who is still in high school. First during the interviews he said, “I pretty much do good in school”, but later that while he wants to graduate from high school, its getting harder to keep up, and he seems unclear as to whether he will actually complete his high school career. All four participants did agree on the value of education, and how important they felt it was to have a have a high school diploma. Perhaps this is one aspect that separates them from other gang involved youth to look towards a life with a good education and a way to move beyond gang life.

### *Life Goals and Dreams*

This theme includes pathways for the future the participants are thinking about at this stage in life, as well as any life philosophies the participants may be trying to live by. Stamina’s dreams and future hopes are to get his GED, obtain a legally paid job and career path, and “to meet a perfect woman.” Stamina hopes to have children one day, and to become a professional boxer. His thoughts become very interesting when we

delve into his belief system he tries to live by, “I believe in a higher and a lower self...You got that little speck of good and that little speck of evil. One can’t exist without the other.” He is struggling inside still with the path he should take ahead in life. “I’m always at odds with myself. It’s like one minute I’m...I mean I’m not delusional. I know some a the shit I do is not good it’s just bad for me. I shouldn’t be doin’ it. And I acknowledge that...but there’s a reason for everything I do. I don’t just go out and do something to be doin’ it.” He also mentions he “has a strong faith...he’s a firm believer.” Alto is happy where he resides currently, and wants to make sure he can always live in a neighborhood as nice as where he lives now. “I’m trying to see the future and how I can make that happen.” His dreams also center around continuing his culinary arts education and getting a college degree. Fuerte dreams include getting a good job that is steady and consistent. He would also be married already if his favorite coach didn’t keep telling him he was too young and to wait until he has that steady and good paying job to support his family. Mosco is striving to become a professional boxer. He also hopes to be a much better father to his children one day than his own was to him. All of these participants have dreams and goals for their future, not just a thought in their head they will live only and die only as a gang member.

### *Monetary Influences*

This theme that includes the issue that money gives you a higher form of status, the issue of legal versus illegal types of employment, the issue that some of the participants were rather entrepreneurial in spirit, and the rewards of selling drugs.

Stamina sold drugs and made a lot of money. He has also served time for breaking and entering into houses. He admitted he also made thousands of dollars doing that as well. He says, “Well, I was good at selling drugs.” Stamina never really discussed any other material goods he bought as a result of all the drug money he made, other than books. He would take his drug money and go to Barnes and Nobles and buy books. Alto had a history of being a young, successful entrepreneur. “My friend and I saved our money and would go to a store...like BJ’s...and buy candy bars in bulk and then we’d sell them everywhere. We made a bunch of money back then.” Later, he got involved in selling drugs. With his drug money, he bought lots of clothes and jewelry. While both Stamina and Alto were involved in the illegal side of making money, Fuerte and Mosco only admitted to making money legally. Mosco works at a fast food restaurant, and likes that. Before the fast food restaurant, he worked in the mall at a cookie and pretzel making shop. He said he enjoyed that as well, and likes to have his own money. Fuerte does not currently have a job, but is looking for one. He used to work at a restaurant, and said he made pretty good money there. All four participants discussed at one time or another, or demonstrated through their photographs, that money was important, and had benefits to improve their lives, or their family’s lives.

### Triangulation

This section will help clarify the triangulation between the three forms of data involved in this research study, and how the triangulation made some of the questions truly come to life and show the reality of some of the participants’ lives. Regarding

question one, dealing with the lived experiences of gang involved youth located in an area where gangs are just emerging and wondering about the most influential people in the lives of these youth having anything to do with their gang involvement, the pictures helped the researcher become much clearer about the influential people in the participants' lives. The photographs taken, along with the interviews, seem to corroborate each others story, especially in the cases of Fuerte and Mosco. Both stated their mothers and other important women were the most positive influences in their lives. Mosco had pictures of his mother and sister, and Fuerte had pictures of a couple women, perhaps a sister and a girlfriend. Mosco only briefly mentioned his younger family members in the interview, but the many photographs he took of the younger children in his family allowed the researcher to see exactly how influential these children probably really are in this young man's life. There was a lot of care and love showing in the pictures towards the children, and also in the way they looked up to Mosco. Question two, dealing with the places participants lived in, greatly came live with the photographs. If anyone had ever thought gang involved youth lived in inner cities, in horrible dilapidated buildings, then this research question would greatly clear up any false beliefs about this issue. It's important to keep in mind this research was done in an emerging area, meaning gangs are just becoming known and establishing themselves in this area researched. Each house and apartment building was either new or very well maintained. All had flowers or shrubbery, the grass was cut and trimmed, and all cars surrounding the buildings were respectable, clean, and relatively new. While I am sure gangs exist in

areas we consider to be stereotypical because of movies and media we may have seen about gangs, this research found that emerging area gang involved youth are living in respectable, clean, well maintained neighborhoods. The neighborhood maps also depicted this information clearly. These living situations were all more towards the suburbs rather than the inner downtown city. They have families, even if they are from a broken home, and appear close with these families. The pictures showed a lot of love and families having fun together. Places were clean, cared for and seemed comfortable. Question three, dealing with the program, again came alive with the photographs taken. There were single student pictures, showing them holding up advertisements for the program. There were pairs of youth either watching the ring with boxers inside, or exercising or practicing their moves on the gym floor around the boxing ring. And, there were many photographs of boxing matches between students in the ring. There were pictures of coaches. The coaches and kids were wearing t-shirts with the logo of the program's name depicted, and lots of smiles and support shown for the program in the photographs taken. Question four, showing how they saw themselves as different from others who choose not to get involved was difficult to answer with any form of data other than the interviews themselves.

### Summary

The semi-structured interviews provided much of the valuable information. They were rich in detail, and the participants were all very cooperative and willing to discuss their lives. However, if the maps and photographs had not been added to this qualitative

study to gather further data, the research questions could not have been answered as well or as with such an impact as they were with them.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

This chapter summarizes the research, the methodology, and the results of the qualitative research study performed. The chapter will discuss explanations of the findings, and will integrate this study's research findings with previous studies. The chapter will also discuss implications of the study, limitations, and future research needed on the topic of youth gangs. The purpose of this study is to gain knowledge and an understanding of the lived experiences of youth gang members in an emerging area. This study attends to the following research questions:

1. What is the deep, rich, lived experience of youth who become gang involved in an area where gangs are an emerging issue, and how do the people that influence them the most contribute to their gang involvement?
2. What is the deep, rich, lived experience of youth who become gang involved in an area where gangs are an emerging issue, and how do the places they live in contribute to their gang involvement?
3. What is the deep, rich, lived experience of youth currently involved in a gang intervention program, and from their perspective what is helping them the most in the program and what do they see most helping other gang involved youth in the future?
4. What is the deep, rich lived experience of gang involved youth currently involved in an intervention program in regards to how they see themselves as

different from their other gang involved peers who are not choosing to get into intervention programs? What makes them seek help towards a more positive future, while others choose not to do so?

To achieve the research goals and answers to the research questions, four gang involved youth attending a gang prevention and intervention program in Raleigh, North Carolina were selected by their coaches to have the opportunity to volunteer to be a participant in this qualitative research study. Involvement in the study included a semi-structured interview, a neighborhood map drawing, and a photovoice project. The semi-structured interviews allowed much detailed data to be collected, and the neighborhood maps and photovoice pictures allowed further insight into the research questions, and for triangulation of the data to occur in the analysis process.

To attest that quality and validity were carefully considered in this research study, there were many procedures and safeguards put into place during the dissertation process. First, the researcher translated all the taped interviews by herself, to ensure that all slang utilized by the participants was properly worded in the written transcriptions of the interviews. Second, to ensure validity, the researcher kept a journal throughout the entire research and analysis process. This journal allows the researcher to keep her own personal biases out of the research process, including during the interviews, the drawing of the maps, and in discussing the photographs in the photovoice project. It also helped the researcher keep personal bias out during the analysis of the data. An audit was done on the journal by an auditor to ensure personal bias of the researcher had not entered into



the analysis of the data. This journaling process to assist in validity is called researcher reflexivity. Helpful discoveries by the auditor included a second analysis of the positive human influences theme, and a thorough discussion resulted in the changing of whom was considered to be positive in the voices of the participants. Third, thick, rich description was sought in the interviewing process to allow enough clear information to be gathered and continue the process of validity. Fourth, there was great collaboration between the researcher and the participants during the interview process, the drawing of the maps, and the photovoice experience. Fifth, multiple coders were utilized and consensus coding transpired to persevere in the validity process. Finally, triangulation of the three forms of data collected, (the semi-structured interviews, the neighborhood maps and the photographs), took place to complete the validity methods utilized in this research study.

## Summary of Results

### *Question One*

The common themes discovered in question one were *negative issues, emotional repercussions, and coping mechanisms; positive human influences; role of women; and high risk lifestyle*. All of these discovered themes coincided with the idea of a most influential person, and how this person or people may have played a part in these participants becoming gang involved youth. All four of the participants had no consistent, positive father influence while they were growing up. Some were away due to military service, and some left due to separation/divorce issues. This left what can only

be described as single mothers to raise the families. Often there were more than 3 children, and some from different fathers still not involved in the family life of raising these children. These young mothers were left with the stress of raising the children emotionally and financially on their own. It meant most mothers were out working, and an older sibling was raising the younger siblings. Most participants greatly respected their mother due to all the hard work and sacrifices they saw her making to keep the family alive and well. This also triggered half of the participants to take on the idea that they were their own worst influence. It was interesting to hear who the participants said were their most positive influences. One was a gang member heavily involved in drugs who was murdered in a gang/drug shooting. Another was a best friend who turned on him and is having an affair with the boys own mother. Another still said the “cool” guys who were selling drugs because they had a lot of money. Finally, in regards to influential people and becoming gang involved, taking the “sugar with the shit” or taking the good but remember the bad comes with it, the fatalistic behavior of not really caring whether you could die at any moment because you have nothing to look forward to in life for a dream or a goal, and the dual lifestyle where they want to live somewhere safe and nice, but have no problem hanging out with gang members and drug selling individuals in another neighborhood other than their own, really shows us where these youth are at. They have been let down by people they looked up to, had no positive male figure in their life, and saw single mothers struggling to keep them fed and clothed and alive, that had little time for caring and nurturing probably due to exhaustion from working so hard.

The one mother that wasn't a single mom was an abuser. These youth were let down, and they were looking for someone to make a difference in their life, and to pay attention to them. It is certainly possible that the people these youth were closely involved with may have something to do with them becoming gang involved, as well as some of the situations some of those people exposed them to.

### *Question Two*

The common themes revealed in question two were *language and language issues, and living environment*. All of the themes realized in this section had to do with the places these youth lived in, and whether the places could have had anything to do with them becoming gang involved. Language, or specifically English as a second language, was a concern and tied in with living environments. Two participants spoke Spanish, one was born and lived most of his life outside the United States, and the other was born here but speaks less English than the youth who was born and mostly raised outside of the United States. This language barrier created a struggle in school, and caused one youth to drop out, and is causing a great struggle for the other youth to complete his high school diploma. All of the participants seemed to move a lot while they were young. One was incarcerated. Three of the four took great pride in their current living situations. The data showed mostly these participants live in nice, safe neighborhoods, and have respect for where they live. While language may have played a part in two of the participants having difficulty in school, it is unclear as to whether it has anything to do with them being considered gang involved youth. According to the data

uncovered in this section, it appears where the participants live has not played a part in them becoming gang involved.

### *Question Three*

The common themes uncovered in question three were *pride and socially acceptable behaviors: and the role of structured program intervention*. All of the themes discovered in this section were related to the structured intervention program all four participants were involved in. The question sought to discover how the program was helping and what the youth felt would also help other gang involved youth in the future. The program appeared to give the youth a chance to discover and be praised for things in their life they are proud of. Some were proud of their intellectual abilities or accomplishments. Three of the four were proud of their physical appearance. This was very apparent in the three that mentioned the body image issue, and was noticeable in the photographs as well. The program seems to have helped the youth work through the idea of owning up to your past and what you have done. The one participant that was incarcerated also agreed with the reasoning behind serving jail time and even believed that it may help him again in the future due to his continued illegal activities. The program most noticeably gives the youth a place to work out their aggressive urges in an appropriate manner, in the ring, and not on the streets. The program also spends time talking to the youth about their futures, and to plan and set goals for themselves. The idea of it being a safe zone, and a place to keep youth off the streets was evident. Finally,

the male coaches were mentioned again and again as another main reason why the youth continued to participate in the program.

#### *Question Four*

The common themes found in question four were *education; life goals and dreams; and monetary influences*. The themes discovered in this section all uncovered answers to the question as to how the youth saw themselves as different from other gang involved peers, and why they chose to get involved in a program designed to help youth move away from gangs and towards a more stable and promising future. The four participants all seemed to value the idea of a high school diploma. Only one of the four has a diploma. That same one who followed through with getting his high school diploma is also the only one who appears to be on a direct path to continue his education with a two year college degree. Perhaps following through at all costs to get that high school diploma will make all the difference in his life in a comparison to the other three participants. While this participant who accomplished the high school diploma may not have been the one who may have had the highest intelligence score on a test, he certainly has more going for him than the other three at this point in his life with his perseverance and desire to accomplish his educational goals. This participant was Alto, and he is also the only one who has managed to keep a job for over four years, and enjoys the field he works in enough to continue his education in that same career field. Perhaps high intelligence is not the main focus, but instead may be persistence and dedication to educational goals, and a clear understanding of work ethics and responsibilities. Two of

the four talked about having a family one day. Three of the four discussed their boxing abilities and the desire to be a professional boxer. All four participants mentioned money and how important it is in their lives. At least two of the participants seemed not to struggle with the idea that money was important, whether it was obtained legally or illegally.

### Integration of Findings with Existing Literature

#### *Comparing to Existing Literature*

The results of this research study do connect with other previous research studies. Regarding question one and the findings about single mothers, Beckert, Strom, Strom, Darre, and Weed (2008) discuss that there is little known about single parents and their relationships with youth entering into adolescence. Beckert et al. (2008) make the following recommendations to assist in forming this relationship between adolescents and their parents: give feedback to parents on what their strengths are to allow them to feel confident about certain aspects of their relationships, and to provide them with parent education based specifically on their individual needs at times that will be convenient to their busy lifestyles. If single mothers were aware of their parenting strengths, even though they are not able to spend as much time with their children due to work schedules and added responsibilities of a single parent, and were able to receive convenient and helpful assistance in regards to areas of weakness in parenting skills, would this have made any difference in the lives of the four participants in regards to being gang involved youth? It may have eased some of the situation with Stamina's mother who was abusive

due to all the stress of being a military wife. It may also have made a difference in Alto's delinquency at such a young age. Another area regarding single mothers was found concerning employment status. Kalil and Ziol-Guest (2005) found that in some conditions, the experiences of employment of lower income, single mothers were associated with a weakening in their adolescent's well-being. Kalil and Ziol-Guest continued by saying employment instability was linked to an increased risk of dropping out of school and a reduction in the adolescent's self esteem. Mothers who had an experience with a bad job were associated with a greater risk of their adolescents repeating their grades in school (Kalil & Ziol-Guest, 2005). Three of the mothers in this study were well respected for their hard work and long hours spent on the job to keep the family fed, clothed, and sheltered. This particular study did not delve into the specifics of the single mothers work history, other than that three of the mothers worked very hard. It would be interesting to know if the work histories of these mothers would support the adolescent's development in school as seen in the work of Kalil and Ziol-Guest. Bracki, Dolson, and Maurice (1997) found that a father's place in the family structure and the timing of his leaving the family had a profound impact on the adolescent's development in regards to identity, role in the family, and relationships. Bracki et al. (1997) went on to say that teens already on the fringes of gang involvement increased their involvement after they were denied a relationship with their father or another father figure. This may have been demonstrated in Stamina's case, as his father was never around, and his father figure, an uncle, was killed. A third area found in previous research regarding single

mothers was their projection of negative feelings about an absent father onto their eldest male child (Lowe, 2000). Lowe (2000) went on to say that while it may be common for the eldest male child to take on the role of their absent parent, in that it may assist in the mourning of the lost parent, it may also open the adolescent up to maternal criticism, for example, “He’s just like his father...he never gets anything right.” Lowe continues later in the article with stating there is a general relationship between the psychological stability of a mother and her interaction quality with her children. Single mothers who feel more supported by family and friends are much more likely to have good relationships with their children than those single mothers who are overburdened and who feel alone (Lowe, 2000). Perhaps the secret to keeping more at risk youth in single mother homes out of gangs could be in the support the mother could receive, as well as in counseling the mother against putting her negative feelings of her ex partner onto their child. These mothers may be so overwhelmed and perhaps even unaware of how they may be harming their child by placing their negative feelings about an absent partner onto their child. While none of the participants actually stated this was occurring in their relationships with their mothers, this was too important a finding to not relate to the current study’s information. To wrap up question one and single mothers, one final piece of related literature comes into mind. Paschall, Ringwalt, and Flewelling (2003) wrote the two most important deterrents to delinquent behavior are parental control and supervision. We can relate this topic back to the idea that single mothers need more



support, and more education about how to successfully raise their youth when they cannot necessarily be the ones implementing all the supervision and discipline as needed.

Question two and the issue of English as a second language with two of the participants was found to be worth mentioning. Notre Dame University (2002) found that the lives of Latino youth in two townships in Illinois could possibly be improved by: enhancing the educational performance of children in school, allowing for expanded after school tutoring and mentoring, having alternative activities to gang involvement, improving and expanding the bilingual and Latino teachers in the school system, promoting more parental involvement in schools, and providing more adult education. Youth who are at risk with single parents and other life impacting issues need more attention and Notre Dame University did an appealing study to anyone interested in knowing what may be helpful in keeping youth at risk with many problems out of gangs. While Fuerte and Mosco are not actual gang members yet, they are certainly on the fringes of becoming gang members, and it may help for their communities to know what to try to keep these youth from becoming actual gang members.

Question three related literature was found in a paper presented in 1992 at Chapel Hill University by Cary Reglin. The paper was about black urban tenth grade males, and their self perceptions and achievements. Reglin discovered in his research that adolescent males who perceived themselves as good looking performed better academically and in sports than those who didn't perceive themselves as handsome. Three of the four participants in this study consistently mentioned pride in their physical

appearance as a result of the boxing program and working out associated with the program they are involved in. Reglin suggests that teachers, counselors, and administrators can utilize this very powerful positive statement towards youth. Perhaps this can begin with realizing that the intervention and prevention programs centered around physical fitness have a strong pull for male adolescents that are looking to improve their self images. If we can start by improving their self images through physical pride of their bodies, perhaps this will lead to further confidence in their sports and academic abilities. Perhaps this can keep them from becoming gang members.

Finally, literature complimenting question four and how the participants may be different from other gang involved peers was found on educational experiences. Stedman and others (1988) found this important information on keeping youth in school instead of having them become drop outs: that being a drop out is a complex issue involving many issues like socioeconomic status and in-school experiences, and the phenomena of dropping out is widespread and covers many backgrounds. Stedman and others (1988) also discovered that being above the normal age for their grade, and being enrolled in an academic track were two issues that had a consistent impact on the educational success of at risk youth. Fuerte and Mosco, because of their language barriers, are both above their normal age level for their grade. This may have been a factor in Fuerte dropping out, and may also become a factor in Mosco dropping out.

*Relation to Ecological Systems Theory and Social Disorganization Theory*

In the existing literature found on ecological systems theory, development is changed as a function of the person's exposure to its environment and its interactions with its environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Ecological systems theory had a number of systems explaining the interactions and development. The exosystem referred to one or even more settings that do not actively involve the developing person, but whose events affect what happens in the settings which contain that developing person (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). We must consider research question one and the idea of the most influential person in each participant's life, and how their entire world was changed due to whom that person was. This theory's systems allow us to understand how the participants' development was changed because of what occurred in their exosystems while growing up. Three participants said their mothers were the most positive influence in their life. All three mothers were or eventually became single mothers, and had little time for their children due to the long hours they had to work to take care of their families. The fourth participant had an abusive mother. Due to this issue of single or abusive mothers being a part of the participants lives, this caused them to look for other sources for influence, and led to negative influences; a gang and drug involved uncle, peers involved in drug selling and gangs that seemed cool because they had lots of money and status, and a best friend who became a mother's boyfriend. Bronfenbrenner and Evans (2000) article summarized the findings of their study with one word: chaos. The study discussed that modern society continues to have growing chaos, for example, many

more single parent families and less direct parent participation in child care and rearing (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). When the financial support need of a family seems to overtake the nurturing time that is so desperately needed by youth during their developmental years, this creates an open door for negative influences, and those negative influences continue to impact and linger on in these participants lives.

In the existing literature found on social disorganization theory, the main issue discussed is delinquency, which is defined as an adaptive behavior where adolescents usually act as members of adolescent peer groups in an effort to find the way toward meaningful and respected adult roles, essentially unaided by an older generation, yet under the influence of many criminal models, usually in an inner city area (Shaw & McKay, 1969). Delinquency in the work developing social disorganization theory is described as an alternate pathway for lower income society to gain the material wealth and respect that the media and current American world seem to focus on, and lead youth to believe that no matter how you gain the wealth and status, you will be successful (Sham & McKay, 1969). Two of the four participants took the pathway of delinquency to make money illegally by selling drugs. One managed to secure a job in a field he actually really liked, and this is perhaps why he has planned out a stable life including continued work in the culinary arts field while he goes to college for a degree to enhance his life and earning potential in his chosen field. The other has gotten caught up in the judicial system, making a life of future planning and stability very difficult. Once you get charged with a felony, you lose your options for going to college with financial aid.

This closes many doors to young people caught up in gang life and not yet aware of the repercussions or perhaps not caring enough about the doors that are shut as a result of being charged with a felony. While social disorganization theory is about development, this theory focuses more on the ways in which a place, specifically a neighborhood, would develop. Due to the unique interactive functions and layout of a particular neighborhood, the theory's base leads towards the discussion of how people in the neighborhood may develop and change in ways they may not if they were living somewhere else (Kubrin & Weitzer, 2003). The results of this study do not necessarily follow the ideas supporting social disorganization theory's idea that where you live makes you who you are. Most of the participants all live in rather comfortable surroundings, in this area considered to be emergent in regards to youth gangs. They are not poor, inner city youth, but seem instead to be the working middle class suburbia type of families. These families seem to take great pride in their living environment, and choose to move into circumstances that reflect their desires to be safe and live well. Therefore, despite the living environments of the youth in this study, they still become youth who are either in a gang, or are certainly considered to be gang involved due to their friends and family and where, how and with whom they spend their time. When they do spend time with gangs, it is not where they live, but instead in the "bad" part of town. They are trying to keep where they live and gang life separate, and are not integrating the two functions together.

*Relation to the OJJDP Gang Prevention and Intervention Model*

The OJJDP gang prevention and intervention model was developed from social disorganization theory because it focuses on the innate idea that the lack of social opportunities available to the youth who become gang involved and the degree of social disorganization in their communities lead to the development of youth gangs (Institute for Governmental Research, 2002). The model also suggests other factors may be included in the formation of youth gangs, such as poverty, social policy deficiencies, institutional racism, and misdirected or a complete lack of social controls (Institute for Governmental Research, 2002). This study's findings done in an area considered to be an emerging one in regards to youth gangs does not seem to support the idea that gangs may be formed because of a lack of social control in the place where the youth live. Three of the four youth in this study all live in comfortable and safe neighborhoods. The fourth participant, while admittedly not living in a safe and comfortable neighborhood, did state he did not run his gang and drug selling directly from where he lived. It does appear there are places in the area studied that may indeed have a lack of social control and organization, but it is not where the participants are living; which is what social disorganization theory and the OJJDP model appear to have as an assumption. This is an interesting detail to take a look at. The OJJDP model also focuses on poverty and a lack of social activities available to youth. This part of the model is perhaps what may be most worthwhile for the studied area to take a look at in prevention and intervention, at least according to what this small study has found. Because one participant has had such

luck with completing his high school diploma, and caring about a future including further education, maybe more thought needs to be put into the idea of educational programs and goal setting in intervention and prevention programs in an emerging area.

### Limitations

Every study has limitations, and this one was no different. First, undeniably, this study has a very small sample size. Youth who are gang involved are difficult to engage in any manner, and to have four youth who were of at least age 18 and willing to participate in this form of research with several meetings involved was a lucky chance indeed. Even some of the participants involved in the study were on and off as far as participation and attendance in the program, which was the only program the researcher found available to actually get in touch with gang involved youth. The researcher had to make numerous visits to the site to get all of the information needed from each participant. At times, some of the youth were there, and others were absent. It took a lot of persistence on the researcher's part to obtain the information. The sample size certainly may not be large enough to make generalizations about gang involved youth in emerging areas, but will hopefully be instead seen as a beginning step in obtaining information about gang involved youth in areas where gangs are just starting to infiltrate. Second, the main limitation in this study is while the participants did take some wonderful photos the researcher would have greatly valued and appreciated adding into her dissertation, she is unable to do so due to the ethical issues involved in the photovoice consent forms. The researcher was unable to obtain, despite adequate and repeated

training with the participants, any consent forms to be able to utilize any photos in her dissertation paper. It was the researcher's understanding, after talking with the coaches and participants, that it was simply just too much work for the participants to ask everybody whose picture they took to sign consent forms. All the participants did a wonderful and thorough job in obtaining photographs demonstrating all four of the research questions, however all failed to obtain the consent forms. It was decided, after speaking with the participants and coaches, that the researcher would use the photographs in the coding, theming, and analysis part of the project, but would not include the actual photos due to lack of acquiring the proper consent forms to do so.

#### Implications for Future Research

Much research is needed in the area of youth gangs. This study sought information on a topic associated with the new, contemporary form of youth gang member. This study made some interesting preliminary discoveries about areas considered to be emerging in their development of youth gangs in that they are not necessarily poor, inner city youth, they are not practicing their gang activity necessarily where they live, and that the participants definitely became products of who they found influential in their developmental years. Further research is needed on middle class youth getting involved in gang life. It would also be interesting to understand how the youth who are gang involved feel comfortable going into someone else's neighborhood to practice gang life and sell drugs, but do not want it in their own living environment. The topic of influential people in the lives of youth who become gang affiliated is another



intriguing area of discovery. Could single mothers be the clue to stopping the gang involvement? They certainly are respected by three of the participants in this study. If the influential people in the life of a child are not healthy and stable personas, how can the cycle of perpetuating delinquency be broken? It would be interesting to research what type of influence could step in and help the child progress into a youth who does not become gang involved. More research needs to be done on physical fitness intervention programs, and why certain programs specifically tied to gang intervention, like boxing and martial arts, are attempted, rather than just football or baseball. Does it have anything to do with the idea that martial arts and boxing are individual achievement sports, and football and baseball are considered teamwork sports? Finally, a high school education and whether it should be considered a top priority in regards to keeping kids out of gangs, or helping youth who are gang involved move past their involvement and towards a more positive future, needs to be considered in research on youth gangs. All ideas mentioned for further research would extend the findings discovered in this small, qualitative research study.

#### Concluding Remarks

This study found that information available on single mothers and their relationships with their male adolescents, lack of a father figure, pride in physical appearance, and educational experiences associated with at risk youth concurred with current and available literature on youth gangs. Uncovering the idea that gang involved youth living in what can be considered an emergent area for gangs are not living in

poverty and unkempt neighborhoods appears to be a significant new finding. Instead they are living in well maintained areas, with families that take pride in their environment. When these youth do “practice” their gang activity, they are keeping it out of their own living environment and taking it to lower income areas they seem to have no connection to personally. Influential people in a youth’s life do appear to make a difference in the next chapter in a youth’s life. Education seems to have made all the difference in another participant’s life. Hopefully, this dissertation will encourage more research on youth gangs developing in emerging areas, and spark more interest in the need for more and better quality prevention and intervention programs to help youth at risk for becoming gang involved.

## REFERENCES

- Basit, T. N. (2003). Manual or electronic? The role of coding in qualitative data analysis. *Educational Research, 45*(2), 143-154.
- Beckert, T., Strom, P., Strom, R., Darre, K., & Weed, A. (2008, Summer). Single mothers of early adolescents: Perceptions of competence. *Adolescence, 43*(170), 275-290.
- Bracki, M., Dolson, B., & Maurice, K. (1997, August). *Pre-teen gang members: The father connection*. Paper presented at the meeting of annual meeting of the American Psychological Association, Chicago, IL.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bronfenbrenner, U., & Evans, G. W. (2000). Developmental science in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: Emerging questions, theoretical models, research designs and empirical findings. *Social Development, 9*(1), 115-125.
- Coolbaugh, K., & Hansel, C. J. (2000, March). *Juvenile Justice Bulletin: The Comprehensive Strategy: Lessons Learned from the Pilot Sites*. (Available from the U. S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Washington, D. C. 20531)
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

- Creswell, J. W., & Miller, D. L. (2000). Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory Into Practice*, 39(3), 124-130.
- Dalla, R. L. (2000). Exposing the 'Pretty Woman' myth: A qualitative examination of the lives of female streetwalking prostitutes. *Journal of Sex Research*, 37(4), 344-353.
- Dealey, S. (2006, January). MS-13: America's most vicious gang. *Reader's Digest*, 100-107.
- Egley, A., Howell, J. C., & Major, A. K. (2006, July). *National Youth Gang Survey 1999-2001*. (Available from the U. S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Washington, D. C. 20531)
- Esbensen, F. A. (2000, September). *Juvenile Justice Bulletin: Preventing Adolescent Gang Involvement*. (Available from U. S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Washington, D. C. 20531)
- Fagan, J. E. (1990). Social process of delinquency and drug use among urban gangs. In C. R. Huff (Ed.), *Gangs in America* (pp. 183-2190). Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Finestone, H. (1976). *Victims of change*. Westport, CT: Greenwood.
- Foster-Fishman, P., Nowell, B., Deacon, Z., Nievar, M. A., & McCann, P. (2005). Using methods that matter: The impact of reflection, dialogue, and voice [Electronic

- version]. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 36(3-4), 275-291.
- Retrieved January 16, 2007, from <http://www.lib.ncsu.edu>
- Griffin, M., & Meacham, M. (2002). Gangs in schools: An introduction to the problem and interventions [Electronic version]. *Annals of the American Psychotherapy Association*, 5, 15-19. Retrieved January 3, 2005, from INFOTRAC database.
- Gottfredson, G. D., & Gottfredson, D. C. (1999, July). Survey of school-based gang prevention and intervention programs: Preliminary findings. Paper presented at the second National Youth Gang Symposium, Las Vegas, NV.
- Howell, J. C. (1994, April). *Fact Sheet #12*. (Available from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, <http://www.ncjrs.gov/txtfiles/fs-9412.txt>)
- Howell, J. C. (1997, December). *Fact Sheet #72: Youth Gangs*. (Available from the U. S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Washington, D. C. 20531)
- Howell, J. C. (1998, August). *Juvenile Justice Bulletin: Youth Gangs: An Overview*. (Available from the U. S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Washington, D. C. 20531)
- Howell, J. C. (2000, August). *Youth Gang Programs and Strategies Summary*. (Available from [http://www.ncjrs.gov/html/ojjdp/summary\\_2000\\_8/home.html](http://www.ncjrs.gov/html/ojjdp/summary_2000_8/home.html))
- Howell, J. C., & Decker, S. H. (1999, January). *Juvenile Justice Bulletin: The Youth Gangs, Drugs, and Violence Connection*. (Available from <http://www.ncjrs.gov/html/ojjdp/171152/contents.html>)

- Howell, J. C., Egley, A., & Gleason, D. K. (2002, June). *Juvenile Justice Bulletin: Modern-Day Youth Gangs*. (Available from the U. S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Washington, D. C. 20531)
- Huff, C. R. (1998, October). *National Institute of Justice Research in Brief: Comparing the Criminal Behavior of Youth Gangs and At-Risk Youths*. (Available from the U. S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice, Washington, D. C. 20531)
- Institute for Governmental Research. (2002, June). *OJJDP comprehensive gang model: A guide to assessing your community's youth gang problem* (2000-JD-FX-0001) (Available from OJJDP website: <http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/>)
- Juarez, T. (1996). Where homeboys feel at home in school [Electronic version]. *Educational Leadership*, 53, 30-32. Retrieved January 3, 2005, from INFOTRAC database.
- Kalil, A., & Ziolo-Guest, K. (2005, January/February). Single mothers' employment dynamics and adolescent well-being. *Child Development*, 76(1), 196-211.
- Klein, M. W. (1995). *The American street gang*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Knox, G. W., Houston, J. G., Tromanhauser, E. D., McCurrie, T. F., & Laskey, J. (1996). Addressing and testing the gang migration issue. In J. M. Miller, & J. P. Rush

- (Eds.), *Gangs: A Criminal Justice Approach*. Cincinnati, OH: Anderson Publishing Company.
- Kubrin, C. E., & Weitzer, R. (2003). New directions in social disorganization theory. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 40(4), 374-402.
- Lopez, K. A., & Willis, D. G. (2004). Descriptive versus interpretive phenomenology: Their contributions to nursing knowledge. *Qualitative Health Research*, 14(5), 726-735.
- Lowe, W. (2000, January-March). Detriangulation of absent fathers in single-parent black families: Techniques of imagery. *American Journal of Family Therapy*, 28(1), 29-40.
- Mathison, S. (1988). Why triangulate? *Educational Researcher*, March, 13-17.
- Maxson, C. L. (1998, October). *Juvenile Justice Bulletin: Gang Members on the Move*. (Available from [http://www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org/jjbulletin/9810\\_1/contents.html](http://www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org/jjbulletin/9810_1/contents.html))
- McCaslin, M. L., & Scott, K. W. (2003). The five-question method for framing a qualitative research study. *The Qualitative Report*, 8(3), 447-461.
- Miller, P. (1989). Chapter one. In *Theories of developmental psychology* (pp. 3-29). New York: W. H. Freeman & Company.
- Miller, W. B. (1992). *Crime by Youth Gangs and Groups in the United States*. (Rev. ed.). (Available from the U. S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice, Washington, D. C. 20531)

- Miller, W. B. (2001, April). *OJJDP Report: The Growth of Youth Gang Problems in the United States: 1970-98*. (Available from [http://www.ncjrs.gov/html/ojjdp/ojjdpprpt\\_yth\\_gng\\_prob\\_2001/index.html](http://www.ncjrs.gov/html/ojjdp/ojjdpprpt_yth_gng_prob_2001/index.html))
- Moore, J. W. (1978). *Homeboys: Gangs, drugs and prison in the barrios of Los Angeles*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Moustakas, C. E. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- National Youth Gang Center. (n.d.). *Frequently asked questions regarding gangs*. (Prepared by J. C. Howell & A. Egley). Retrieved October 25, 2006. from <http://www.iir.com/nygc/faq/htm>
- Notre Dame University. (2002, January). *Bordering the mainstream: A needs assessment of Latinos in Berwyn and Cicero, Illinois*. Illinois, Notre Dame University, Institute for Latino Studies.
- Nowell, B. L., Berkowitz, S. L., Deacon, Z., & Foster-Fishman, P. (2006). Revealing the cues within community places: Stories of identity, history, and possibility [Electronic version]. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 37(1/2), 29-46. Retrieved January 16, 2007, from <http://www.lib.ncsu.edu>
- Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. (1997). *Youth gangs in America: An overview of suppression, intervention, and prevention programs*. OJJDP National Satellite Teleconference. Retrieved October 9, 2006, from <http://www.ncjrs.gov/txtfiles/jgangs.txt>



- Osgood, D. W., & Anderson, A. L. (2004). Unstructured socializing and rates of delinquency [Electronic version]. *Criminology*, 42(3). Retrieved March 30, 2006, from <http://www.lib.ncsu.edu>
- Paschall, M., Ringwalt, C., & Flewelling, R. (2003, Spring). Effects of parenting, father absence, and affiliation with delinquent peers on delinquent behavior among African-American male adolescents. *Adolescence*, 38(149), 15-34.
- Pattillo, M. E. (1998). Sweet mothers and gangbangers: Managing crime in a black middle-class neighborhood. *Social Forces*, 76(3). Retrieved March 30, 2006, from <http://www.lib.ncsu.edu>
- Perry, B. (2006). Using photographic images as an interactive online teaching strategy [Electronic version]. *Internet & Higher Education*, 9(3), 229-240. Retrieved on January 16, 2007, from <http://www.lib.ncsu.edu>
- Photovoice. (n.d.). Retrieved October 21, 2006, from <http://www.photovoice.com>
- Racher, F. E., & Robinson, S. (2003). Are phenomenology and postpositivism strange bedfellows? *Western Journal of Nursing Research*, 25(5), 464-481.
- Redfield, R. (1941). *Folk culture of Yucatan*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Rollins, J. (2005, February). Freeing youth from the grips of gangs. *Counseling Today*, 12-14.
- Sanchez-Jankowski, M. S. (1991). *Islands in the street: Gangs and American Urban Society*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

- Sante, L. (1991). *Low life: Lures and snares of old New York*. New York, NY: Vintage Books.
- Shaw, C., & McKay, H. (1969). *Juvenile delinquency and urban areas*. (Rev. ed.). Chicago, IL: University Press.
- Sheldon, H. D. (1898). The institutional activities of American children. *The American Journal of Psychology*, 9, 424-448.
- Spencer, M. B., Fegley, S. G., & Harpalani, V. (2003). A theoretical and empirical examination of identity as coping: Linking coping resources to the self processes of African American youth. *Applied Developmental Science*, 7(3), 181-188.
- Spergel, I. A. (1995). *The youth gang problem*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Starbuck, D., Howell, J. C., & Lindquist, D. J. (2001, December). *Juvenile Justice Bulletin: Hybrid and Other Modern Gangs*. (Available from the U. S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Washington, D. C. 20531)
- Stedman, J., & others. (1988). *Dropping out: The educational vulnerability of at-risk youth* (CRS Report for Congress 88 417-EPW). Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service.
- Taylor, C. S. (1989). *Dangerous society*. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University.
- Thornberry, T. P., & Burch III, J. H. (1997, June). *Juvenile Justice Bulletin: Gang Members and Delinquent Behavior*. (Available from the U. S. Department of

Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Washington, D. C. 20531)

Twemlow, S., & Sacco, F. (1998). The application of traditional martial arts practice and theory to the treatment of violent adolescents [Electronic version]. *Adolescence*, 33, 505-521. Retrieved January 3, 2005, from INFOTRAC database.

Vigil, J. D. (1988). *Barrio gangs: Street life and identity in Southern California*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Weisel, D. L. (2002). The evolution of street gangs: An examination of form and variation. In W. L. Reed & S. H. Decker (Eds.), *Responding to gangs: Evaluation and research* (pp.25-65). Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice.

## APPENDICES

## **APPENDIX A: CONSENT/CONFIDENTIALITY FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to be a participant in the research project entitled, “Youth Gangs: Lived Experiences in an Emergent Area”, being conducted by Heather J. Robertson. I understand that this research is a dissertation at the North Carolina State University. I understand that my participation in this research project is entirely voluntary. I understand that the interview done in this research will be audio taped, and then transcribed. I also understand that any pictures I take or drawings I am asked to do will be used in the study. I understand I may ask for copies of these pictures or drawings, but the originals will be kept for the research analysis process. Finally, I understand that I may withdraw from participating in this research project without any penalty to myself, and to have any research data or results returned to me, removed from the experimental records, or destroyed.

The following points have been explained to me:

1. The reason for the research is to explore the lived experiences of youth gang members that live in an emergent area.
2. Direct quotes from the audio tapes/transcriptions may be used, but no identifiable information will be used.
3. To increase validity of this study, the transcriptions, drawings, and photographs will be viewed by up to three other research assistants.

The procedures are as follows:

1. Study participants will be interviewed, asked to draw a picture of their own neighborhood without any identifiable labels to keep confidentiality, and be asked to take photographs that will assist in answering the research questions in this research project. There will be six separate meetings for the participants,

beginning with an informational meeting and getting consent to participate, the interviews, the map drawing, the photovoice training session, the selection of photos for the research project, and a final presentation of the data by the researcher for the participants if they choose to attend.

2. The audio tapes from the interviews will be transcribed into written format by the researcher and research assistants.
3. The transcriptions will then be coded and analyzed by the researcher and research assistants.
4. A final written report of the data will be turned into the dissertation committee. The written report may also be submitted for publication and may also be used in future research projects.

There are no anticipated physical, psychological, or legal risks associated with this study, but, if any question or activity makes you uncomfortable, you may feel free to skip that question in the interview or skip the activity altogether.

The results of this participation will be confidential and will not be released in any identifiable form without prior consent of the participant unless required by law. Aliases will be used to report any data, rather than any identifiable legal name or nickname.

Other people that may have access to the research data, (the audio tapes, transcriptions, neighborhood map drawings, and photographs), will be the researcher's dissertation committee and research assistants. Audiotapes will be kept confidentially stored, and destroyed after the research study is completed. All drawings and photographs will remain confidentially stored with the researcher.

---

Signature of the Participant and Date

---

Signature of the Investigator and Date

## APPENDIX B: Consent Form for Adults Who May Appear in Photographs

### May I Take Your Picture?



#### Has this project been approved by NCSU?

Yes, This project has been approved by the NCSU School of Education Institutional Review Board on Research Involving Human Subjects.

#### Who can I contact if I have any questions about the project?

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Heather Robertson Cook at 252-732-4007. If you feel you have not been treated the way this form reads, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during this research project, you may contact:

Dr. David Kaber, Chair of the NCSU IRB for the Use of Human Subjects in Research Committee, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/515-3086) or Mr. Matthew Ronning, Assistant Vice Chancellor, Research Administration, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/513-2148).

If you are willing to have your picture taken please read the following statement very carefully. Then please sign and date this form and return it to me. I will give you a copy of this form for your own records. To receive this copy, please print your name, street number, street name, city, state, and zip code below.

---

---

---

---

#### Agreement Statement:

By signing this consent form, I agree to have my picture taken. I also understand and agree that unless otherwise notified in writing, that North Carolina State University assumes that permission is granted to use my pictures for projects, related discussions, exhibits, presentations, and publications.

---

Your Signature and Date

---

Photographer's Signature and Date

If you would like a copy of your picture(s), please sign here. \_\_\_\_\_  
They will be mailed to you.

\*Special thanks to Dr. E. Lopez of Florida State University for the original form design.

## APPENDIX C: Consent Form for Guardians of Minors Who May Appear in Photographs

### May I Take Your Picture?



#### Has this project been approved by NCSU?

Yes, This project has been approved by the NCSU School of Education Institutional Review Board on Research Involving Human Subjects.

#### Who can I contact if I have any questions about the project?

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Heather Robertson Cook at 252-732-4007. If you feel you have not been treated the way this form reads, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during this research project, you may contact:

Dr. David Kaber, Chair of the NCSU IRB for the Use of Human Subjects in Research Committee, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/515-3086) or Mr. Matthew Ronning, Assistant Vice Chancellor, Research Administration, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/513-2148).

If you are willing to allow the minor to have his/her picture taken please read the following statement very carefully. Then please sign and date this form and return it to me. I will give you a copy of this form for your own records. To receive this copy, please print your name, street number, street name, city, state, and zip code below.

---

---

---

#### Agreement Statement:

By signing this consent form, I agree to have the minor in my guardianship's picture taken. I also understand and agree that unless otherwise notified in writing, that North Carolina State University assumes that permission is granted to use his/her pictures for projects, related discussions, exhibits, presentations, and publications.

---

Minor's Name

---

Your Signature and Date

---

Photographer's Signature and Date

If you would like a copy of the picture(s), please sign here. \_\_\_\_\_  
They will be mailed to you.

\*Special thanks to Dr. E. Lopez of Florida State University for the original form design.



## APPENDIX D: Assent Form for Minors Who May Appear in Photographs

### May I Take Your Picture?



#### Has this project been approved by NCSU?

Yes, This project has been approved by the NCSU School of Education Institutional Review Board on Research Involving Human Subjects.

#### Who can I contact if I have any questions about the project?

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Heather Robertson Cook at 252-732-4007. If you feel you have not been treated the way this form reads, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during this research project, you may contact:

Dr. David Kaber, Chair of the NCSU IRB for the Use of Human Subjects in Research Committee, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/515-3086) or Mr. Matthew Ronning, Assistant Vice Chancellor, Research Administration, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/513-2148).

If you are willing to have your picture taken please read the following statement very carefully. Then please sign and date this form and return it to me. I will give you a copy of this form for your own records. To receive this copy, please print your name, street number, street name, city, state, and zip code below.

---

---

---

---

#### Agreement Statement:

By signing this assent form, I agree to have my picture taken. I also understand and agree that unless otherwise notified in writing, that North Carolina State University assumes that permission is granted to use my pictures for projects, related discussions, exhibits, presentations, and publications.

---

Your Signature and Date

---

Photographer's Signature and Date

If you would like a copy of your picture(s), please sign here. \_\_\_\_\_  
They will be mailed to you.

\*Special thanks to Dr. E. Lopez of Florida State University for the original form design.

## APPENDIX E: OUTLINE FOR RESEARCH SESSIONS

**Session 1: Information and Consent** (scheduled one hour **group** meeting-5-6 pm, at program building) For information, each participant will miss the following activities while they participate in the research study during each of the 6 scheduled research sessions: (a possible combination of any of the following) independent physical exercise workouts in a workout/exercise room, a boxing skills lesson and workout with coaches, or a life skills building class.

**Objective:** Give a small presentation to 8 participants and any concerned staff at the program regarding the following:

- Researcher and interest in youth gangs
- Research description and purpose, explanation of expectations for researcher and participants (taping of sessions will be discussed)
- Consent forms-go over and obtain permission and signed forms
- Discuss any questions regarding the expectations

**Materials:** Consent forms, pens, researcher's planner/calendar for scheduling.

- Set up semi-structured interview times and meeting space with each participant (we will meet in an empty classroom, empty office, or empty conference room available that day for each interview, located within the program's building).

**Session 2: Semi-Structured Interview** (5-6:30 pm, at program building) (**individual**)

For information, each participant will miss the following activities while they participate in the research study during each of the 6 scheduled research sessions: (a possible combination of any of the following) independent physical exercise workouts in a

workout/exercise room, a boxing skills lesson and workout with coaches, or a life skills building class.

Objective: To complete semi-structured interview with each participant.

Materials: Interview questions, tape recorder and cords, tapes.

-Each interview session time was selected at the first session, therefore each participant will know when their interview will take place, and where to meet the researcher.

-Researcher will greet participant and set a positive mood for session, (only first names will be used for confidentiality purposes), select a meeting space for the day, set up tape recorder and chair arrangement, then begin (only the researcher and participant will be present).

-The semi-structured interview questions are available in Appendix B, and begin with obtaining verbal consent to tape on the tape, a developmental history, and then the main interview questions with probing questions as necessary.

-Interviews will be scheduled for 1.5 hours, and may be longer or shorter, depending on the participant.

-At the end of the interview questions, the researcher will thank the participant, turn off the recorder, see if there are any final questions by the participant about the interview or process, and allow the participant to return to the scheduled activities in the intervention program (located in the same building the interviews take place).

**Session 3: Group Session on Neighborhood Maps** (5-6 pm, at program building) For information, each participant will miss the following activities while they participate in

the research study during each of the 6 scheduled research sessions: (a possible combination of any of the following) independent physical exercise workouts in a workout/exercise room, a boxing skills lesson and workout with coaches, or a life skills building class.

Objective: To complete neighborhood map drawing assignment with all participants in a group setting.

Materials: White paper, lead pencils with erasers, colored pencils.

- All 8 participants will meet together with the researcher.
- The researcher will discuss the purpose of the maps, how they relate to the research.
- Prompts will be used as directions and to stimulate thinking about what to draw and label on each map.
- Each participant will be given a blank sheet of white paper and a pencil to draw their own map (only first names will be used as a differentiating label).
- This session will be scheduled for 1.0 hours, but each participant may stay until the map is completed.
- As participants begin, researcher will move about the room to answer any questions and maintain a positive environment.
- As each participant completes the map, they may hand it to the researcher and return to the scheduled activities that evening for the program.

## Neighborhood Map Session Directions

During today's session, each of you is going to draw simple map of your own neighborhood. No expert artistry is needed-really!

Remember one of the research questions is:

2. What is the deep, rich, lived experience of youth who become gang involved in an area where gangs are an emerging issue, and how do the places they live in contribute to their gang involvement?

So, in order for the research to have some idea as to whether where you live has anything to do with you being gang involved, I'd like to see what your neighborhood looks like. You will all be given paper, and regular lead and colored pencils to work with. Start by thinking first what is in your neighborhood-directly around your house. Are there houses, apartments or condos, parks, businesses, restaurants, bridges, railroad tracks, bus stations, community centers-I think you get the picture. Then start by putting your house near the center of the paper and then adding to the drawing by showing what surrounds your house. Make sure to not put anything that may actually identify exactly where you live-like exact street names, exact business names like "Mason's Grocery"-but things like Kroger's and McDonald's are okay because they are so common-and just continue to add to your picture until you feel the map is a good show of what is located in your neighborhood. You can put specific place identifiers on things like: Grandma's house, cousin's house, local restaurant if it's a one and only kind of place, best friend's house. Don't put real people names like Jose's house or Grandma William's house. Once you are done getting the buildings and places on your map-think about the questions I asked you during your interview about your neighborhood.

Examples:

\*Does your neighborhood have a working social system? As in a particular way it runs?

For example, is there someone who runs it, either in a positive way like a Grandma who watches out for the kids, or in a not so positive manner, like a gang or a drug outfit that occupies the neighborhood? Who are the people in charge if this exists? Who knows about this control? Is it a positive control or a negative control in your neighborhood?

\*Do you think where you live now, or where you spent time growing up in previously, had anything to do with you becoming a gang member? If it did, then how or why? If you say no, explain why it had no impact on your gang involvement.

\*Are there gangs in your neighborhood? How do you know? Do only the kids know they exist, or do the adults also know about the gangs? How do you think they affect your neighborhood?

Then decide a way for your own map to show me the answers to some of those questions.

Think about the positive influence places and identify those-and then also identify places where not so positive things occur-like where gangs hang out and where drugs may well be sold. Make sure not to put any specific identifiers-as remember I am not collecting this information for cops or to get anyone in trouble-only to gather information on neighborhoods and gang influences.

If you have any questions, or need to see/hear the research questions again, I will be here to assist you.

Each map will be different, so there is no right or wrong way to draw these maps. Just have fun and add as much detail as you'd like-remembering again to not add any specific identifying markers on your map. You will have around an hour to complete this-

hopefully everyone will be finished in this amount of time. If you need a little more, I'll stay a little longer so you can complete the assignment today.

When you are done-put the name you chose to use as your identifier-same as the one you picked for the interview-on the back of your paper.

Okay, Get started!

**Session 4: Photovoice Training for All Participants** (5-6:30 pm, at program building)

**(group)** For information, each participant will miss the following activities while they participate in the research study during each of the 6 scheduled research sessions: (a possible combination of any of the following) independent physical exercise workouts in a workout/exercise room, a boxing skills lesson and workout with coaches, or a life skills building class.

Objective: To train all participants in the photovoice technique, including ethical issues involved, and hand out all materials to complete photovoice assignment.

Materials: Disposable cameras, consent forms for photovoice, manila envelopes labeled with first names of participants only, list of research questions for each participant.

-Photovoice will be introduced to all participants in a group session. Only the researcher and 8 participants will be present.

-Ethical issues and procedures in research as well as specific to photovoice, purpose and instructions for using the photovoice research method, and instructions on the disposable camera usage will be introduced. Researcher will have a disposable camera on hand for all participants to practice its use.

Participants will be clear on instructions for photographs they will be asked to take and how this will tie together with the intended research.

-Participants will be given one disposable camera, and consent forms to turn in with camera, as permission needs to be obtained if they photograph any person. Participants will be given one week to complete the research. When each participant is done with the assignment, they may turn the camera and consent forms into one of their coaches, and the researcher will collect all the completed cameras from the coaches at the end of the week. Consent forms and cameras will be kept confidential and in a locked drawer by coaches until picked up by the researcher. Participants will turn in their cameras and consent forms to coaches by putting them into a sealed manila envelope with only their first name on it, ensuring confidentiality.

-Researcher will take the disposable cameras to a developing one hour facility, and wait while the film is developed to ensure as much confidentiality as possible in regards to film development. Individual consent forms and individual pictures will be put back into the labeled manila envelope to be re-distributed to the participant at the next meeting.

## **Photovoice Training**

### **Session 1**

The photovoice concept was developed by Professor Caroline Wang at the University of Michigan School of Public Health and Mary Ann Burris from the Ford Foundation.

Photovoice is a process that has been used for research, education, social change, and the development of more healthful public policy. It entrusts cameras to people who have the least access to those who make decisions about their lives. People whose voices



frequently go unheard and whose perspectives are often overlooked - from women living in the villages of rural China to people who reside in the homeless shelters of Ann Arbor, Michigan to people struggling with a serious mental illness in Boston - have used photovoice to amplify their visions and experience. Photovoice values the knowledge put forth by people living in a community as a vital source of expertise. Photovoice empowers people at the grassroots level, rather than specialists, policy makers, or professionals, to represent and define issues of concern, areas of strength, and targets for change. ([www.photovoice.com](http://www.photovoice.com)).

**Photovoice has 3 main goals:**

- to enable people to record and reflect their community's strengths and concerns
- to promote critical dialogue and knowledge about personal and community issues through large and small group discussions of photographs
- to reach policy makers.

To these ends, the photovoice process lays out multiple stages for defining the goals of a project, anticipating an audience, taking pictures and telling stories about them, evaluation, and presentation. While photovoice can be done on a more individual basis, one of the most powerful aspects of the technique is the group reflection on and discussion of the photographs.

Participants will attend a Photovoice training. The Photovoice training begins with a discussion of cameras, ethics, and power; ways of seeing photographs; and a philosophy of giving photographs back to community members as a way of expressing appreciation,

respect, or camaraderie. Ethical issues related to taking photographs will be covered in detail including obtaining informed consent from people included in images.

1. **Cameras:** We'll be using these (researcher will have a couple practice disposable cameras for all to see and practice with). These are disposable, and are simple to use. Researcher will demonstrate how to take a photo, how to use flash, and let participants practice by taking a few photos and asking any needed questions. At the end of the session, you will each get a disposable camera for yourself, and you'll have a week to return the used camera back to me, so I can have to film developed and then we'll meet again. I'll tell you more about that in a bit.

2. **Ethics:** Okay, now we need to discuss the ethics of using photography in research. You can't just go out and photograph people whenever you want. They may get upset or offended. You can photograph places and things that aren't alive-like parks or buildings, toys, rooms empty streets, and even some things that are alive-like pets or plants. But people we have to be careful with. When you take your photos, you will get a copy of the 4 research questions. Before you take a photo, think about how you can answer each question a few times. I will hope that each of you will try to answer all 4 of the questions. Remember the questions are:

1. What is the deep, rich, lived experience of youth who become gang involved in an area where gangs are an emerging issue, and how do the people that influence them the most contribute to their gang involvement?

2. What is the deep, rich, lived experience of youth who become gang involved in an area where gangs are an emerging issue, and how do the places they live in contribute to their gang involvement?
3. What is the deep, rich, lived experience of youth currently involved in a gang intervention program, and from their perspective what is helping them the most in the program and what do they see most helping other gang involved youth in the future?
4. What is the deep, rich lived experience of gang involved youth currently involved in an intervention program in regards to how they see themselves as different from their other gang involved peers who are not choosing to get into intervention programs? What makes them seek help towards a more positive future, while others choose not to do so?

For questions number 3 and 4, you may want to bring your camera to Second Round, as they have to do with the program. Just remember, you'll need to be careful about taking photos of people.

Now we are going to go over how you need permission to take peoples photos. Researcher will have copies for all of the 3 different forms for photovoice consent/assent. Researcher will go over 3 forms, and make sure participants understand what consent and assent are, as well as what each form means. Then researcher will pose a few practice questions:

If you want to take a photo of your Grandma because she's been your most influential person, how would you go about doing this using the photovoice

technique? (ask permission, have person read over form or you explain it to them, gain the needed signature on the form, and address to mail consent/assent and photos as well if they check that area, now take photo, put signed forms into manila envelope so you can turn them into researcher).

What about if you want to take a picture of your niece or nephew because your whole life changed when they came into the world? How would you do this using the photovoice technique? (ask permission from mom or dad or guardian of child, have guardian/parent read over form, explain it to them as needed, gain needed signature/address, take photo, put signed form into manila envelope). Now that goes for if your niece or nephew is just a baby-but what if they are old enough to write. Read and understand the forms? Then make sure participants understand when and how to use the assent forms.

\*\*Remember, you won't be able to choose any photos for the research project of people who you have not gotten a signed consent/assent form from. Remember, not all the photos you take will be of people, so you won't have to gain consent every time. Just when the photo will include people.

At end of session, researcher will hand out manila envelopes with the "chosen" pseudonym on the outside. Each envelope will include one disposable camera, multiple copies of all 3 photovoice consent/assent forms, and a copy of the research questions. Researcher will tell participants they have a week to take their photos, and whenever they finish taking their photos, they can turn in their manila envelopes with the used camera, signed consent/assent forms, and the copies of

the questions. They may hand their envelopes to one of the coaches, who will make sure to put the envelopes into a designated and secure area, until the researcher comes to Haven House and picks up the envelopes to develop the film and make copies of the consent/assent forms to mail back to the photo participants. Please be careful of what you decide to photograph. If there are any issues or problems with the photos, coaches will be notified-examples-obscene photos.

To end the session, the researcher will discuss briefly what the next session will entail:

Next session we will be meeting as a group again. Each of you will get your developed pictures, your consent forms again, and a copy of the research questions. You will choose one photo that is your favorite to answer each of the 4 research questions. Then you will make sure you have the needed consent/assent forms for each chosen photo. Finally, you will write a small caption, a few words, a whole paragraph, a few sentences-whatever works for you, to describe the photo and why you chose it to answer which specific question.

**Session 5: Photo Selection Process of Photovoice** (5-7 pm, at program building)

**(group)** For information, each participant will miss the following activities while they participate in the research study during each of the 6 scheduled research sessions: (a possible combination of any of the following) independent physical exercise workouts in a workout/exercise room, a boxing skills lesson and workout with coaches, or a life skills building class.

Objective: To complete selection of photos for research process, write story captions for photos, relate each chosen photo to a research question, and handle any ethical issues regarding consent of people photographed.

Materials: Envelopes with developed photographs, photovoice consent forms, research questions, pens, lined paper/notecards, paper clips.

-All 8 participants and the researcher will meet together.

-Instructions on this part of the photovoice process will be given.

-Each participant will decide on one photo that answers each research question best. (Refer back to page 5 in this document for the 4 research questions).

Participants get to make this choice. If there are any people on the photos, participant must label first name of person on back of the photo, and show they have obtained a permissive signature on the consent form to use that photo. They will make a star on the consent form next to any used name to ensure permission agrees with pictures.

-Next, they will write a small caption telling each picture's story, and how it relates to the research question. (this will be paper-clipped to the actual photo).

## **Session 2**

Today we will be choosing your 4 photos to answer the 4 research questions. I will now pass out your envelopes. Take out your photos and research questions. (researcher will read these outloud again) Choose the four you feel most represent the answers to the research questions. Next, if the picture involves people, find the consent/assent forms to match the picture, and place the picture on top of those forms in 4 separate piles. Researcher has paper clips to secure the

forms to the correct pictures. Researcher will have lined paper and notecards for written part of photovoice project. After you have selected your four photos, think about a small paragraph, phrase or caption, or few sentences to explain your photo and which question it answers and why you think it answers that questions. Next, turn in the remaining photos, the research questions, and whatever consent/assent forms you did not use. Then give the researcher your four selected photos, attached to the correct forms, along with your written caption of each photo.

If you would like a copy of the photos you took, please let the researcher know, and she will get these to you.

Thanks for all your hard work! The next visit we have will be me sharing the results of the research study with you!

**Session 6: Sharing of Research Findings** (one hour **group** presentation of research, 5-6 pm, at program building) For information, each participant will miss the following activities while they participate in the research study during each of the 6 scheduled research sessions: (a possible combination of any of the following) independent physical exercise workouts in a workout/exercise room, a boxing skills lesson and workout with coaches, or a life skills building class.

Objective: Presentation of research findings to participants and program.

Materials: Powerpoint or other visual presentation, any needed presentation equipment, photograph display of photovoice selected photos.

-After researcher has completed her findings, she will schedule a presentation of these for all involved in the research process, and whoever the participants also choose to invite.



## APPENDIX F: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

May I have your permission to audiotape this session?

May I call you by your first name, or will you choose a nickname?

### Demographic Information:

What is your first name (or chosen nickname)?

How old are you?

What is your race?

Are you currently in school, have you graduated, or dropped out?

When did you graduate/drop out? If you dropped out, why did you make that choice?

Do you have a job? Why or why not? What do you do?

How long have you been attending this intervention program?

Why do you come to this program?

How did you find out about it?

Are you a gang member?

Which gang do you affiliate with?

How old were you when you were first initiated into the gang?

How long have you been in the gang?

If you are no longer associated with your gang, how long has it been since you stopped hanging with or affiliating with your gang?

What was your first language? What do you speak at home and with friends?

Interview Questions:

\*Tell me about your family? Who do you live with? Parents? Brothers and sisters?

Extended family? What was your family life like? Was it a happy childhood, or was there family violence involved? What about alcohol or drug use within the family?

\*Tell me about your life, where you were born, grew up, all the places you have lived in or moved to?

\*Tell me about your educational background? How many schools did you go to? Did you switch schools a lot? How come? What do you think about school? What type of grades did/do you get? Favorite classes, least favorite?

\*Tell me about all the jobs you have had? What did you like about them, or not like?

\*Who has been the most positive influence in your life? (been the most helpful, always there for you when you needed someone, given you positive things to think about and do, perhaps loved you the most, took care of you) How did they positively influence you?

\*Who has been the most negative influence in your life? (had a negative impact on your life, physically or emotionally abusive, was involved in drugs or alcohol and it impacted you, was never there for you, involved you in illegal activities, bullied you, you think back negatively about that person) How did they negatively influence you?

\*Did either the most positive person or most negative person in your life have anything to do with you becoming gang involved? How?

\* Tell me about your neighborhood. Where do you live? What type of building do you live in, (an apartment, a house, a condo, etc.)? How would you describe your neighborhood? (safe, not safe, busy, dirty or clean, crowded, empty, in the city, in the suburbs or out in the country, etc.)

\*Does your neighborhood have a working social system? As in a particular way it runs? For example, is there someone who runs it, either in a positive way like a Grandma who watches out for the kids, or negatively like a gang or a drug outfit that occupies the neighborhood? Who are the people in charge if this exists? Who knows about this control? Is it a positive control or a negative control in your neighborhood?

\*So you think where you live now, or where you spent time growing up in previously, had anything to do with you becoming a gang member? If it did, then how or why? If you say no, explain why it had no impact on your gang involvement.

\*Are there gangs in your neighborhood? How do you know? Do only the kids know they exist, or do the adults also know about the gangs? How do you think they affect your neighborhood?

\*Let's move onto the intervention program you attend now. You have already told me about how you heard about it, and how long you've been coming, so let me now ask what makes you come to the program? What do you think is helping you the most in the program?

\*Have you ever been involved in any other intervention program? What is different or unique about this program that keeps you coming?

\*What has made the most difference in your life as a result of attending this program? What changes in your life have you made since attending this program?

\*What part of this program do you think would help another youth who is gang involved the most? Why do you think this particular part would help them?

\*What do you think the purpose of this program is? What does this program mean to you for your future? Is it supposed to get you out of the gang?

\*Have you gotten out of the gang since starting this program? Why, or why not? If you did get out of your gang after starting this program, what exactly about this program helped you make that decision?

\*If you are still in your gang, why are you? Do you see this program as helping you if you are still in your gang? How?

\*Why do you think you are coming to this program, but other peers of yours who are also gang members, (in the past or currently), do not choose to come? How do you see yourself as different from your peers who choose not to come to this program or another intervention program?

\* Tell me about your future. (family, friends, career, dreams) Do you think the way you see your future has changed since you started this program? How did you see your future differently before you started this program, and how is it different now because of this program?

\* What specifically about this program helped you paint a brighter future for yourself? What actual steps have you taken to create that future you picture now in your head?

\*Is there anything else you think I should know, or others should know, about being a youth who is/was gang involved? Do you have anything else you would like to add to this interview?

Thank you for your time

\*Questions asked all include a theoretical background in ecological systems theory (questions on family and influential people, as well as surrounding people and places), social disorganization theory (any questions dealing with neighborhoods or the way they are structured socially or physically-and how this may have impacted the youth's life), or

the OJJDP's gang prevention and intervention model (any questions related to the program at hand, the discovery of exactly what is working or not in the current program, and ways from youth's point of view how to improve or what is working in the program, as well as anything to do with prevention and/or intervention of gangs).