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The Role of Violence within and across Self-identified Gang Youth

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A Dissertation submitted to The Graduate School at the University of Missouri-St. Louis
for the partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree
Doctor of Philosophy in Criminology and Criminal Justice

December 2014

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The Role of Violence within and across Self-identified Gang Youth

ABSTRACT

Within the field of criminology, increased attention has been afforded to the influence and importance of individual exposure to violence and victimization. Research has demonstrated that violence – whether actual or anticipated – is not distributed evenly across individuals, but is amplified during the period of adolescence and is strongly influenced by individual risky behavior. Perhaps for no other group has the role of violence been more pronounced than in the lives of gang affiliated youth. Whether actual (i.e., direct and vicarious victimization) or anticipated (i.e., fear of crime and perceived risk of victimization) violence, gang youth commonly discuss violence in terms of having an important role in both their gang experiences and daily lives. In particular, research has demonstrated how violence can play an important role within the specific stages of the gang experience – 1) gang joining, 2) active membership, and 3) gang leaving. This includes the importance of protection from violence as a common motivator for joining, the utility of violence as a means of building cohesion between active gang members, as well as the importance of exposure to violence as an impetus for gang leaving. While the role of violence is documented in the lives of gang youth, research has often approached the study of its influence and role in a disjointed and static manner. This has left a more fragmented understanding of the role of violence within specific stages of the gang experience. While further descriptive understanding of the role of violence within each stage of membership is needed, whether the role of violence changes over time or interacts across stages has largely been unexplored. This dissertation attempts to address this gap in the literature by using a mixed methods approach to examine and provide

detailed descriptive accounts of the role of violence both within and across self-identified gang youth.

This dissertation examines the role of violence within and across a sample of self-identified gang youth using both retrospective and prospective data. The objectives of the dissertation are: 1) to examine the prevalence and extent of objective (i.e., actual violence) and subjective violence (i.e., anticipated violence) within the three emergent domains (i.e., the neighborhood, school, and peer domains) as well as whether there are qualitative differences in violence between those who retrospectively discuss their self-identified status in terms of involvement in a gang or in a non-gang peer group; 2) to examine the extent and role of violence within each stage of membership (i.e., around the formation of gang ties, the period of active involvement, and the period of gang disassociation); and 3) to examine whether the role of violence varies over time or interacts across the tenure of gang involvement.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Few areas of criminological research have garnered as much scholastic and popular attention as have youth gangs. While street gangs have had a long and storied history in the United States (U.S.) (Howell & Moore, 2010), it is only within the past thirty years that their prevalence has been acknowledged by communities large and small across the entire nation (Decker, Melde, & Pyrooz, 2013; Klein, 1995; W. Miller, 1982/1992; 2001). Within the last ten years, gang prevalence has witnessed a steady rise (from 2001 and 2005) and subsequent stabilization (from 2005 to 2010) (Howell, Egley, Tita, & Griffiths, 2011). Even with recently stable gang prevalence rates, roughly one-third of communities – urban, suburban, and rural – report the existence of gangs within their jurisdictions (Egley & Howell, 2012). Based on most recent law enforcement estimates, approximately 756,000 youth are involved in 29,400 gangs across the U.S. (Egley & Howell, 2012).

In addition to findings of widespread gang prevalence and activity by law enforcement, survey research has also contributed to the collective understanding of youth gangs. While prevalence of membership varies across studies, most longitudinal youth surveys find between five and 20 percent of surveyed youth are gang affiliated at some point (Esbensen, Peterson, Taylor, & Freng, 2010; Gordon et al., 2004; Hill, Howell, Hawkins, & Battin-Pearson, 1999; Huizinga & Schumann, 2001; Thornberry, Krohn, Lizzotte, Smith, & Tobin, 2003). While gang participation peaks approximately around the age of 14, survey research has found that youth affiliation is fleeting – lasting approximately one year or less (Esbensen & Huizinga, 1993; Peterson, Taylor, & Esbensen, 2004; Thornberry, Huizinga, & Loeber, 2004; Thornberry et al., 2003).

While only a small proportion of the youth population ever join a gang – “the best estimate of general U. S. youth gang prevalence is 5% ever-joined” (Klein & Maxson, 2006), even temporary affiliation has numerous deleterious consequences (Melde & Esbensen, 2014). Relative to non-gang youth, gang members report greater involvement in delinquent behavior (Battin-Pearson, Thornberry, Hawkins, & Krohn, 1998; Esbensen & Huizinga, 1993; Krohn & Thornberry, 2008; Thornberry et al., 2003) as well as more delinquent attitudes (Esbensen & Huizinga, 1993; Krohn & Thornberry, 2008; Peterson et al., 2004; Thornberry et al., 2003). The amplification effect of gang affiliation is such that gang members have been found to account for between 50 and 86 percent of all youth offending in high risk samples (Esbensen & Huizinga, 1993; Esbensen et al., 2010; Huizinga, Weiher, Espiritu, & Esbensen, 2003; Thornberry & Burch, 1997; Thornberry et al., 2003; Thornberry et al., 2004). Gang youth are also more at risk for victimization and report a greater number of serious violent victimizations than similar non-gang youth (Curry, Decker, & Egley, 2002; Maxson, Curry, and Howell, 2002; Melde, Taylor, & Esbensen, 2009; Peterson et al., 2004; Rosenfeld, Bray, & Egley, 1999; Taylor, Freng, Esbensen, & Peterson, 2008; Taylor, Peterson, Esbensen, & Freng, 2007). Faced with enhanced risk and exposure to crime and victimization, violence is often discussed in terms of having an important role in the lives of gang youth (Decker et al., 2013; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996).

The resurgence of gangs and their known deleterious effects has brought renewed scholarly attention to the experiences of gang youth. While research has largely focused on the consequences of active membership and risk factors for joining, it has also demonstrated the important role violence plays within the lives of gang youth. Research

has demonstrated the presence and importance of violence within each stage of membership (i.e., gang joining, active membership, and gang leaving) (see Decker & Van Winkle, 1996). Specific to pathways into gang membership, research has identified a variety of motivations and means for joining. While many youth cite joining gangs for fun, friendship, and monetary rewards, desire for the protection the gang is thought to provide is one of the most commonly cited motivators (Decker, 1996; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Esbensen, Deschenes, & Winfree, 1999; J. Miller, 1996; 2001; Padilla, 1992; Peterson et al., 2004; Vigil, 1988). While most youth discuss joining their gang through a passive and non-violent process, many discuss having witnessed or experienced joining through an active process in which violence plays a central role (e.g., jumping in, committing a crime) (see Decker, 1996; Quicker, 1983; 1999).

During the period of active membership, violence plays a particularly integral role in the gang experience (Decker, 1996; Klein & Maxson, 1989). Active gang members experience exacerbated risk and prevalence of individual victimization as well as vicarious exposure to violence (Melde et al., 2009; Peterson et al., 2004; Taylor et al., 2007; 2008). The increased threat and prevalence of victimization that gang members' face derives from both inter-gang (Decker, 1996; Hagedorn, 1988; Klein, 1971; Vigil, 1988) and intra-gang sources (Decker & Curry, 2002; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; J. Miller, 1998; 2001). Inter-gang violence, including actual violent incidents as well as the perceived or anticipated threat of possible future violence between rival gangs, is considered the "predominant myth system among gang members" (Klein, 1971: 85) and a demonstrated facilitator of gang cohesion (Decker, 1996; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Klein, 1971; Hagedorn, 1988).

Much less is understood about pathways out of gangs as well as the role violence plays in the leaving process although gang desistance has recently begun to attract the interest of scholars. While the likelihood of gang leaving is consistent¹ across different racial and ethnic groups (Thornberry et al., 2003), research has demonstrated that females appear to join and leave gangs faster and at a younger age (Esbensen & Huizinga, 1993; Peterson, 2012; Pyrooz, Sweeten & Piquero, 2013; Sweeten, Pyrooz, & Piquero, 2013; Thornberry et al., 2003). Youth also stress a variety of factors and experiences which influence and often motivate their decision to leave. This can include gradual disinterest in the gang as well as family ties and responsibilities (Decker & Lauritsen, 2002; Decker & Pyrooz, 2011; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Fleisher, 1998; Hagedorn & Devitt, 1999; Horowitz, 1983; Monti, 1994; Padilla, 1992; Peterson, 2012; Pyrooz & Decker, 2011; Quicker, 1983; 1999; Vigil, 1988). Among the most commonly cited factors contributing to gang leaving are direct and vicarious exposure to violence (Decker & Lauritsen, 2002; Decker & Pyrooz, 2011; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Monti, 1994; Padilla, 1992; Peterson, 2012; Pyrooz & Decker, 2011; Quicker, 1983; 1999; Vigil, 1988). Similar to gang joining, former gang members note that the process of leaving their gang occurs either through an informal and passive process or an active and formal process. While leaving through a passive process (e.g., making new friends, moving away, aging out) is the most commonly cited method, it is the active process in which violence can play a central role (e.g., jumping out, committing a crime to leave, asking leaders for permission) (see Decker & Lauritsen, 2002; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Fleisher, 1998;

¹ In their research with the Pathways to Desistance study in Philadelphia and Phoenix, Pyrooz and colleagues (2013) uniquely documented that males, blacks, and Hispanics remained in gangs longer than their female and white counterparts. The authors suggests that this unpredicted finding may be because minority males have a more difficult time desisting from gang involvement given their larger social networks which may be less integrated into prosocial community networks.

Fong, Vogel, & Buentello, 1995; Hagedorn, 1994; Hagedorn & Devitt, 1999; Harris, 1994; Horowitz, 1983; Matza, 1964; Maxson, 1993; J. Miller, 2001; Monti, 1994; Padilla, 1992; Peterson, 2012; Quicker, 1983; 1999; Vigil, 1988).

While the role of violence has been documented within the lives of gang youth, research has often explored its role in a disjointed and static manner. This approach has left a fragmented understanding of the importance of violence by exploring its role within specific stages of membership (i.e., the role of violence in the period of gang joining, or the period of active membership, or the period of gang leaving). Given this, far less is understood about the role violence plays across the entirety of the gang experience. While further descriptive understanding of the extent and role of violence within each stage of gang membership is needed, attention must also be given to the role of violence across stages of gang affiliation. To date, the extent to which the role of violence changes over time or interacts across stages has largely been unexplored. This dissertation attempts to address this gap in the literature by examining the role of violence within and across self-identified gang youth.

The dissertation examines the role of violence with a multi-site sample of gang-involved adolescents. The dissertation's first research objective is to examine the prevalence and extent of objective (i.e., actual violence) and subjective (i.e., anticipated violence) forms of violence experienced by the sample of youth. Particular attention is afforded to the identification and examination of emergent domains of violence as well as inspection of qualitative differences between youth who retrospectively discuss their self-identified status in terms of involvement in a gang or non-gang peer group. The second objective is to situate and explore changes in perceptions of fear and insecurity as well as

experiences with violence *around* the stages of gang membership (i.e., around the formation of gang ties, the process of joining or affiliation, the period of active participation, and the process of leaving or disengagement). The third and final research objective is to examine whether the role of violence varies over time or interacts across the duration of gang involvement. Overall, this dissertation seeks to expand understanding of the role of violence within and across the lives of current and former gang youth. In order to examine these research objectives, the dissertation employs a mixed methods approach using both retrospective qualitative narratives as well as prospective quantitative survey data from a multi-site sample of self-identified gang youth.

The structure of the dissertation is as follows. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the relevant gang literature, including the prevalence of membership, complexities in defining membership, as well as the extent and effect of violence within the stages of membership. Chapter 3 discusses the theoretical models of gang membership and lays out the theoretical framework for the dissertation – drawing on social learning theory. At the close of the chapter, a description of the dissertation’s primary and secondary research objectives is provided. Chapter 4 provides a detailed description of the methodologies of the two sources of data, the analytic techniques used to explore the research objectives, and a discussion of the prevalence and major thematic patterns of violence across the selected sites. Deviant case analysis is also presented for youth who indicated no meaningful experiences with or perceptions of disorder within their narrative accounts. Chapters 5, 6, and 7 exhaustively explore, in turn, the three specific emergent thematic domains of violence as well as inductively identified subthemes. Special attention is

afforded to the presentation of deviant cases, discontinuities within narrative accounts, as well as qualitative differences between those retrospectively classified as part of a gang or non-gang peer group. Chapter 8 then draws on both the retrospective narrative accounts as well as the longitudinal, prospective survey responses of a restricted sample of gang-involved respondents for which violence was both prevalent and salient within and across their gang experience. The chapter situates and examines violence *around* the stages of involvement and demonstrates the changing and interacting nature of violence within and across the lives of gang youth. The final chapter summarizes key findings as well as discusses the theoretical and practical contribution of the dissertation.

CHAPTER TWO: RELEVANT LITERATURE

Prevalence of Gang Membership

In recent decades, there has been increasing acknowledgement of the existence of gangs across a variety of communities within the U.S. Reports by law enforcement acknowledge the existence of gangs in over 3,500 jurisdictions in 2010 (Egley & Howell, 2012) – including large urban cities, suburban counties, small cities, and rural counties. While the existence of gangs was recognized by several large urban cities prior to the 1960s (Klein, 1995), the overwhelming majority of U.S. cities experienced and/or acknowledged the onset of gang problems during and following the 1980s (Howell, Egley, & Gleason, 2002; Howell, Moore, & Egley, 2002; National Youth Gang Survey, 1999). To delineate the differences between cities with earlier and later onset and/or recognition of gang presence, chronic and emergent gang cities were identified.

Spergel and Curry (1993) specified that chronic gang cities have had longer histories of serious gang problems, predating 1980. While fewer in number, chronic gang cities include some of the nation's largest cities – such as Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York – and also tend to have more stereotypical gangs and gang members relative to emergent cities. Gangs in chronic gang cities are often more structured – including a higher proportion of membership in traditional gangs (Klein & Maxson, 1996; Maxson & Klein, 1995) – and members are often involved in more serious and diverse offending (Howell, Egley, et al., 2002; Howell, Moore, et al., 2002; Spergel & Curry, 1993). Chronic gang cities also have more gang rivalries, gang traditions, experience greater intergenerational transmission of membership and values, as well as overall infusion of

gang culture into the greater community (Howell, Egley, et al., 2002; Howell, Moore, et al., 2002; Spergel & Curry, 1993).

Conversely, emergent cities are often smaller in residential population, have had comparatively less serious gang problems, and experienced gang onset – and/or formal acknowledgement – after 1980 (Spergel & Curry, 1993). Relative to gangs and gang members in chronic gang cities, members in emergent cities often participate in comparatively less serious offending and the gangs often include a greater number of younger, female, and white members (Howell, Egley, et al., 2002; Howell, Moore, et al., 2002; Spergel & Curry, 1993). Members in emergent cities are also disproportionately involved in compressed and specialty gangs (Klein & Maxson, 1996) which are often racially and ethnically mixed (Howell, Egley, et al., 2002; Howell, Moore, et al., 2002; Spergel & Curry, 1993).

The National Youth Gang Survey (NYGS) has been measuring trends in the prevalence of gangs across the U.S. beginning in the 1990s; the reported prevalence of gangs in the U.S. has fallen from a high of 39.9 percent to a low of 23.9 percent of the study population in 2001. Following the low point in 2001, the prevalence of gangs subsequently increased over the next four years (33.6% in 2005) and has remained relatively stable through 2009 (34.6%) (Howell et al., 2011). On the whole, chronic cities experienced relative stability in the prevalence and severity of gang problems overtime. For the past thirty years, however, some emergent cities have encountered notable fluctuations in the presence and severity of gang problems while others have had relatively stable and serious histories of gang problems (Egley, Howell, & Major, 2004). Given differences in city-specific seriousness and stability of gang problems, the

delineation between chronic and emergent gang cities may have questionable utility at this point. This is particularly the case within the emergent gang cities category, which can include cities with a stable and serious gang problem of thirty years as well as cities with less serious and short-term gang problems. Despite the label shortcomings, the temporal distinction between the two groups of gang cities has proven central to prior research and the collective understanding of the nature of gang problems (e.g. chronic and emergent cities are demographically and behaviorally distinct) as well as what strategies are most appropriate to control gangs (Howell, Moore et al., 2002; Klein & Maxson, 2006).

Beyond the use of law enforcement data, survey research has contributed to the understanding of youth gangs in several important ways including: 1) the prevalence of self-identified youth gang membership, 2) the peak age of gang joining, 3) the prevalence of female gang members, and 4) the extent of minorities in gangs. Given that survey research cannot typically draw on nationally representative samples; survey samples are generally drawn from schools, high-risk cities and neighborhoods, and arrested or incarcerated populations. Contributing to the understanding of gang prevalence in the U.S., survey research demonstrated that between five to 20 percent of youth are gang affiliated (Snyder & Sickmund, 1999). In their study of almost 6,000 middle school students in 11 U.S. cities, Esbensen and colleagues (2010; Esbensen & Winfree, 1998) found that 17 percent of youth were ever gang affiliated and almost 9 percent were presently active at the time of the study. Similar prevalence rates of youth having ever been gang affiliated have also been found within the Denver Youth Survey (14%), the Pittsburgh Youth Study (19.2%), and the Seattle Social Development Project (15.3%)

(Gordon et al., 2004; Hill et al., 1999; Huizinga & Schumann, 2001). Variations in the self-identified prevalence of gang membership found across survey research is influenced not just by time-period, geographic location, and sampling design, but also by the definition and measurement of gang involvement.

Survey research demonstrated that most youth join gangs between 11 and 15 years of age while active involvement peaks prior to the age of about 14 (Esbensen & Huizinga, 1993; Hill et al., 1999; Thornberry et al., 2003). Research has also demonstrated that males are one and a half to two times more likely to join a gang than are females (Klein & Maxson, 2006). That said, between 8 and 12 percent of juvenile females will join a gang (Esbensen, Brick, Melde, Tusinski, & Taylor, 2008; Esbensen & Winfree, 1998; Hill et al., 1999), equating to a quarter to a third of all gang members (Esbensen & Huizinga, 1993; Esbensen et al., 2010). Thornberry and colleagues (2003) further demonstrated that females join and leave their gang at younger ages than their male counterparts. Much ethnographic research in the U.S. and Europe has demonstrated the disproportionate involvement of urban minorities and non-native immigrants in youth gangs (see Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Lien, 2005; Vigil, 1988; 2002). While the disproportionate level of minority involvement in gangs has been largely upheld in qualitative studies, survey research has tempered the popular assumption that gangs are almost exclusively composed of poor, urban, minority, non-native/immigrant males; instead demonstrating that the racial and ethnic composition of the gang population is remarkably similar to that of its surrounding community (Esbensen & Carson, 2012; Esbensen & Peterson Lynskey, 2001; Esbensen et al., 2010; Weerman & Esbensen, 2005). In particular, research has found sizable populations of native-European

(Weerman & Esbensen, 2005) and white American youth who are largely undetected or unacknowledged as gang involved (Esbensen & Peterson Lynskey, 2001; Esbensen et al., 2010).

Defining Gang Membership

Perhaps the most persistent problem plaguing gang research has been the lack of a definitional consensus of gang membership (Ball & Curry, 1995; Esbensen, Winfree, He, & Taylor, 2001; Klein & Maxson, 2006). The earliest attempt at defining the uniqueness of gangs was by Thrasher (1927). Gangs were considered distinct from other youth groups and were characterized by: a) spontaneous and unplanned origin, b) intimate face-to-face relations, c) a sense of organization, solidarity, and morale that is superior to that exhibited by the mob, d) a tendency to move through space and meet a hostile element, which can precipitate cooperative and planned conflict – a morale-boosting activity in itself, e) the creation of a shared *esprit de corps* and a common tradition or “heritage of memories,” and f) a propensity for some geographic territory, which it will defend through force if necessary (Thrasher 1927: 36-46). The omission of delinquent or illicit behavior from Thrasher’s characteristics of the gang was intentional; acknowledging that criminal gangs were only some of many gangs he observed in Chicago.

Klein’s (1971) work with Los Angeles gangs emphasized the importance that gangs be perceived as distinct by their neighborhood, recognize themselves (self-identify/nominate) as a denotable group, and be sufficiently involved in illegal activity to garner negative responses from the neighborhood and/or law enforcement. Without the inclusion of involvement in illegal activity, the definition was left vulnerable to the inclusion of seeming pro-social groups (e.g., the Boy Scouts of America, community and

religious organizations, and university fraternities and sororities) (Bursik & Grasmick, 1993; 1995). Inclusion of illegal and delinquent behavior, while now a common benchmark of defining membership (Esbensen et al., 2010), remains a contested point within gang research (Klein & Maxson, 2006; Short, 1996).

Most modern gang research uses definitions which merge the major concepts of both Thrasher (1927) and Klein (1971). Definitions typically emphasize “descriptors” (Klein & Maxson, 2006) such as group status, the use of recognizable symbols, verbal and nonverbal communication of gang status, permanence, claimed and defended turf, and involvement in crime (Curry, Decker, & Pyrooz, 2014). Recent collaborations between American and European gang researchers have also provided a significant stride forward in the movement towards a consensus gang measure. The Eurogang definition of a troublesome youth group seeks to capture the necessary minimal elements of gang characteristics without the use of the word “gang.” This approach was designed for the study of gangs in non-English speaking countries in which the word “gang” may not be universally understood, translatable, or may draw comparison to the popular imagery associated with so-called American gangs (e.g., the Bloods and Crips of Compton, California). The Eurogang definition emphasizes durability, street orientation, youth status, and self-identified group involvement in illegal behavior (Weerman et al., 2009) and has been demonstrated as successfully predictive within both European and American samples (Esbensen et al., 2008; Esbensen & Weerman, 2005; Matsuda, Esbensen, & Carson, 2012).

While there is growing consensus of the definitional criteria of gang membership, the most commonly used measurement approach is self-nomination: directly asking

individuals to identify if they are currently in a gang (Esbensen & Winfree et al., 2001; Thornberry et al., 2003). Self-nomination has been repeatedly upheld as a robust indicator of membership and is the most commonly used law enforcement approach to identifying gang members (Bursik & Grasmick, 1995; Curry et al., 2014; Esbensen & Huizinga, 1993; Esbensen & Winfree, 1998; Esbensen & Winfree et al., 2001; Huizinga & Elliott, 1986; Matsuda et al., 2012; Thornberry et al., 2003).

While critics of the approach often question whether or not individuals truthfully respond, the approach's reliance on individual perceptions of what constitutes a gang and active membership in that group may account for capturing a diverse pool of current and former members. This may be particularly problematic across locations with varying gang problems and histories (i.e., chronic and emergent gang cities), where individual perceptions of what constitutes "a gang" and "gang membership" may individually vary due to individual experiences with gangs as well as the influence of local and national media depictions of gangs (e.g., The History Channel's television series *Gangland*)² (see Klein & Maxson, 2006).

Just as there has been ardent debate over the definition and measurement of active membership, defining gang leaving has proved similarly problematic. Research has demonstrated that gang membership is a fleeting youth experience, lasting approximately one year or less (Esbensen & Huizinga, 1993; Peterson et al., 2004; Thornberry et al., 2003; 2004). While self-reported former membership is the most common means of identifying desisted members, self-identified former membership may coincide with

² The *Gangland* series ran 88 original television episodes on The History Channel between 2007 and 2010. The series is presently in syndication on the cable television channels Spike and The History Channel. While *Gangland* classifies itself as a documentary television series, its episodes provide viewers with an overly dramatic and violent presentation of established traditional gangs (e.g., Aryan Brotherhood, Bloods, Crips, Mara Salvatrucha, and Sureños) in a variety of American cities.

continued involvement with and emotional attachment to former associates. Self-identified former members may continue to participate in varying levels of involvement in activities – whether illicit or leisure – with former associates. Individuals may also experience varying levels of emotional attachment to all or a select group of former associates (e.g., I would feel compelled to help out the former gang or a specific former associate if they were in trouble). Using these two dimensions (i.e., sustained activities with and attachments to a former gang), Figure 1 shows a typology of former gang members that has been proposed to classify individuals (Decker & Lauritsen, 2002; Pyrooz & Decker, 2011; Pyrooz, Decker, & Webb, 2014).

Figure 1: Typology of Self-Identified Former Gang Members³

		<i>Emotional ties with former associates</i>	
		No	Yes
<i>Engaged in activities with former associates</i>	No	A. True desisters	B. Persistent ties
	Yes	C. Instrumental friendships	D. Decelerating membership

This typology identifies four types of individuals who claim to have left their gang. Those with no sustained involvement with and attachment to former gang associates are categorized as true gang desisters (Group A). Those in Group B no longer discuss engaging in illicit or leisure activities with their former associates, but indicate some degree of persistent emotional attachment or loyalty to the former gang or specific former associates. Those in Group C remain involved in activities, illicit and/or leisure, with former associates, but no longer express attachment or loyalty to their former gang group or associates. Persistent involvement in activities with these former associates may continue, but the emotional relationship between the self-identified gang leaver and former gang members appears instrumental in nature (e.g., the individual may interact

³ Adapted from Decker and Lauritsen (2002) and Pyrooz and Decker (2011).

with former associates for the benefit of continued access to illicit substances). Finally, those in Group D – while having self-reported no longer being an active gang member – still remain involved in activities with and express emotional attachment to former associates. While one could suggest those in this group are being disingenuous in their self-identification of gang status, they are unique from those reporting active membership in that they have self-reported active membership previously, but now perceive their status has changed. It is possible that individuals in this group have experienced meaningful reductions in the extent to which they spend time with and are emotionally attached to gang associates (i.e., decelerating gang involvement). The disjuncture between self-identified former membership and enduring social and behavioral ties to gang associates remains a problematic feature of defining and researching gang leavers (see also Decker & Lauritsen, 2002; Pyrooz & Decker, 2011; Pyrooz et al., 2014; Sweeten et al., 2013).

The Gang Experience

Growing acknowledgement of gangs across a variety of communities as well as their known deleterious effects has brought renewed scholarly attention to the gang experience for youth. The three stages of membership – 1) gang joining, 2) active membership, and 3) gang leaving – are each distinct chapters in the gang experience. While each stage is of comparable importance, research to date has placed much greater emphasis on the stages of gang joining and active membership. In particular, most empirical research has focused either on the identification of risk factors for gang joining or on examining the behavioral and attitudinal consequences of active membership (Decker et al., 2013; Klein & Maxson, 2006; Krohn & Thornberry, 2008). In spite of this,

a growing understanding of the entire gang experience and the role violence plays within it is beginning to emerge.

Pathways into Gangs

Gang membership is not a randomly assigned experience which is spontaneously thrust upon youth. Individuals often get to know and spend time with gang members over a period of time before finding themselves solicited by a member or voicing their own interest in joining a gang (Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Lauger, 2012; Miller, 2006; Monti, 1994; Padilla, 1992). Research has identified two factors – pushes and pulls – which have been found to attract and compel individuals to join a gang. Pulls are features of gang membership – whether actual, anticipated, and/or mythic – which attract individuals into gangs. Research has also found others who discuss feeling as if they were pushed into gang membership by forces beyond their control. It is through these push factors where violence – whether real, anticipated, and/or mythic – can play a central motivating role. While some joiners may discuss joining exclusively because of push or pull features of membership, many discuss the importance of co-occurring life experiences and features of membership which both pushed and pulled them into membership.

To date, most research has found that non-violent pull factors are the most commonly identified motivators for gang joining. These can include having friends or family members in the gang as well as anticipated opportunities to make money, meet members of the opposite sex, increase status within the neighborhood, strengthen cultural pride, and for fun and excitement (Decker & Curry, 2000; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Durán, 2013; Esbensen et al., 1999; Esbensen & Peterson Lynskey, 2001; Esbensen &

Winfree, 2013; Freng & Winfree, 2004; Lauger, 2012; Maxson & Whitlock, 2002; Monti, 1994; J. Miller, 1996; 2001; Padilla, 1992; Peterson, 2009; 2012; Peterson et al., 2004; Spergel, 1995; Thornberry et al., 2003; Vigil, 1988; 2002). The most commonly discussed push motivation found in prior research is the desire for protection and insulation from violence which is believed to be provided by the gang (Decker & Curry, 2000; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Durán, 2013; Esbensen et al., 1999; Esbensen & Peterson Lynskey, 2001; Freng & Winfree, 2004; Lauger, 2012; Maxson & Whitlock, 2002; Melde et al., 2009; J. Miller, 2001; Monti, 1994; Padilla, 1992; Peterson, 2009; 2012; Peterson et al., 2004; Spergel, 1995; Thornberry et al., 2003). While cited by both male and female gang joiners, research has demonstrated that females, in particular, report that they joined the gang seeking protection from physical and sexual abuse by family members or romantic partners (Fleisher, 1998; Harris, 1994; Joe & Chesney-Lind, 1995; Lauderback, Hansen, & Waldorf, 1992; Lauger, 2012; J. Miller, 1998; 2001; Moore, 1991; Portillos, 1999). Still other youth felt compelled to or believed they were forced to join because they both anticipated and feared the consequences of remaining unaffiliated (Curry et al., 2014; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Esbensen et al., 1999; Padilla, 1992; Peterson et al., 2004; Spergel, 1995). By remaining unaffiliated, youth discuss being fearful of harassment and victimization by gang members and others in their schools or neighborhoods (Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; J. Miller, 2001; Monti, 1994). While the desire for protection – where violence plays a central role through real, anticipated, and/or mythic violent consequences – is a commonly discussed motivator for joining, the importance of other co-occurring and non-violent experiences and motivations should not be understated.

Similar to the formation of other friendship peer groups (Warr, 2002), the desire to join a gang may spontaneously manifest or gradually evolve over a period of time. An individual who is sufficiently pulled and/or pushed in membership may express individual interest in joining or be solicited by a friend or acquaintance in the gang (Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Lauger, 2012; Monti, 1994). If the gang is agreeable, an individual may join the gang either through an active/formal process (i.e., initiation) or a passive/informal process (i.e., gaining acceptance and membership in the gang by gradually spending greater amounts of time with the gang). Research to date, drawing overwhelmingly from ethnographic studies, has found evidence for an active process of gang joining. Violence often plays a central role in active/formal processes; in order to join, a potential member must undergo a violent initiation ceremony (e.g., jumping/beating in or being sexed in) (Curry et al., 2014; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Durán, 2013; J. Miller, 1996; 1998; 2001; Padilla, 1992; Portillos, 1999; Quicker, 1983; 1999; Vigil, 1988) or commit a mission or crime for the gang (Curry et al., 2014; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996). However, a growing body of research suggests that a passive and more innocuous process of joining is most prevalent (e.g., acceptance by the gang through a gradual increase in time spent with the gang) (Spergel, 1995; Lauger, 2012; J. Miller, 2001; Monti, 1994). It is often the case that current and former members – while expounding on the formal and violent means associated with joining their gang – routinely cite their own exceptionality by noting that they personally did not need to undergo an active and violent joining process. The practice of contrasting individual exceptionality to ‘others’ is clearly demonstrated by Jody Miller’s (1996; 2001) research with young female gang members. While girls discussed the common practice of ‘sex-ing

in' as a means of gang initiation, none of the girls explicitly stated having undergone the process (see also Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Durán, 2013; Portillos, 1999). Rather Miller demonstrated how the girls created a rigid dichotomy between their own and others' perceived status in the eyes of their male gang associates. Girls who had undergone a 'sex-ing in' process were labeled as "nasty," "hos," and "hoodrats" (J. Miller, 2001: 172), while others noted they were "one of the guys" (Miller, 1996: 308). The widespread extent to which many gang members are "unique" or "exceptions" to the rule may suggest that reports of a violent and active joining process may often be based more in mythic rhetoric than reality. Whichever the process, sufficiently motivated members emerge on the other side of the stage of gang joining as active members of the gang.

The Period of Active Membership

Once active, members report notable changes in their attitudes, behavior, and experiences. On the whole, active members experience increases in delinquent attitudes, opportunities for individual and group delinquency, as well as dramatic shifts in their prevalence and frequency of involvement in delinquent behavior (Decker et al., 2013; Battin-Pearson et al., 1998; Esbensen & Huizinga, 1993; Krohn & Thornberry, 2008; Melde & Esbensen, 2011; 2013; 2014; Peterson et al., 2004; Thornberry et al., 2003). The amplification effect of gang affiliation is such that gang members have been found to account for 50 to 86 percent of all youth offending in high risk samples (Esbensen & Huizinga, 1993; Esbensen et al., 2010; Huizinga et al., 2003; Thornberry & Burch, 1997; Thornberry et al., 2003; 2004). With joiners experiencing significant increases in individual and group offending, both individual gang members and the gang as a

collective group face enhanced risk of and exposure to violence and victimization (Lauritsen & Laub, 2007).

Given their involvement in illicit behavior, members often make ideal targets for victimization from other offenders. Often times gang members will be targeted for victimization because they carry money, weapons (Bjerregaard & Lizotte, 1995; Blumstein, 1995), and other illicit substances on their person (Esbensen & Winfree, 1998; Howell & Decker, 1999; Howell & Gleason, 1999; Huff, 1998; Maxson, 1995). Gang members also face greater risk of and exposure to violence through inter-gang sources (Decker, 1996; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Sanders, 1994). The exchange of violence between rival gangs can often be spread through contagion (Decker, 1996), where acts of retaliation can be continually perpetuated as well as grow exponentially more violent. The mere threat of contagion of inter-gang violence can also contribute to increased weapon carrying (Decker, 1996; Horowitz, 1983), something that further elevates gang members' risk of robbery victimization (Jacobs, 2000).

While the risk and occurrence of violence has been discussed in terms of inter-gang conflicts, gang members are also at risk for victimization from within their own gang. Intra-gang victimization can manifest in the heightened risk of theft of personal possessions, but can also include threats and actual acts of violent victimization. This can include physical violence in the form of an initiation ritual as well as for infractions or violations of gang rules or informal norms (Decker, 1996; Decker & Curry, 2002; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; J. Miller, 1996; 1998; 2001; Padilla, 1995; Vigil, 1988), whether experienced directly, witnessed vicariously, or anticipated based on mythic tales of the use of violence on gang joiners and/or rule violators. While female gang members

experience less victimization than do their male counterparts, they are particularly at risk for intra-gang violence. Miller (1998; 2001; Miller & Decker, 2001) has demonstrated that many of the gendered strategies employed by female members to minimize their risk of inter-gang violence (e.g., seeking protection from their male gang associates) only further increase their risk of physical and sexual violence from within their gang (e.g., physical and sexual victimization as a means of gang joining, emotional and physical degradation for violations of gang rules or informal gender norms, and continued sexual exploitation by male associates during membership).

The fact that gang members face increased risk and frequency of serious violent violence from both within and outside the gang (Decker & Curry, 2002; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Maxson et al., 2002; J. Miller, 2001; Peterson et al., 2004; Rosenfeld et al., 1999; Taylor et al., 2007; 2008) is paradoxical given the fact that a number of gang members report that they joined their gang for protection. While many gang joiners seek protection – or “a safe haven” (Peterson et al., 2004: 813) – from violence, this protection seldom materializes. Research by Melde and colleagues (2009) demonstrated that while the amplification effect of membership status on violent victimization is clear, members appear to recognize and, at least temporarily, tolerate this risk. Their findings demonstrate that individual levels of fear are reduced during the youth’s period of active membership. While fear of crime experiences notable reductions during active membership, objective assessments of risk of victimization are amplified; further supporting the belief that individuals develop a sense of hyperawareness to violence during a period of active membership (Decker, 1996).

Whether violence is objectively or subjectively perceived – violence plays a central role in the gang experience (Decker, 1996; Klein & Maxson, 1989). Gang member experiences with violence, whether actual or anticipated, have the potential to reaffirm a gang member's need for the reduced fear and sense of protection the gang affords (Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Melde et al., 2009; Monti, 1994; J. Miller, 2001; Padilla, 1992). What's more, Klein (1971: 85) noted that violence is the predominant myth system found within gangs. As such, violence has also been shown to foster cohesion between gang members (Decker, 1996; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Klein, 1971; Hagedorn, 1988; Melde et al., 2009). This is particularly so for mythic violence, where the tradition of telling and retelling tales of aggression and inter-gang violence, or war stories, “is a coping mechanism that receives constant reinforcement within the gang” (Klein, 1971: 85). This “myth system” reaffirms group camaraderie in the face of constant adversity or threat from rival gang(s) (Klein, 1971). Despite these potentially violent consequences of gang affiliation, the increased cohesion of the gang only furthers the sense of individual importance and belonging that the gang provides (e.g., a substitute family) (Esbensen et al., 1999; Fleisher, 1998; Miller, 1996; 2001; Vigil, 1988), in addition to access to more social/leisure activities (e.g., opportunities to hang out and socialize with peers, imbibe in alcohol and other substances, and meet new people as well as members of the opposite sex) (Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Klein, 1971; Padilla, 1992; Thrasher, 1927; Vigil, 1988).

Pathways Out of Gangs

For most youth, gang affiliation is a fleeting and short lived experience (Esbensen & Huizinga, 1993; Peterson et al., 2004; Thornberry et al., 2003; 2004). Similar to the

process associated with joining their gang, the desire to leave the gang may spontaneously manifest or gradually build during the period of membership. For many former members, the desire to leave the gang was motivated from growing disinterest in the gang (i.e., the members and the activities) and attraction towards other non-gang activities or peer groups (Decker & Lauritsen, 2002; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Fleisher, 1998; Klein, 1971; Horowitz, 1983; Padilla, 1992; Peterson, 2012; Thrasher, 1927; Quicker, 1983; 1999; Vigil, 1988). Other gang members discuss that they just felt like leaving – often because the gang failed to meet their expectations of what they believed it would be (Carson et al., 2013; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Padilla, 1992; Peterson, 2012; Pyrooz & Decker, 2011). Involuntary peer group change associated with moving to a different city, neighborhood, or school has also been found to prompt gang disaffiliation (Decker & Lauritsen, 2002; Decker & Pyrooz, 2011; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Fleisher, 1998; Hagedorn & Devitt, 1999; Klein, 1971; Padilla, 1992; Thrasher, 1927; Vigil, 1988).

Given the increased risk and exposure to violence inherent in membership, one of the most frequently noted motivations for leaving is the role of violence (Carson et al., 2013; Decker & Lauritsen, 2002; Decker & Pyrooz, 2011; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Hagedorn & Devitt, 1999; Monti, 1994; Padilla, 1992; Peterson, 2012; Pyrooz & Decker, 2011; Taylor, 1990; Vigil, 1988; 2002). For some members leaving was motivated by a single severe violent victimization (Decker & Lauritsen, 2002; Decker & Pyrooz, 2011; Hagedorn & Devitt, 1999; Monti, 1994; Vigil, 1988; 2002). Decker and Lauritsen's (2002) interviews with former members revealed the motivating role that exposure to a single direct or vicarious victimization could spur; EX011 left because "I got to realizing

[gang membership] wasn't my type of life. ...I got seriously stabbed and I was in the hospital for three months" while EX018 and EX002 left because "my cousin got shot" and "all my friends were getting killed" (Decker & Lauritsen, 2002: 57-8). For others, an accumulation or succession quality of violent experiences motivated their gang leaving (Decker & Lauritsen, 2002; Vigil, 1988). Experiences with violence leave many members fatigued and spur a desire to leave the gang to forestall future exposure to violence (Decker & Lauritsen, 2002; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Monti, 1994; Padilla, 1992; Pyrooz & Decker, 2011; Vigil, 1988; 2002). Members also cite other adverse experience associated with their gang affiliation. This can include past experiences with – as well as a desire to avoid future involvement with – the police (Monti, 1994; Moore, 1991; Padilla, 1992; Pyrooz & Decker, 2011; Vigil, 1988) as well as the legal and penal system (Horowitz, 1983; Klein, 1971; Padilla, 1992; Spergel, 1995; Vigil, 1988). The importance of familial disapproval of membership and subsequent pressuring to leave the gang (Carson et al., 2013; Moore, 1991; Padilla, 1992; Peterson, 2012; Vigil, 1988; 2002) further demonstrates the importance of family ties and responsibilities (Decker & Lauritsen, 2002; Decker & Pyrooz, 2011; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Pyrooz & Decker, 2011; Vigil, 1988; 2002).

Much like the process of joining, members who wish to shed their gang affiliation do so either through an active (e.g., killing your own mother, undergoing a jumping out ritual, committing a crime to leave, or formally petitioning gang leaders for permission) or passive process (e.g., making and spending increasing time with new non-gang friends, moving away, or aging out) (see Carson et al., 2013; Decker & Lauritsen, 2002; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Fleisher, 1998; Fong et al., 1995; Hagedorn, 1994; Hagedorn &

Devitt, 1999; Harris, 1994; Horowitz, 1983; Matza, 1964; Maxson, 1993; J. Miller, 2001; Monti, 1994; Padilla, 1992; Peterson, 2012; Pyrooz & Decker, 2011; Quicker, 1983; 1999; Vigil, 1988). While research has overwhelmingly found that individuals discuss leaving through a predominately passive, informal, and non-violent process, many current and former members expound on the normality of a violent exit ritual (see Decker & Lauritsen, 2002; Quicker, 1983; 1999). While Decker and colleagues' (Decker & Lauritsen, 2002; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996) were consistently told the only way to leave the gang was by undergoing a "jumping out" ritual or by shooting a close relative, former members scoffed at the very notion – particularly the obligation of "killing your mother." Similarly to those who discuss their exemption from a formal and violent entry into their gang, many former members note that their exceptional standing in the gang afforded them their uniquely informal and non-violent exit. Former gang members may also experience a range of consequences for their leaving (Carson et al., 2013; Decker & Pyrooz, 2011; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Peterson, 2012). Leavers may still face continued police scrutiny as well as threats and acts of victimization by rival gang members who do not know or care to recognize their non-member standing. Leavers – as well as their close friends and family members – may also face harassment, threats, and violence at the hands of former gang fellows as a consequence desertion. On the whole, however, former gang members subsequently report lower rates of delinquency, delinquent attitudes, and victimization (Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Melde & Esbensen, 2011; 2013; 2014; Peterson et al., 2004).

For many gang youth, violence – whether actual and anticipated – plays an important role both within their daily lives and in gang experiences (Decker & Van

Winkle, 1996). While prior research has demonstrated the extent and potential importance of violence within each of the stages of membership, less is understood about whether the role of violence changes over time or interacts between stages of membership. The next chapter discusses theoretical models of gang membership and lays out the theoretical framework for the dissertation – drawing on social learning theory, and details the dissertation objectives.

CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As discussed in the previous chapter, gang membership is associated with several deleterious consequences. This chapter discusses theoretical models of gang membership and provides the theoretical framework for the dissertation – drawing on social learning theory. The chapter also provides a detailed description of the dissertation’s research objectives. In an attempt to theoretically model the strongly established association between gang affiliation and delinquent involvement, Thornberry and colleagues (1993) proposed three competing theoretical frameworks (i.e., selection, social facilitation, and enhancement). Since their initial proposal, the models have been empirically assessed using diverse samples of current and former gang members (Krohn & Thornberry, 2008).

Models of Gang Membership

The selection model suggests that gangs do not contribute directly to the high levels of delinquency reported by active members. Instead gangs attract and recruit high-offending individuals, thereby rendering any relationship between gang affiliation and delinquency as spurious in nature. Influenced by theories of crime which assert stable individual criminal propensities, the selection model assumes that individuals will be drawn into associations with other similarly crime-prone individuals (i.e., the principle of homophily) (Glueck & Gleuck, 1950; Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). For the selection model to be accurate, gang members – relative to non-gang members – should offend at higher rates before, during, and after membership (Krohn & Thornberry, 2008; Thornberry, Krohn, Lizzotte, & Chard-Wierschem, 1993; Thornberry et al., 2003).

As the theoretical counterpoint to the selection model, the social facilitation model rebuffs the assertion that gang members exhibit elevated criminal propensities

compared to non-members. Instead the model posits that members and non-members are relatively similar in their behavior prior to gang joining. Upon joining, gang membership – through a learning process inherent within the gang group context – influences available opportunities for and subsequent involvement in delinquency. When a member leaves the gang, opportunities and involvement in delinquent behavior should exhibit notable declines. This model suggests a direct causal link between gang affiliation and variations in individual rates of delinquency. The framework draws heavily on learning perspectives, where individuals are influenced by delinquent peer groups through a learning process (Akers, 1998/2009; Sutherland, 1939; Warr, 2002). This includes exposure to opportunities for imitation of delinquent behavior, exposure to an excess of delinquent definitions, and reinforcement of delinquent definitions through rewards (Krohn & Thornberry, 2008; Thornberry et al., 1993; 2003).

Finally, the enhancement model serves as a conceptual middle ground between the selection and social facilitation models. The model suggests that while antisocial individuals may be more at-risk to self-select or be recruited into gangs, affiliation will further exacerbate opportunities for and involvement in delinquency during the period of active membership. This framework draws on both on social learning as well as risk-factor driven developmental perspectives (Krohn & Thornberry, 2008; Thornberry et al., 1993; 2003).

Since the initial proposal of the three models by Thornberry and colleagues (1993), a number of empirical assessments have been conducted using longitudinal panel data. While sufficient evidence exists to justify the need of prevention efforts to “attack risk characteristics” of potential joiners (Klein & Maxson, 2006), Krohn and Thornberry

(2008) concluded that, to date, a pure selection model – where members, relative to non-members, have higher rates of delinquency before, during, and after membership – has failed to be supported. This suggests that theoretical perspectives predicated on stable criminal propensities (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990) and individual self-selection into associations with similarly crime-prone peers (i.e., the principle of homophily) (Glueck & Glueck, 1950) are ill-suited for theorizing gang membership.

Conversely, empirical support for the social facilitation and enhancement models has been widespread across a variety of longitudinal quantitative youth studies (Bendixen, Endresen, & Olweus, 2006; Esbensen & Huizinga, 1993; Hill et al., 1999; Lahey, Gordon, Loeber, Stouthamer-Loeber, & Farrington, 1999; Thornberry, 1998; Thornberry et al., 1993; 2003) as well as qualitative gang research (Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Horowitz, 1983; Vigil, 1988). Consistent with the mechanisms of social learning theory (Krohn & Thornberry, 2008; Melde & Esbensen, 2011; 2013; Thornberry et al., 2003; Winfree, Backström, & Mays, 1994; Winfree, Mays, & Backström, 1994), the models suggest that changes in opportunities for and involvement in delinquent behavior are directly influenced by changes in gang status. This is illustrated by greater involvement in and opportunities for delinquency during the period of active membership than prior to joining and subsequent leaving (Krohn & Thornberry, 2008). Given the utility of the models in accounting for change in individual behavior and opportunities over the lifecycle of gang membership, social learning provides a potential framework for accounting for changes in victimization (Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Melde & Esbensen, 2011; Peterson et al., 2004) and the role of violence within and across the lives of self-identified gang youth.

Social Learning Theory

Learning perspectives have their sociological origins in Sutherland's (1939) differential association theory which posits that criminal behavior is learned through interactions with others who engage in and hold criminal beliefs. The learning process occurs within the intimate peer group and suggests that criminal behavior is a result of law-violating definitions exceeding law-abiding definitions (Sutherland & Cressey, 1960). While differential association theory has been supported by research illustrating the strong relationship between self-reported delinquency and the number of delinquent peers (see Warr, 2002), the perspective has been criticized for poor operationalization of central concepts as well as vague specification of the learning process (see Cressey, 1960).

The most prominent revised learning perspective has been Akers' (1985; 1998/2009) social learning theory. Building on the principles of Sutherland's differential association theory, social learning theory sought to better specify the mechanisms through which the learning process operates. This specification was achieved by restating the principals of differential association in terms of operant conditioning and reinforcement.

The social learning perspective is centered on the four major concepts of *differential association*, *definitions*, *differential reinforcement*, and *imitation* (Akers, 1985; 1998/2009). Differential association refers to direct associations and interactions with others and remains the context in which all learning mechanisms operate. Definitions, which are acquired through associations, are attitudes or meanings which are attached to general and specific behavior as well as neutralizations and rationalizations

for beliefs. Differential reinforcement refers to the reinforcing balance of actual and anticipated rewards and punishment for behavior and associations. Finally, imitation is involvement in behavior after having witnessed others engage in the behavior. Imitation is more likely to occur if anticipated rewards are believed to outweigh anticipated consequences for engaging in the behavior. The perspective posits that behavioral acquisition, continuation, and cessation are influenced through a dynamic learning process that occurs between the four concepts in the context of the primary peer group.

While the social learning process is dynamic and includes reciprocal and feedback effects between the main concepts, characteristic temporal sequences for acquisition, continuation, and cessation of behavior have been proposed (Akers, 1998/2009; Akers & Jensen, 2008). Following onset of behavior, the social learning perspective suggests that continuity and cessation are strongly influenced by *direct* (i.e., adverse experiences and social sanctions) and *indirect* (i.e., insufficient rewards) differential reinforcement. Social and non-social rewards and consequences – as well as anticipated rewards and consequences for future behavior – directly affect definitions associated with behavior as well as the likelihood of the behavior being repeated (Akers, 1998/2009; Akers & Jensen, 2008). Similarly, peer associations themselves are affected by actual and anticipated reinforcing rewards and consequences and are maintained only as long as the individual perceives them to be sufficiently more rewarding than aversive (Akers, 1998/2009; Warr, 2002). In their recent meta-analysis of empirical research, Pratt and colleagues (2010) found that the concepts of differential association and definitions were strongly supported, but only modest support was found for differential reinforcement and imitation. While two of social learning theory's concepts garnered only modest support,

the authors concluded that, in general, the empirical support for social learning theory was comparable to that of other criminological perspectives.

As gangs have been referred to as a special and quintessential context in which the learning process operates (Akers & Jensen, 2008), social learning theory is a promising framework for discussing the role of violence within and across the lives of self-identified gang youth. The perspective's promise has been well supported by research which has established that social learning variables account for differences between gang and non-gang youth as well as the effects of gang status (active and inactive) on changes in opportunities for and involvement in delinquency (Esbensen & Deschenes, 1998; Kissner & Pyrooz, 2009; Krohn & Thornberry, 2008; Winfree & Backström et al., 1994; Winfree & Mays et al., 1994). Illustrating the salience of the gang context is the robust finding that the period of gang affiliation is marked by increased delinquent peer association, exposure to delinquent models, opportunities for and involvement in delinquency, as well as opportunities for reinforcement of behavior through gang group norms (Battin-Pearson et al., 1998; Esbensen & Huizinga, 1993; Krohn & Thornberry, 2008; Thornberry et al., 1993; Winfree & Backström et al., 1994; Winfree & Mays et al., 1994).

Specific to the onset of gang membership, the social learning framework emphasizes the importance of differential associations and the opportunities they afford for learned definitions, imitation, and reinforcement. Gang research provides support for the importance of each of the concepts of social learning in the process of gang joining. Just as in the formation of other non-gang groups, gang joiners are exposed to and interact with gang affiliated peers (Winfree & Backström et al., 1994) and family

members (Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Jankowski, 1991; Vigil, 1988) – largely influenced by propinquity (Cairns & Cairns, 1994) – prior to joining. These associations importantly provide opportunities for imitation and may also increase gang favorable definitions (Winfree & Backström et al., 1994; Winfree & Mays et al., 1994). Exposure to and interaction with gang members also affords potential joiners the opportunity to observe real and anticipated reinforcing rewards (e.g., companionship, protection, and opportunities for fun and potentially lucrative involvement in crime) and consequences (e.g., victimization⁴, trouble with parents and law enforcement) of gang membership and involvement in illicit gang behavior (Brownfield, 2003; Dishion, Nelson, & Yasui, 2005; Jankowski, 1991; Vigil, 1988; Warr, 1990).

Specific to what contributes to continuity and cessation of behavior, the social learning framework emphasizes the concepts of differential reinforcement and differential association (Akers, 1998/2009; Akers & Jensen, 2008). In particular, differential reinforcement – through a balance of reinforcing rewards and punishments – affects whether behavior or associations will be sustained or terminated. Social and non-social punishments can be either direct, adverse consequences that are a result of behavior or associations, or indirect, removal of a reward as a consequence of behavior or associations (Akers, 1985; 1998/2009; Akers & Jensen, 2008). Given this, the factors which motivate continuity and cessation of gang membership can be discussed in terms of their influence on the balance of reinforcing rewards and consequences for gang behavior and affiliation.

⁴ Violent victimization may also, over the longer term, serve as a reinforcing reward of involvement which enhances gang cohesiveness (Decker, 1996; Klein, 1971). Decker and Lauritsen (2002: 67) posit, however, that this is a result of “the socialization power of the gang in “reconstructing” the violence in a fashion that serves to reintegrate the [victimized] gang member into the collective.”

Within the social learning framework, the importance of direct consequences for continuation or cessation of behavior and associations cannot be overstated. Similarly, the importance of direct adverse experiences and social sanctions has been identified as having motivated a large number of former members to leave their gang (i.e., exposure to violence and victimization as well as adverse sanctions from family members and the criminal justice system). Exposure to violence and victimization – including both direct and vicarious experiences as well as the desire to avoid future violence and victimization – has been one of the most commonly cited reasons for gang disengagement. For some, the balance of rewards and punishments of membership was significantly altered by a single act of direct or vicarious violence (Decker & Lauritsen, 2002; Hagedorn & Devitt, 1999; Monti, 1994; Moore, 1991; Peterson, 2012; Vigil, 1988; 2002). For others, the balance was altered by an accumulation of violent experiences (Decker & Lauritsen, 2002; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Monti, 1994; Padilla, 1992; Pyrooz & Decker, 2011; Taylor, 1990; Vigil, 1988; 2002). Whether precipitated by a single violent event, an accumulation of events, or a desire to avoid perceived future violence, direct aversive consequences of gang involvement are salient motivating factors for leaving the gang (Akers, 1998/2009; Akers & Jensen, 2008).

Research has demonstrated that former members have also noted the importance of other adverse consequences as triggering gang cessation. This includes gang members who were motivated to leave because of actual or anticipated social sanctions from their family (Decker & Lauritsen, 2002; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Moore, 1991; Padilla, 1992; Peterson, 2012; Vigil, 1988; 2002) as well as actual or anticipated legal sanctions from the criminal justice system (Horowitz, 1983; Klein, 1971; Monti, 1994; Moore,

1991; Padilla, 1992; Pyrooz & Decker, 2011; Vigil, 1988). For these members, the belief that continued gang affiliation would result in real or anticipated social and legal sanctions was of strong importance. These direct consequences appear to have offset any of the actual or perceived rewards of gang affiliation which sustain continuity of membership and subsequently motivated termination of membership (Akers, 1998/2009; Akers & Jensen, 2008).

For others, indirect reinforcing consequences induced change in gang status. This may be illustrated by former members who cited their gang leaving was because they 'just felt like it' and that 'the gang wasn't what they thought it would be' (Carson et al., 2013; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Padilla, 1992; Peterson, 2012; Pyrooz & Decker, 2011). While these motivations for change in gang status appear nondescript, they may suggest that former members perceived a lack of sufficient reinforcing rewards from membership. As both peer associations and behavior are affected by how rewarding or aversive they are (Akers, 1998/2009; Akers & Jensen, 2008), it is plausible that many former members shed their affiliation and association with gang peers in the interest of pursuing other more rewarding non-gang peer associations (Thrasher, 1927; Warr, 1996; 2002).

Similarly, changes in peer associations have also been directly cited as having motivated change in gang status. Research has found many younger former gang members indicated that they became disinterested in their gang peers and subsequently sought out other more attractive non-gang peer associations (Decker & Lauritsen, 2002; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Fleisher, 1998; Klein, 1971; Horowitz, 1983; Peterson, 2012; Padilla, 1992; Thrasher, 1927; Quicker, 1983; 1999; Vigil, 1988). Others

experienced a residential or school move which restricted opportunities for association and interaction with gang and non-gang peers (Decker & Lauritsen, 2002; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Fleisher, 1998; Hagedorn & Devitt, 1999; Klein, 1971; Padilla, 1992; Thrasher, 1927; Vigil, 1988). While research has indicated that it is more difficult to disassociate from highly delinquent peer groups than conventional groups (Warr, 1993; 1996; 2002; Winfree & Backström et al., 1994), the transient nature of gang affiliation suggests that changes in gang and non-gang peer associations are a reasonable and prevalent trigger for change in youth gang status. This is particularly plausible given that both gang and non-gang adolescents often associate and interact with multiple peer groups simultaneously and that non-gang adolescent peer groups have been identified as remarkably volatile and transient (Reiss, 1986; Warr, 1996; 2002).

Former gang members have also noted the importance of several age-graded life events (i.e., marriage, parenthood, employment, and military enlistment and service) which they believe were the impetus of their decision to leave the gang. While the social learning framework is less adept at predicting the occurrence of these life events, it remains profitable in modeling the changes in gang status and associations. The learning framework accounts for the importance of age-grade life events by demonstrating how they can change exposure to definitions, provide new reinforcing rewards and consequences for continued behavior and associations, and importantly disrupt and dissolve associations and interactions with gang members or peers (Akers, 1998/2009; Warr, 1998; 2002).

The Current Study

While research has demonstrated the extent and importance of violence within discrete stages of membership, the importance of violence across the entire gang experience is less understood. To address this gap in the literature, the dissertation examines the extent and role of violence – through the theoretical lens of differential reinforcement – within and across a multi-site sample of self-identified gang youth. Applying a mixed methods approach – using both retrospective qualitative narratives and prospective survey data, the dissertation explores the following research objectives.

1. What is the extent of violence in the lives of youth gang members?

Research has demonstrated that gang-involved youth routinely experience greater rates of exposure to violence than do their non-gang peers.

Building on this, the dissertation expands understanding of extent and role of conflict and violence in the lives of gang-involved youth.

A) What are the domains in which self-identified gang youth experience violence?

Risk and prevalence of violence may occur within the context of a variety of social spheres or domains (e.g., family, peer groups, school, neighborhood, and employment). Through detailed analysis, the dissertation demonstrates the prevalence and extent of conflict and violence within the three emergent thematic domains – neighborhood, school, and peer – as well as other notable subthemes.

B) Does the prevalence and effect of violence differ when experienced objectively or subjectively?

Research has demonstrated violence can be experienced both objectively and subjectively. Objective experiences can include direct and vicarious victimization while subjective experiences include anticipated violence – individual fear of crime, sense of insecurity, and perceived risk of victimization. The dissertation examines the prevalence and the effect of the two means of experiencing violence.

C) Are there substantive differences in the extent and influence of violence between youth who retrospectively discuss their self-identified gang status in terms of involvement in a gang or in a non-gang peer group?

The dissertation draws on a sample of youth who self-identified gang involvement at some point during an earlier longitudinal panel study. While all prospectively identified their gang status, a sizable proportion of the youth did not retrospectively classify themselves as current or former gang members during the qualitative interviews. The dissertation examines whether the prevalence and extent of violence differs for those who retrospectively discuss their self-identified gang status in terms of involvement in a gang or non-gang peer group.

2. *What is the extent and role of violence around each of the stages of gang involvement?*

Research posits violence as a central feature of gang involvement and has demonstrated its notable extent in the lives of gang youth. Building on this, the dissertation provides detailed descriptions of the prevalence and extent of violence – whether objective or subjective in form – within and across the lives of a sample of retrospectively classified gang-involved youth. In particular, the dissertation situates and examines the role of violence *around* the stages of gang involvement.

A) *What is the extent and influence of violence around the formation of gang ties and associations?*

Research has demonstrated that gang joiners discuss a variety of reinforcing experiences and factors which pushed, pulled, or otherwise motivated them into membership or involvement. Many discuss feeling pushed into membership by forces beyond their control; in particular, the motivating effect of actual and anticipated experiences with violence (Curry et al., 2014; Decker & Curry, 2000; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Esbensen et al., 1999; Esbensen & Peterson Lynskey, 2001; Freng & Winfree, 2004; Maxson & Whitlock, 2002; Melde et al., 2009; Padilla, 1992; Peterson, 2009; 2012; Peterson et al., 2004; Spergel, 1995; Thornberry et al., 2003). Others are pulled into involvement through the lure of real and anticipated reinforcing rewards (e.g.,

opportunities for companionship and protection) (Brownfield, 2003; Jankowski, 1991; Vigil, 1988; Warr, 1990). In light of this, the dissertation examines changes in perceptions of and experiences with violence around the formation of gang associations.

B) What is the extent and role of violence during the period of active participation?

- a. *Joining and Affiliation*: Research has also demonstrated that violence can be a central feature in active methods of gang joining (Curry et al., 2014; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; J. Miller, 1996; 2001; Padilla, 1992; Quicker, 1983; 1999; Vigil, 1988). The dissertation explores the extent of active and violent means of affiliating or joining the gang group.
- b. *Active Gang Involvement*: Violence is often central to the period of active membership and affiliation. Gang members face increased risk of and exposure to direct and vicarious victimization through both inter- as well as intra-gang sources (Decker, 1996; Decker & Curry, 2002; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Hagedorn, 1988; Klein, 1971; Melde et al., 2009; J. Miller, 1998; 2001; Peterson et al., 2004; Taylor et al., 2007; 2008; Vigil, 1988). Despite the increased risk and extent of violence, research has demonstrated that violence can enhance gang cohesiveness (Decker, 1996; Klein, 1971) as well as

reinforce a member's reliance on the gang for its perceived protective nature and its ability to reduce individual fear of victimization (Melde et al., 2009). Given these findings and their consistency with the social learning approach, the dissertation explores what reinforcing role violence – as well as the role of protection from violence – plays throughout the period of active participation.

- C) What is the extent and role of violence in gang disassociation?
- a. *Motivations for Leaving*: Within the social learning framework, gang status should only be maintained as long as an individual perceives the reinforcing rewards of involvement to outweigh any corresponding punishments (Akers, 1985; 1998/2009). As a *direct* reinforcing consequence of involvement (Akers & Jensen, 2008; Warr, 2002), research has demonstrated that violence can facilitate divestiture of gang ties and status. Many discuss the motivating importance of direct and vicarious exposure to violence – whether an accumulation of events or a single severe incident – in their decision to leave their gang (Decker & Lauritsen, 2002; Decker & Pyrooz, 2011; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Hagedorn & Devitt, 1999; Monti, 1994; Padilla, 1992; Peterson, 2012; Pyrooz & Decker, 2011; Taylor, 1990; Vigil, 1988; 2002). For others, *indirect* reinforcing consequences induced change in gang status (Akers & Jensen,

2008; Warr, 2002); a lack of sufficient reinforcing rewards of membership is demonstrated by those who reference disillusionment – “I just felt like it” or “gang membership wasn’t what I thought it would be” (Carson et al., 2013; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Padilla, 1992; Peterson, 2012; Pyrooz & Decker, 2011) – as having motivated their desistance. The dissertation, therefore, explores what reinforcing role violence and protection play in motivating de-identification and disengagement.

- b. *Methods of Leaving*: Just as with the process of gang joining, violence can also be a feature of how members leave their gang (Decker & Lauritsen, 2002; Quicker, 1983; 1999). In light of this, the dissertation examines the extent of active as well as violence means or pathways out of membership.
- c. *Consequences for Leaving*: Finally, former gang members may experience a range of consequences for their leaving (Carson et al., 2013; Decker & Pyrooz, 2011; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996). Leavers may be victimized by rival gang members who do not know or care to recognize their ‘non-member’ standing. Ex-members – as well as their close friends and family members – may also face harassment, threats, and violence at the hands of former gang fellows as a consequence of desertion. The dissertation investigates what adverse

consequences are experienced as a result of gang de-identification and disengagement.

3. Does the role of violence vary over time or interact across the tenure of gang involvement?

While research has documented the extent and salience of violence within specific stages of membership (i.e., joining, active participation, and leaving), the role of violence across the whole gang tenure has been largely unexplored. In keeping with the concept of differential reinforcement of gang status, the dissertation addresses this gap in the literature by exploring whether and how the role of violence varies over time and interacts across the life-cycle of involvement.

The purpose of the dissertation is to contribute to the literature by providing detailed accounts of the prevalence, extent, and role of violence within and across a multi-site sample of gang youth. As violence in the gang context can serve as both a reinforcing reward (i.e., protection) and consequence of membership (i.e., inter- and intra-gang violence), the dissertation's exploration of its role across the lives of gang youth draws profitably from the social learning framework. Through a mixed methods approach, the dissertation's research objectives aim to collectively advance understanding violence's role within the lives of gang youth and across the whole of the gang experience.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

The aim of the dissertation is to provide further understanding of the role of violence within and across the lives of self-identified gang youth. To meet this objective, the dissertation employs a mixed methods approach using both retrospective qualitative narratives and prospective quantitative survey data from a multi-site sample of self-identified gang youth. Data for this project come from the Process and Outcome Evaluation of the Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.) Program as well as A Multi-method, Multi-site Study of Gang Desistance. This chapter provides a detailed description of the data and methods used for each study as well as the analytic techniques used to explore the present research objectives. The chapter closes with a discussion of the prevalence and major thematic patterns of violence across the selected sites.

The National Evaluation of the G.R.E.A.T. Program

The G.R.E.A.T. program is a gang and delinquency prevention program taught by law enforcement officers in a middle school setting. The program was developed in 1991 by Phoenix-area, Arizona, law enforcement agencies and was quickly adopted across the country. The program has two main goals: 1) help youth avoid gang membership and delinquency and 2) develop positive relationships with law enforcement (Esbensen, 2013; Esbensen et al., 2011; 2013). Results from an earlier National Evaluation of the G.R.E.A.T. Program (1995-2001) found no program effects⁵ in terms of youth behavior (i.e., gang membership and delinquency) (Esbensen, 2002; Esbensen et al., 2001) which led to critical program revisions (Esbensen, 2013; Esbensen et al., 2011; 2013). The revised G.R.E.A.T. curriculum was expanded from nine to 13 lessons and placed greater

⁵ The evaluation did, however, identify programmatic effects on several mediating, risk factor variables associated with gang involvement and delinquency.

emphasis on life-skills (e.g., communication and refusal skills, conflict resolution, and anger management) believed central to the prevention of gang membership and delinquency.

A process and outcome evaluation of the revised program was undertaken in 2006 as part of a grant awarded to the University of Missouri-St. Louis by the U. S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice (2006–JV–FX–0011). The Process and Outcome Evaluation of the G.R.E.A.T. Program (hereafter the G.R.E.A.T. Evaluation or the National Evaluation study) included several components: observations of G.R.E.A.T. officer training, observations of G.R.E.A.T. and non-G.R.E.A.T. classrooms, teacher and law enforcement surveys, interviews with G.R.E.A.T. officers and supervisors, and longitudinal student surveys.

Cities were chosen for inclusion in the National Evaluation based on three criteria: 1) the existence of an established G.R.E.A.T. program, 2) geographic and demographic diversity, and 3) evidence of gang activity (Esbensen, 2013; Esbensen et al., 2011; 2013). This approach yielded seven cities which vary in size, geographic and demographic make-up, and the level and history of gang activity. The participating cities include: Albuquerque, New Mexico; Greeley, Colorado; Nashville, Tennessee; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Portland, Oregon; Chicago, Illinois; and a Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas area community. For each of the sites, four to six schools were purposively selected to yield a sample that closely resembled the student composition of each school district. Within the 31 participating schools in the evaluation, classrooms were randomly assigned either to the treatment (G.R.E.A.T. program) or control groups: 102 classrooms

received the treatment and 93 were in the control group (Esbensen, 2013; Esbensen et al., 2011; 2013).

All students in the selected classrooms (N = 195) at the beginning of the 2006 – 2007 school year were eligible for participation in the evaluation (N = 4,905). Given the age of the sample (i.e., under the age of 18), active parental consent was required for inclusion in the evaluation. Consent forms – which gave a thorough explanation of the study – were distributed to all eligible students and only youth whose parents or guardians signed and returned the forms were included in the longitudinal panel study. The active parental consent process yielded an 89 percent (N = 4,372) return of consent forms (11% or N = 533 did not return the consent forms) and 78 percent (N = 3,820) granted permission for their child to participate in the evaluation (11% or N = 552 declined participation) (Esbensen, 2013; Esbensen et al., 2011; 2013).

The G.R.E.A.T. Evaluation study consists of a gender balanced (i.e., 50% male and female) sample of 3,820 youth which is also racially and ethnically diverse (i.e., 38% Hispanic, 27% white, 18% black, and 18% other race or ethnicity). As the G.R.E.A.T. program was predominately taught in 6th grade classrooms (26 of the 31 schools taught the program in 6th grade with the remaining five schools having taught the program in 7th grade classrooms), approximately two-thirds of the youth (61%) were 11 years old or younger at the 2006 pre-test (Mn = 11.5; Range: 11 to 16). The longitudinal student survey included collection of six waves of data over a five year period (2006 – 2011). All waves were collected approximately one year apart, with the exception of the post-test which was collected three months following the pre-test and Wave 3 which was collected approximately nine months after the post-test. Youth completed the pre-test and post-test

(Waves 1 and 2) in the fall and spring of the 2006 – 2007 school year (with 98.3% and 94.6% completion rates).⁶ Youth then completed four annual follow-up surveys each fall (Waves 3, 4, 5, and 6), with completion rates of 87, 83, 75, and 72 percent, respectively (Esbensen, 2013; Esbensen et al., 2011; 2013).

Students were surveyed using confidential group-administered questionnaires which took between 30 and 45 minutes to complete. The surveys included questions which covered an array of topics including attitudes, perceptions, and behavior pertaining to themselves as well as their friends, school, and community. Given the G.R.E.A.T. program's main goal of preventing gang membership, youth were asked about gang affiliation and activity at each survey point. As the measurement of gang membership has proved a persistent problem across prior research (Ball & Curry, 1995; Esbensen et al., 2001), the National Evaluation utilized several measurement approaches to identify gang youth. Most directly, youth were explicitly asked about their current and former gang membership (i.e., "Are you now in a gang?" and "Have you ever been in a gang?"). This self-nomination approach is the most commonly used across research and is considered as a robust indicator of membership (Esbensen et al., 2001; Matsuda et al., 2012; Thornberry et al., 2003). The study also included an alternative measure of membership which eliminated reliance on the word "gang." The Eurogang definition, which has been found to be successfully predictive within both European and American research samples (Esbensen et al., 2008; Esbensen & Weerman, 2005; Matsuda et al., 2012), emphasizes group durability, street orientation, youth status, and acceptance of and involvement in

⁶Due to under-representation of black youth in the Chicago schools which agreed to participation during the initial 2006 sampling effort, two additional schools were included in the evaluation starting in the 2007 – 2008 school year (Esbensen, 2013; Esbensen et al., 2011; 2013). Longitudinal surveying of the additional Chicago youth (N = 148) was lagged one year and concluded in the fall of 2011.

illegal behavior (Klein et al., 2001; Weerman et al., 2009). Youth who satisfy the requirements of the Eurogang definition are those whose group of friends: 1) include three or more people, 2) are between the ages of twelve and twenty-five, 3) spend a lot of time in public places, 4) have been in existence for more than three months, and 5) accept and participate in illegal activity. Using both definitional approaches, a total of 951 unique youth (i.e., 25% of the full sample) reported active gang membership at some point during the five year evaluation.

A Multi-method, Multi-site Study of Gang Desistance

In 2011, the National Institute of Justice and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (U. S. Department of Justice) sought proposals for original research on gang desistance. The University of Missouri-St. Louis was awarded a grant funding A Multi-method, Multi-site Study of Gang Desistance (hereafter the Gang Desistance study) (2011-MU-MU-0027). The ongoing study is an expansion of the Process and Outcome Evaluation of the G.R.E.A.T. Program (2006 – 2013) and is designed to examine trends and patterns associated with gang desistance through quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method components. The study is focused around four objectives: 1) assess the extent to which the experience of leaving the gang is similar or different for stable and transient/intermittent youth; 2) examine whether the processes for leaving the gang varies depending upon the gang member's centrality in the gang (i.e., core versus peripheral); 3) investigate the role of sex as well as race and ethnicity in gang leaving; and 4) investigate the extent to which gang characteristics (e.g., gang structure, sex composition, and gang typology) influence the desistance process (Esbensen, 2011). The study included collection of original data, including in-depth semi-

structured interviews with a sample of youth who self-identified active gang membership at some point during the National Evaluation as well as brief structured interviews with their parent or guardian.

The Gang Desistance study included collection of original data across all seven of the cities involved in the G.R.E.A.T. Evaluation. However, based on logistical and budgetary limitations as well as the recommendations of the study Advisory Board, the study concentrated original data collection within four main cities (N = 135 interviews, including 115 self-identified gang and 20 Eurogang youth) with more limited data collection in the three secondary sites (N = 46 interviews, including 28 self-identified gang and 18 Eurogang youth) for comparative purposes. The main cities were purposely selected based on several characteristics: 1) the number of youth who reported gang membership; 2) the demographic make-up of gang youth, and 3) the city specific gang history.

Table 1: Prevalence of Gang and Eurogang Youth by City

	<u>Gang Youth</u>		<u>Eurogang Youth</u>	
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Albuquerque, NM	92	18.0	89	20.3
Portland, OR	39	7.6	64	14.6
Dallas-Fort Worth area, TX	82	16.0	49	11.2
Greeley, CO	79	15.4	73	16.6
Nashville, TN	64	12.5	53	12.1
Philadelphia, PA	102	19.9	31	7.1
Chicago, IL	54	10.5	80	18.2
Total	512		439	

Within the National Evaluation, self-identified active gang membership varied over time: Wave 1 (N = 168), Wave 2 (N = 177), Wave 3 (N = 172), Wave 4 (N = 151), Wave 5 (N = 95), and Wave 6 (N = 74). Across the entire five year study, a total of 512

unique youth self-identified active membership at one or more waves. The number of gang youth also varied by site (see Table 1).

These self-nominated gang youth were roughly gender balanced (i.e., 56.4% male [N = 289], 43.6% female [N = 223]) and diverse in terms of race and ethnicity (i.e., 45.5% Hispanic [N = 233], 27% black [N = 138], 15.8% white [N = 81], and 11.7% other race or ethnicity [N = 60]). Recent gang members – those that reported membership during the last three waves of data collection (Waves 4, 5, and/or 6) – made up 27.9 percent (N = 143) of self-identified active gang youth, while distant members – those that reported membership during the first three waves (Waves 1, 2, and/or 3) – accounted for 72.1 percent (N = 369). In terms of the types of gang members, stable members – those that reported active membership in multiple consecutive waves of data – accounted for 30.3 percent (N = 155) of self-identified youth while 69.7 percent (N = 357) reported transient (reported membership at one survey wave) or intermittent membership (reported membership at multiple, nonconsecutive waves of data).⁷

A total of 439 youth met the requirements of the Eurogang definition of gang membership. Unlike self-identified gang membership, the number of youth who satisfied the Eurogang requirements increased over the duration of the study: Wave 1 (N = 28), Wave 2 (N = 72), Wave 3 (N = 83), Wave 4 (N = 131), Wave 5 (N = 136), and Wave 6 (N = 164). The number of Eurogang youth also varied by site (see also Table 1). Eurogang youth were balanced in terms of gender (i.e., 49.7% male [N = 218], 50.2% female [N = 221]) and – while diverse in terms of race and ethnicity – included a higher proportion of white youth than witnessed in the sample of self-identified gang members

⁷ Of the 357 youth, 322 (or 62.9%) recorded transient and 35 (or 6.8%) intermittent gang membership across the G.R.E.A.T. Evaluation study surveys.

(i.e., 46.5% Hispanic [N = 204], 28.5% white [N = 125], 13.4% other race or ethnicity [N = 59], and 11.6% black [N = 51]). Recent members made up 60.4 percent (N = 265) of Eurogang youth, while distant members accounted for 39.6 percent (N = 174). In terms of the types of Eurogang members, stable members accounted for 22.1 percent (N = 97) of Eurogang youth while 77.9 percent (N = 342) reported transient or intermittent membership.

Given the geographic and demographic diversity of each of the seven sites, the modal race and ethnicity of self-identified active gang youth varied by city: Hispanic (Albuquerque, New Mexico; Greeley, Colorado; and a Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas area community); black (Chicago, Illinois; Nashville, Tennessee; and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania); white (Portland, Oregon). The modal race and ethnicity of Eurogang youth also varied by city: Hispanic (Albuquerque, New Mexico; Chicago, Illinois; Greeley, Colorado; and a Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas area community); black (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania); white (Portland, Oregon; and Nashville, Tennessee). The seven cities also varied in terms of their unique gang history, with three having been identified as chronic gang cities (Chicago, Illinois; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Albuquerque, New Mexico) and four having been deemed emergent cities (Portland, Oregon; Greeley, Colorado; a Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas area community; and Nashville, Tennessee) (Howell et al., 2011; National Youth Gang Survey, 1999; Spergel & Curry, 1997). Based on the prevalence and diversity of identified gang youth in the National Evaluation, the Gang Desistance study selected Albuquerque, New Mexico, Nashville, Tennessee, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and a Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas area community as the four main sites for original data collection. Selection of these sites also provided

diversity in terms of geographical location (including one Southwestern, Southern, Southeastern, and Northeastern city) and the history of local gang problems (including two chronic [i.e., Albuquerque, New Mexico and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania] and two emergent [i.e., Nashville, Tennessee and a Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas area community] gang cities).⁸

The project intended to conduct a total of ten interviews (i.e., five self-identified gang and five Eurogang youth) within each of the three secondary sites (Chicago, Illinois; Greeley, Colorado; and Portland, Oregon), yielding a final of 30 in-depth interviews. For each of the four main sites, the proposed goal was to conduct in-depth interviews with 30 self-identified gang and five Eurogang youth. The 30 interviews with self-identified gang youth were purposively split into two comparative samples of stable and transient/intermittent members. Being fewer in number (i.e., 155 or 30.3%), stable gang members were purposively sampled; specifically, attempts were made to contact and interview all available stable youth through the close of data collection period (Morse, 2007). For transient/intermittent members (i.e., 357 or 69.7%), a random selection of every Nth youth was used to attain a proposed total of 15 interviews. In the event that a selected youth could not be located or the parent and/or youth declined participation in the study, a replacement was randomly selected from the remaining pool of gang youth. The project intended for the four main sites to yield a final sample of 140 interviews with gang youth, 120 of which are with self-identified gang (with two comparative samples of

⁸ While the remaining three sites in the National Evaluation were not selected as one of the four main sites for the Gang Desistance study, the three secondary sites (Chicago, Illinois; Greeley, Colorado; Portland, Oregon) are still diverse in terms of geographic location (including one Midwestern, Mountain, and Western city) and the history of local gang problems (including one chronic (i.e., Chicago, Illinois) and two emergent (i.e., Greeley, Colorado and Portland, Oregon) gang cities) (see Howell et al., 2011; National Youth Gang Survey, 1999; Spergel & Curry, 1997).

60 stable and transient/intermittent gang youth) and 20 of which with Eurogang youth. To achieve the proposed number of youth interviews, a sample of 426 gang and Eurogang youth was selected.

Interviews for the study were conducted by eight researchers from April to August 2012. Once self-identified gang and Eurogang youth were selected for inclusion, an initial contact letter was sent to the parent or guardian via USPS approximately two weeks before the inaugural data collection trip to each city. The letter 1) reminded the parent that the child had participated in the G.R.E.A.T. Evaluation study, 2) described the current study, 3) informed them that research assistants would visit their homes, and 4) provided a time frame (e.g., the summer of 2012). Across all seven cities, only one respondent called to set up a time to participate in the study following the receipt of an initial contact letter.

Following the mailing of the initial contact letter, the interview schedule was pre-tested in the Nashville, Tennessee site – during which five interviews were conducted by two researchers. The pre-testing allowed for further instrument refinement and was also used to inform interviewer training (Silverman, 2006). To bolster the reliability of the interview schedule, a thorough two-day training session was conducted in May to ensure that all interviewers were well-versed and comfortable with the interview process.⁹ Following the training session, each interviewer was required to complete two interviews – which were closely reviewed for quality and reliability by the Project Director – prior to being certified and approved for further data collection. Reliability was also enhanced through the use of periodic team meetings to review and assess one another's interviews

⁹ Importantly, six of the interviewers had been trained in qualitative research at the university graduate level and had prior experience conducting and analyzing qualitative interviews.

and transcriptions (Wiener, 2007) as well as discuss emergent patterns and themes across the interviews (see also Silverman, 2006).

After training, interviewers visited the selected youths' homes to make contact with the parent or legal guardian, explain the purpose of the study (i.e., conducting a supplemental study on "the shifting nature of peer groups"), and obtain consent for the interview. When possible, structured confidential interviews were conducted with the parent or guardian (lasting approximately 15 minutes) who was compensated \$10 for participation. While the main purpose of the parental interview was to gain study "buy in" from the parent, the parent interview obtained descriptive information about the family, living arrangement, as well as parental behavior (i.e., parental monitoring) and attitudes (e.g., attitudes about their neighborhood, their child's school, their child's peer group, and identification with the street code).

Once consent had been obtained, the interviewer explained the nature of the study to the adolescent and obtained youth assent when the subject was under the age of 18 (informed consent was used when the study participant was 18 or older). The in-depth interviews were semi-structured with a series of open-ended questions to allow for considerable probing (see Appendix A for the complete Youth Interview Guide). The interviews were audio-recorded, conducted in a confidential setting in or outside of the youth's home or at a mutually agreeable confidential place (e.g., nearby city park or within the interviewer's vehicle), lasted an average of 52 minutes (Range: 18 to 103 minutes), and the youth was compensated \$20 for completion of the interview.

No one interviewer completed more than 20 interviews in a single site. The most total interviews by one researcher was 37 (20.4% of the interviews) and the least

conducted was eight (4.4% of the total). Completed interviews were recorded and transcribed by the same researcher (when possible¹⁰) using transcription software (e.g., Express Scribe or f4). The accuracy and validity of transcriptions produced by each of the five major transcribers was assessed by the Project Director and two other research staff members. These inter-rater reliability checks were central to assessing and rectifying any systematic transcription issues specific to a single transcriber or across the entire transcription team (Silverman, 2006: 290).

The youth interview guide was constructed around several themes identified within the extant gang literature, drawing fruitfully from the questions and approaches found in prior qualitative gang research (Decker, 1994; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; J. Miller, 1996; 2001). The themes included: investigation of current and former peer group characteristics (i.e., group structure, type, sex and race composition, embeddedness, group identity, and duration of membership); individual and group experiences with offending, victimization, and law enforcement; and questions specific to the processes surrounding joining and leaving a gang or peer group (see Appendix A). The retrospective design allowed youth to provide detailed descriptive accounts of their perceptions and experiences of gangs in their lives.

At the completion of data collection, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with a final sample of 181 self-identified gang youth or 43 percent of the total selection sample (see Table 2). Of the remaining 67 percent, most had either moved residences (N = 118) or were deemed “not home” after three or more interviewer visits to the residence (N = 86). A small group of youth (N = 18) were not available for

¹⁰ Two researchers and the Project Director were only involved in the interviewing process and did not, therefore, participate in transcription.

Table 2: Breakdown of Data Collection Outcomes for Total Selection Sample

	Total Sample	Interviewed	Moved	Parent Refusal for Both	Youth Refusal	Not Home	Other
Albuquerque, NM	79	33	29	1	1	13	2
Portland, OR	34	13	8	1	0	11	1
Dallas-FW area, TX	79	37	14	2	1	21	4
Greeley, CO	38	18	9	0	3	7	1
Nashville, TN	58	30	18	3	1	5	1
Philadelphia, PA	89	35	31	0	6	14	3
Chicago, IL	49	15	9	1	3	15	6
Total	426	181	118	8	15	86	18
% of Sample	426	42.5	27.7	1.8	3.5	20.2	4.2

interviewing for a variety of reason, including residing in an inaccessible gated community (N = 7), unavailability or passive refusal (N = 6), homes not visited by the completion of active data collection (N = 3), and youth arrest (N = 2). Of the 181 youth interviewed, 79 percent were with self-identified gang youth (N = 143) and 21 percent were with Eurogang youth (N = 38). A total of 109 corresponding structured interviews with the youth's parent or guardians were also completed. Those youth interviews without a corresponding parent interview were most often due to a non-English speaking parent/guardian or lack of parental interest in study participation. Within the sample of interviewed self-identified gang youth, the modal gang member type was transient/distant youth at 35 percent followed by transient/recent at 25 percent (see Table 3).

Table 3: Gang Member Type for the Interviewed Sample

	Total	Stable/ Distant	Transient/ Distant	Stable/ Recent	Transient/ Recent	Euro- gang
Albuquerque	33	8	11	3	6	5
Portland	13	1	3	0	1	8
Dallas-FW area	37	8	14	6	5	4
Greeley	18	0	0	6	7	5
Nashville	30	4	10	5	6	5
Philadelphia	35	7	11	6	5	6
Chicago	15	1	1	3	5	5
Total	181	29	50	29	35	38
% of Gang Sample		20.3	35.0	20.3	24.5	

The Dissertation: Site Selection, Sources of Data, and Analytic Strategy

For the purpose of this dissertation, a smaller and more manageable sample of gang-involved youth was necessary. The dissertation uses a sample of self-identified gang and Eurogang youth from two of the four main sites in the Gang Desistance study. The final sample of 66¹¹ youth – with varying gang experiences (i.e., stable or transient/intermittent self-identified gang and Eurogang membership) – provides sufficiently ample sample size to reach saturation of themes for the aforementioned research objectives (Bernard, 2000; Copes, Brown, & Tewksbury, 2011; Morse, 1994; 1995; 2007). This strategy allows for the creation of two different comparative samples based on 1) location as well as 2) gang membership type (i.e., those that retrospectively discuss earlier self-identified gang status in terms of involvement in a gang and non-gang peer group). The use of these comparative samples provides opportunities for exploration of similarities and differences in the prevalence and extent of violence within and across self-identified gang youth (Miller, 2005).

Given greater research emphasis on chronic gang cities (notable exceptions include Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Hagedorn, 1988; J. Miller, 1996; 2001), the dissertation focuses on the sample of youth from the two main emergent gang city sites – Nashville, Tennessee and a Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas area community. Both are located in the Southern region of the United States, which experienced the nation's second fastest growth in general population from 1970 to 1992 as well as led the nation in the number of new gang cities from 1970 to 1995 (Howell et al., 2011; Maxson, Woods, & Klein, 1996; W. Miller, 2001). While, on the whole, emergent gang cities have experienced

¹¹ While 67 interviews were completed in the two sites, one interview in the Dallas-Fort Worth area community site was not transcribed. Mario's interview was excluded from transcription because the youth answered all interview questions with incoherent nonsensical responses.

varying levels of prevalence and severity of gang problems, both Nashville and the Dallas-Fort Worth area community have experienced relatively stable gang problems (i.e., percent of homicides that are gang-related) from 1996 to 2009 (Howell et al., 2011). These two sites provide an opportunity to explore the prevalence and role of violence within and across the lives of self-identified gang youth in a region with notable growth in gang prevalence and associated violence.

Nashville Site and Youth Characteristics

Nashville is the second largest city in Tennessee, after Memphis, and serves as the state capital (U. S. Census Bureau, 2012). Table 4 provides population, race and ethnicity distributions, and median household income for Nashville and its county (Davidson). The city is over 56 percent white, but includes sizable proportions of blacks (28.4%) and Hispanics (10%). The city has also experienced notable population growth (10.2%) over the last decade and is host to several ethnic enclaves (e.g., Arabic, Hispanic, Kurdish, Laotian, Somali, and Vietnamese) (Cornfield et al., 2003; U. S. Census Bureau, 2012). Between 2006 and 2010, the median household income of the city was below the national average (i.e., U. S. national average income: \$51,914) and 17.8 percent of the population was below the poverty line (U. S. Census Bureau, 2012).

Table 4: Demographic and Socioeconomic Characteristics, Nashville

	<u>Davidson County</u>	<u>Nashville</u>
Population Size	626,681	601,222
Percent Race/Ethnicity		
White	57.4%	56.3%
Black	27.7%	28.4%
Hispanic	9.8%	10.0%
Other ¹²	5.1%	5.3%
Median Household Income	\$45,668	\$45,063

Source: U. S. Census Bureau, 2012

¹² The Other race and ethnicity category includes the merger of the following U. S. Census Bureau (2012) groups: Asian; Native American; Pacific Islander; Other; as well as bi-racial and multi-ethnic.

The National Youth Gang Survey (1999) reported that Nashville has had a consistent problem of gang presence and severity from 1996 to 2009 (see also Howell et al., 2012). As Table 5 illustrates, a total of 64 youth in the Nashville site self-identified active gang membership at some point during the National Evaluation study. Relative to all active gang youth in the G.R.E.A.T. Evaluation study, gang youth in Nashville were similarly balanced by sex. However, self-identified Nashville gang youth were more likely to be white (i.e., Nashville: 31.3%; G.R.E.A.T. average: 15.8%) and black (i.e., Nashville: 35.9%; G.R.E.A.T. average: 27%) than gang youth in the larger study. Nashville youth were also more likely to report recent (i.e., Nashville: 37.5%; G.R.E.A.T. average: 27.9%) transient/intermittent membership (i.e., Nashville: 76.6%; G.R.E.A.T. average: 69.7%).

Table 5: Characteristics of Self-Reported Gang Youth, Nashville

	<u>Total</u>		<u>Stable/ Distant</u>		<u>Transient/ Distant</u>		<u>Stable/ Recent</u>		<u>Transient/ Recent</u>	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Total	64		6	9.4	26	40.6	9	14.1	23	35.9
Gender										
Male	36	56.3	4	66.6	13	50.0	7	77.8	12	52.2
Female	28	43.8	2	33.3	13	50.0	2	22.2	11	47.8
Race/Ethnicity										
White	20	31.3	2	33.3	9	34.6	2	22.2	7	30.4
Black	23	35.9	3	50.0	8	30.8	5	55.6	7	30.4
Hispanic	14	21.9	0	-	6	23.1	1	11.1	7	30.4
Other	7	10.9	1	16.7	3	11.5	1	11.1	2	8.7

By the close of data collection in the Gang Desistance study, a total of 30 youth interviews were conducted by five interviewers and transcribed by six staff members. As shown in Table 6, the youth interviewed in Nashville were mostly male (19 or 63%) and white (16 or 53%) relative to other racial/ethnic groups (i.e., black = 7; Hispanic = 5; Middle Eastern = 2). Transient/distant youth were the modal gang member type at 33

percent (N = 10), followed by transient/recent at 20 percent (N = 6). Successfully interviewed youth ranged in age from 16 to 18, with an average age of 17.

Table 6: Characteristics of Interviewed Youth, Nashville

	<u>Total</u>		<u>Stable/ Distant</u>		<u>Transient/ Distant</u>		<u>Stable/ Recent</u>		<u>Transient/ Recent</u>		<u>Euro- gang</u>	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Total	30		4	13.3	10	33.3	5	16.7	6	20.0	5	16.7
Gender												
M ¹³	19	63.3	3	75.0	7	70.0	4	80.0	2	33.3	4	80.0
F	11	36.7	1	25.0	3	30.0	1	20.0	4	66.6	1	20.0
Race/Ethnicity												
W	16	53.3	2	50.0	8	80.0	2	40.0	1	20.0	3	60.0
B	7	23.3	1	25.0	1	10.0	3	60.0	1	20.0	1	20.0
H	5	16.7	0	-	1	10.0	0	-	4	60.0	0	-
ME	2	6.7	1	25.0	0	-	0	-	0		1	20.0
Age												
Mean	16.9		17.3		16.8		17.0		17.0		16.8	
Range	16 to 18		17 to 18		16 to 17		16 to 18		16 to 18		16 to 17	

Gang Status Classifications

Following the successful transcription of interviews from each site, the Gang Desistance study utilized a grounded theory approach (Charmez, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to identify and refine a series of gang status classifications. Classifications emerged inductively through a teamwork approach (Wiener, 2007), whereby four research staffers¹⁴ – including the Principal Investigator, the Project Director, the interviewer/transcriber, and a fourth research staff member – would first individually classify a youth’s retrospective status using the youth’s transcribed narrative then convene for a team meeting for discussion. These meetings allowed for assessments of inter-rater reliability as well as the emergence and refinement of status classifications through triangulation (Silverman, 2006: 290). All told, six unique status classifications were identified (see Table 7 for the working definitions of each status classification); four

¹³ Table 6 Key: M = Male, F = Female; W = White, B = Black, H = Hispanic, ME = Middle Eastern

¹⁴ For two of the Nashville interviews only three researcher staffers were used to classify retrospective gang status.

of which substantiated a youth's 'gang status' and two of which reflect a 'conflicting retrospective status' different from that of the prospective survey nomination.

Table 7: Gang Status Classifications, Gang Desistance Study

Gang Status

<i>Gang:</i>	Classify a youth as a gang member when, based on the interview, s/he indicates that they were gang involved at some point in time.
<i>Affiliated:</i>	Affiliated youth are those who indicate that they are "cool with a gang" or discuss having a number of gang members as friends. These are youth that indicate they were not part of the gang. Youth could be classified as highly or loosely affiliated.
<i>Protective Group:</i>	These are youth who discuss the protective nature of their non-gang peer group during the interview.
<i>Eurogang:</i>	A youth identified as a Eurogang member in the survey and whose interview does not indicate that they are gang-involved or affiliated with a gang.

Conflicting Retrospective Status

<i>Misdefine:</i>	Classify a youth as a "misdefine" when they indicate, typically at the end of the interview when asked why they did not discuss their previously self-identified gang group as "a gang," that they answered affirmatively to the gang question because they were thinking of a gang as a group of friends (or as a "Scooby-Doo Gang").
<i>Respondent Error:</i>	A youth should be put into the response error category when they indicate, typically at the end of the interview when asked why they did not discuss their previously self-identified gang group as "a gang," that they were in a hurry while taking the survey, joking around, or similar.

The Nashville site had a final total of 30 youth interviews, including 25 self-identified gang and five Eurogang youth. Of the five Eurogang youth, four remained classified as 'Eurogang.' Shaquille, however, was classified as an 'affiliate' given his assertion that "the term that we use" to describe people like himself "is [gang] "affiliated"."

Of the self-identified gang youth, 14 were classified as both prospectively and retrospectively satisfying 'gang status' requirements while 12 were categorized as having asserted a 'conflicting retrospective status.' The 14 youth who discussed their group in terms of a gang included five members, six affiliates, and three protective group members. The 12 'conflicting retrospective status' youth – who had prospectively self-

identified gang membership at some point during the G.R.E.A.T. Evaluation study – included three who misdefined ‘gang membership’ (i.e., a ‘gang’ like in Scooby-Doo, a ‘good gang,’ etc.) as well as nine youth categorized as ‘respondent error’ (i.e., hurrying through the survey, thinking it would be funny to mark it, etc.). Table 8 provides a visual demonstration of the similarities and differences between a youth’s prospective and retrospective assertion of gang status. For the purposes of the dissertation, gang status is bifurcated using the youth’s retrospective classification: 18 gang-involved and 12 youth with ‘conflicting retrospective status.’

Table 8: Gang Status Classifications – Prospective vs. Retrospective, Nashville

	Total	<i>Gang Status</i>						<i>Conflicting Retrospective Status</i>				
		GM ¹⁵		A		PG		EG		MD		RE
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
GM	25	5	20	6	24	3	12		3	12	9	36
EG	5			1	20		4	80				
Total		5		6		3	4		3		9	
				18						12		

The Dallas-Fort Worth Area Community Site and Youth Characteristics

The Dallas-Fort Worth area community is one of the largest suburban cities in the state of Texas (U. S. Census Bureau, 2012). Table 9 provides population, race and ethnicity distributions, and median household income for the community as well as for

Table 9: Demographic and Socioeconomic Characteristics, DFW Community

	<u>Dallas County</u>	<u>DFW Community</u>
Population Size	2,368,139	226,876
Percent Race/Ethnicity		
White	33.1%	36.7%
Black	22.3%	14.5%
Hispanic	38.3%	37.8%
Other ¹⁶	6.3%	11.0%
Median Household Income	\$47,974	\$52,389

Source: U. S. Census Bureau, 2012

¹⁵ Table 8 Key: GM = Gang; A = Affiliate; PG = Protective Group; EG = Eurogang; MD = Misdefine; RE = Respondent Error

¹⁶ The Other race and ethnicity category includes the merger of the following U. S. Census Bureau (2012) groups: Asian, Native American, Pacific Islander, other, as well as bi-racial and multi-ethnic.

Dallas County. The city has a large Hispanic (37.8%) population, with sizable proportions of white (36.7%), black (14.5%), and other races and ethnicities (11%). As a suburb the cities of Dallas and Fort Worth, the community has experienced sizable growth since the 1950s – with a 5.1 percent growth in population between 2000 and 2010 (U. S. Census Bureau, 2012). Between 2006 and 2010, the median household income of the city was just above the national average (i.e., U. S. national average income: \$51,914) with 13.4 percent of the population below the poverty line (U. S. Census Bureau, 2012).

Though a suburb of Dallas – a chronic gang city (Miller, 1982/1992), the Texas community did not formally acknowledge a gang problem until 1990 (Egley, 2012). As Table 10 demonstrates, a total of 82 youth self-identified active gang at some point during the G.R.E.A.T. Evaluation study. Compared to all gang members in the National Evaluation, gang youth in this community were more Hispanic (i.e., Texas: 51.2%; G.R.E.A.T. average: 45.5%) and slightly more male (i.e., Texas: 62.2%; G.R.E.A.T. average: 56.3%). Otherwise, the community’s self-identified gang youth were relatively consistent in terms of proportion of stable and transient/intermittent members as well as recent and distant gang membership.

Table 10: Characteristics of Self-Reported Gang Youth, DFW Community

	<u>Total</u>		<u>Stable/ Distant</u>		<u>Transient/ Distant</u>		<u>Stable/ Recent</u>		<u>Transient/ Recent</u>	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Total	82		11	13.4	35	42.7	16	19.5	20	24.4
Gender										
Male	52	63.4	7	63.6	20	57.1	12	75.0	13	65.0
Female	30	36.6	4	36.3	15	42.9	4	25.0	7	35.0
Race/Ethnicity										
White	11	13.4	1	9.1	4	11.4	1	6.3	5	25.0
Black	20	24.4	4	36.3	10	28.6	4	25.5	2	10.0
Hispanic	42	51.2	5	45.5	16	45.7	10	62.5	11	55.0
Other	9	11.0	1	9.1	5	14.3	1	6.3	2	10.0

By the close of data collection in the Gang Desistance study, a total of 37 youth interviews were conducted and successfully transcribed by their three interviewers. As shown in Table 11, the vast majority of youth interviewed in the Dallas-Fort Worth area community were male (26 or 72%) and Hispanic (26 or 72%) relative to other racial groups (i.e., white = 4; black = 7). Also, transient/distant youth were the modal gang member type at approximately 38 percent (N = 14), followed by transient/recent at 22 percent (N = 8). Interviewees ranged in age from 16 to 18 and were an average of 17.

Table 11: Characteristics of Interviewed Youth, DFW Community

	<u>Total</u>		<u>Stable/ Distant</u>		<u>Transient/ Distant</u>		<u>Stable/ Recent</u>		<u>Transient/ Recent</u>		<u>Euro- gang</u>	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Total	37		8	21.6	14	37.8	6	16.2	5	13.5	4	10.8
Gender												
M ¹⁷	26	70.3	6	75.0	9	64.3	6	100	3	60.0	2	50.0
F	11	29.7	2	25.0	5	35.7	0	-	2	40.0	2	50.0
Race/Ethnicity												
W	4	10.8	1	12.5	2	14.3	0	-	0	-	1	25.0
B	7	18.9	2	25.0	3	21.4	1	16.7	1	20.0	0	-
H	26	70.3	5	62.5	9	64.3	5	83.3	4	80.0	3	75.0
Age												
Mean	17.1		17.3		17.0		17.2		16.8		17.3	
Range	16 to 18		16 to 18		16 to 18		16 to 18		16 to 17		17 to 18	

Gang Status Classifications

The Dallas-Fort Worth area community yielded a total of 37 youth interviews, including 33 self-identified gang and four Eurogang youth. A total of five research staff members were involved in the process of identifying interviewees retrospective gang status classifications within the site. Of the four Eurogang youth, two were classified as ‘Eurogang’ and two others were reclassified as ‘affiliate.’ Manuel noted that his friends were “[s]upposedly gang bangin’.” Alexis expressed how she “remember[ed] a lot of my

¹⁷ Table 11 Key: M = Male, F = Female; W = White, B = Black, H = Hispanic, ME = Middle Eastern

friends, they would all wear blue” and that she “always wanted to fit in, so I would....wear the color.”

Of the 33 self-identified gang youth in the site, 23 satisfied both prospective and retrospective ‘gang status’ while nine were found to have asserted a ‘conflicting retrospective status’ (see Table 8 for a detailed description of each status classification). The 23 gang youth included six gang members, 13 affiliates, and four protective group members. The nine ‘conflicting retrospective status’ youth – who had each previously self-identified gang membership at some point during the G.R.E.A.T. Evaluation study – included three who had misdefined ‘gang membership’ (i.e., a ‘gang’ like in Scooby-Doo, a ‘good gang,’ etc.) as well as six who were categorized as ‘respondent error’ (i.e., hurrying through the survey, thinking it would be funny to mark it, etc.). Table 12 provides a visual demonstration of the similarities and differences between a youth’s prospective and retrospective assertion of gang status. For the purposes of the dissertation, gang status is bifurcated using the youth’s retrospective classification: 27 gang-involved and nine youth with ‘conflicting retrospective status.’

Table 12: Gang Status Classifications – Prospective vs. Retrospective, DFW Comm.

	Total	<i>Gang Status</i>						<i>Conflicting Retrospective Status</i>				
		GM ¹⁸	A	PG	EG	MD	RE					
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
GM	32	6	19	13	41	4	12		3	9	6	19
EG	4		2	50		2	50					
Total	6		15	4	2			3		6		
			27					9				

Sources of Data and Analytic Strategy

The dissertation uses a mixed methods approach to provide detailed descriptive accounts of violence and demonstrate its role within and across the lives of gang youth.

¹⁸ Table 12 Key: GM = Gang; A = Affiliate; PG = Protective Group; EG = Eurogang; MD = Misdefine; RE = Respondent Error

Using a sample of self-identified gang youth, the research objectives are explored through the use of both the youths' retrospective qualitative narrative accounts and their corresponding prospective quantitative survey data. The dissertation principally draws on the qualitative narrative accounts from a sample of youth (N = 66) from two emergent gang cities. In addition, corresponding longitudinal survey data is secondarily used to bolster the strength of the findings from the narrative accounts (Jupp, 2001; Noaks & Wincup, 2004; Silverman, 2006). This allows the dissertation to triangulate the prevalence and extent of violence across individuals' retrospective and prospective accounts as well as present a more comprehensive picture of the role of violence within and across the lives of youth gang members.

The youth interviews conducted as part of the Gang Desistance study were in-depth and semi-structured. The interview schedule consisted entirely of open-ended questions intended to elicit nuanced responses as well as allow for flexible and exhaustive probing by interviewers. The youth interviews were centered around a variety of themes: investigation of peer group characteristics (i.e., group structure, group types, group sex and race composition, embeddedness, length of membership), individual and group contact with law enforcement as well as victimization, and specific questions about the processes surrounding joining and leaving a gang/peer group (see Appendix A: Youth Interview Guide).

Specific to the dissertation's objectives, no structured questions about experiences with crime and victimization were asked until the penultimate section of the interview schedule. Importantly, the overwhelming majority of accounts of violence discussed by interviewees emerged organically throughout several sections of the interview (e.g.,

discussions about the youth's family, neighborhood, schools attended, as well as current and former peer group(s)). By not having deductively included structured questions about the role of violence, the interview schedule allowed for violence's varying forms and role to emerge and be explored inductively within and across interviewed youth.

Recognizing that research cannot truly gain authentic access to individuals' 'true experiences' (Miller, 2011), this research instead draws on the youths' accounts of their own lived experiences. Perceptions are inherently subjective, but are central to the way people ascribe meaning to events and experiences as well as view their social world and condition (see Agnew, 2006; Miller, 2011; Presser, 2009). Qualitative interviews are, therefore, uniquely suited to generate detailed information about the nature and meaning adolescents and young adults afford their experiences with violence as well as with gangs (Miller & Glassner, 2011). The narrative accounts were analyzed inductively for patterns specific to how violence, and the role of violence, was experienced, expressed, and interpreted by interviewees. Special attention was paid to whether the effect and role of violence changed over time or interacted across the life-cycles of gang involvement (i.e., gang joining, active membership, and leaving).

The dissertation's analysis involved the use of inductive analytic techniques, including line-by-line open and focused coding, to identify and further refine emergent themes through the use of modified grounded theory techniques (Charmez, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).¹⁹ This included identifying and accounting for deviant cases, discontinuities within narratives, and disconfirming evidence of emergent patterns and themes (Charmez, 2006; Silverman, 2006). A constant comparative approach (Glaser &

¹⁹ The Gang Desistance study did not strictly adhere to grounded theory methodology – which requires a preference for theoretical sampling over purposive sampling. Given this, a modified grounded theory approach was undertaken specific to the purposive collection of youth narratives.

Strauss, 1967) was used to make systematic comparisons and thoroughly explore similarities and differences in experienced violence as well as the role and meanings ascribed to violence within and across gang status as well as site location (see Miller, 2005). The concepts and themes identified in the subsequent findings chapters are illustrated by narratives which are indicative of the most common patterns and simple tabulations are included to further substantiate the representativeness of the patterns presented (Miller, 2005).²⁰ While the findings are not generalizable in nature, the findings provide important insight into the effect and role of violence within and across the lives of self-identified gang youth.

The quantitative data come from the six waves of survey data collected over five years as part of the G.R.E.A.T. Evaluation study (Esbensen, 2013). The dissertation draws on corresponding quantitative data collected only for the gang-involved youth and does so to supplement findings from the qualitative narrative accounts. The dissertation focuses on individual responses to a variety of relevant questions and scales (see Appendix B: Relevant Quantitative Survey Questions).

Several scale measures were used including: fear of crime, perceived risk of victimization, and overall victimization (see Table 13). Fear of crime and perceived risk of victimization were asked at Waves 4, 5, and 6. Fear of crime (Wave 4 α = 0.926; Wave 5 α = 0.926; Wave 6 α = 0.949) was measured by asking the youth how afraid they were of eight situations of property and violent victimization at home and at school. Responses to these questions were scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “not at all afraid” to

²⁰ In this and subsequent chapters, “the vast majority” is used to indicate approximately three-quarters or more; “most” or “the majority” to indicate more than half; “many” to indicate approximately one-third; “a number” to indicate roughly a quarter or more; and “several” or “a few” to describe themes discussed by a small number of youth but always more than two (see J. Miller, 2001: 221).

“very afraid.” Perceived risk of victimization (Wave 4 α = 0.908; Wave 5 α = 0.947; Wave 6 α = 0.869) was measured through the same eight questions, except that youth were prompted to think about how likely each form of victimization was to occur. Responses were similarly scored and ranged from “not at all likely” to “very likely.” Table 13 presents the mean and standard deviation for fear of crime (Wave 4: Mn = 2.25, SD = 1.08; Wave 5: Mn = 2.01, SD = 1.02; Wave 6: Mn = 2.10, SD = 1.19) and perceived risk of victimization (Wave 4: Mn = 1.94, SD = 0.95; Wave 5: Mn = 1.89, SD = 1.02; Wave 6: Mn = 1.93, SD = 0.75).

Table 13: Scale Measures for Youth in Nashville and DFW Community, (N = 66)

Variable	Range	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3	Wave 4	Wave 5	Wave 6
		Mn (SD)					
Fear	1–5	-	-	-	2.25 (1.08)	2.01 (1.02)	2.10 (1.19)
Risk	1–5	-	-	-	1.94 (0.95)	1.89 (1.02)	1.93 (0.75)
Victimization	0–121	16.58 (19.48)	14.72 (16.58)	14.22 (14.70)	18.98 (30.36)	14.05 (24.55)	12.02 (24.05)
Nashville		15.56 (19.30)	11.00 (13.83)	14.70 (16.95)	22.14 (30.96)	19.24 (33.67)	11.89 (24.04)
DFW		17.42 (19.89)	17.80 (18.18)	13.82 (12.83)	16.29 (30.05)	9.74 (11.88)	12.13 (24.44)

Victimization was measured through 11 items specific to direct and indirect forms of property, violent, and bullying victimization (Wave 1 α = 0.842; Wave 2 α = 0.777; Wave 3 α = 0.720; Wave 4 α = 0.949; Wave 5 α = 0.934; Wave 6 α = 0.940). At each survey wave, youth were asked to indicate how many times they had experienced victimization in the past six months.²¹ Youth were allowed to circle a response which ranged from zero to ten (i.e., 0, 1, 2, 3, etc.) or “more than ten.” Table 13 demonstrates the means and standard deviations for victimization at each wave for all 66 respondents as well as for the Tennessee (N = 30) and Texas (N = 36) sites.

Other open-ended responses and nominal survey data are also used from the G.R.E.A.T. Evaluation study. These data include: good things about gangs, motivations for gang joining, gang descriptions, what members of a gang do together, as well as the

²¹ Only the post-test (Wave 2) survey, conducted in spring 2007, asked youth if they had participated in delinquency and had experienced victimization in the past *three* months.

motivations, means, and consequences of gang leaving. Regardless of gang status, at each wave youth were asked “what good things do you think would happen to you as a gang member?” The question was followed by a list of eight close-ended statements – which included “there are no good things”, seven positive things, as well as an open-ended “other” category – and prompted the youth to circle all that applied. Youth were also asked to indicate whether or not they had “been involved in gang fights” in the past six months.

For those youth who self-identified current or former gang membership, youth were asked “why did you join the gang?” This question was followed by a close-ended list – which included “not in a gang”, eight positive reasons for joining, as well as an open-ended “other” category – and prompted the youth to circle all that applied. Youth were also asked if ten close-ended statements “described their gang?” They were then asked if “members of your gang do these things together?” This prompt was followed by a list of nine activities (e.g., help out in the community, provide protection for each other, as well as steal things). Response categories for both questions were “no”, “yes”, or “not in a gang”.

To capture the experience of gang leavers, youth were asked three questions prefaced by the statement “If you were a gang member at some point in your life, but you are not now a gang member...” First, respondents were asked “why did you leave the gang?” This was followed by a close-ended list – which included “never in a gang”, “now in a gang”, ten motivations for leaving, as well as an open-ended “other” category – and a directive to circle all that applied. Next, asked was “how did you leave the gang.” This was followed by a close-ended list – which included “never in a gang”, “now in a gang”,

five means or processes of leaving, as well as an open-ended “other” category – and a prompt to circle all that applied. Finally, youth were asked “were there any consequences that resulted from you leaving the gang?” Youth could respond with “never in a gang”, “now in a gang”, “no”, or “yes”. If the youth affirmatively responded, s/he was asked “If yes, what were those consequences?” This was followed by a close-ended list – which included seven consequences as well as an open-ended “other” category – and a directive to circle all that applied.

The prospective quantitative survey data is invaluable to advancing understanding of the prevalence, extent, and role of violence within and across the lives of gang-involved adolescents. Because of the longitudinal nature of the National Evaluation study, within individual change over the tenure of gang status is identifiable. This was accomplished through Paired-Samples T-tests – for scale measures – in SPSS as well as through simple individual measure comparisons across two or more time points. Survey responses are also important to understanding the less quantifiable role of violence. The strength of descriptive survey responses (i.e., benefits of membership, motivations for joining, descriptions of gang rules and activities, as well as motivations, methods, and consequences of leaving) are bolstered by their temporal proximity to the individual’s own experiences and perceptions; for example, motivations reported just after joining may be different – and are less sensitive to issues of memory decay – than those reported one, two, or three years after de-identification.

To this point, this chapter has provided a detailed overview of the dissertation’s two sources of data as well as the analytic methods used to explore its research objectives. The chapter now closes with a discussion of the prevalence and patterns of

violence detailed in the Gang Desistance study narratives. The overview provided by this section is necessary for the demonstration of the extent and role of violence in the subsequent chapters.

The Prevalence and Patterns of Violence

As noted in the review of the literature, gang-involved youth often discuss notable experiences with violence. Importantly, violence is commonly expressed and interpreted as having a central role in the lives of gang youth. While gang members face exacerbated risk of and exposure to violence (Esbensen et al., 2010), research has suggested that violence is also a concern among American youth more generally (Johnston, Bachman, & O'Malley, 2003). Exposure to violence – be it objective (i.e., actual violence) or subjective (i.e., anticipated violence) – can have deleterious consequences on youths' subsequent assessments of violence (i.e., fear of crime and perceived risk of victimization) and behavior believed to enhance personal safety (i.e., gang joining, weapon carrying, and other avoidance behaviors) (Ferraro, 1995; Hindelang, Gottfredson, & Garofolo, 1978).

For the dissertation to accomplish the first of its major objectives – examining the extent of violence within and across the lives of self-identified gang youth, the chapter closes with a discussion of violence described within the qualitative narratives. Recognizing that violence is experienced and interpreted individually, domain analysis (Spradley, 1979) was conducted using the universal semantic relationship of *strict inclusion* (e.g., X is a kind of Y) to allow for the inductive emergence and identification of all meaningful experiences relevant to “violence” (i.e., direct and vicarious victimization, crime and disorder, as well as impressions of safety and insecurity) (see

also Charmaz, 2006). The prevalence and thematic patterns of violence within each of the two emergent gang cities are discussed in turn. Using a constant comparative approach (Miller, 2005), whereby systematic comparisons were used to identify any substantive differences between groups, particular emphasis was placed on the identification and explanation of any substantive differences between those youth with and without experienced violence as well as between locations and differing gang status (i.e., youth classified gang-involved or ‘conflicting retrospective status’).

The Nashville Site

Youth with Experienced Violence

Consistent with this study’s broad conceptualization, the vast majority (26 or 87%) of Nashville interviewees discussed exposure to violence.²² As demonstrated by Table 14, those youth who discussed violence were mostly male (16 or 60%) and white (13 or 50%). As was detailed earlier in the chapter, the 30 self-identified youth were retrospectively classified for their gang status; yielding a total of 18 gang-involved and 12 ‘conflicting retrospective status’ youth. Each of the gang-involved youth as well as the majority (8 or 67%) of the ‘conflicting retrospective status’ youth discussed exposure to violence at some point during their interview.

Table 14: Experienced Violence, Nashville

	Total	Sex			Race/Ethnicity			Status	
		M	F	W	B	H	ME	Gang	CRS ²³
Full Sample	30	19	11	16	7	5	2	18	12
<i>Violence</i>	<i>26</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>No Violence</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>4</i>

²² The four who did not discuss violence are presented as deviant cases towards the end of the section.

²³ Table 14 Key: Sex: M = Male and F = Female; Race/Ethnicity: W = White, B = Black, H = Hispanic, and ME = Middle Eastern; Status: Gang = Gang-involved youth; CRS = ‘Conflicting Retrospective Status’ youth

Table 15: Domains of Experienced Violence, Nashville

Violence	Total	Neighborhood	School	Peer
	26	19	26	19
<i>Gang</i>	18	13	18	16
<i>CRS</i>	8	6	8	3

Analysis of the 26 youth narratives revealed violence within three major themes:

1) the neighborhood domain, 2) the school domain, and 3) the peer domain. Each domain included objective (i.e., direct and vicarious exposure to crime, violence, and gangs) and subjective experiences with violence (i.e., anticipated crime and violence as well as concerns over safety). Of those who discussed violence (see Table 15), violence within the school domain (i.e., within middle and/or high school) was universally discussed. The next most commonly discussed themes included violence within the neighborhood and peer domains (19 or 73%, for both). While analysis revealed important distinctions of violence and its role within each domain, some more general patterns across the three domains are first discussed.

Table 16: Frequency of Domains of Experienced Violence, Nashville

Three Domains (N = 13)

Sex		Race/Ethnicity				Status	
M	F	W	B	H	ME	Gang	CRS ²⁴
7	6	5	5	3	-	12	1

Two Domains (N = 9)

Sex		Race/Ethnicity				Status	
M	F	W	B	H	ME	Gang	CRS
6	3	5	1	2	1	5	4

One Domain (N = 4)

Sex		Race/Ethnicity				Status	
M	F	W	B	H	ME	Gang	CRS
3	1	3	-	-	1	1	3

²⁴ Table 16 Key: Sex: M = Male and F = Female; Race/Ethnicity: W = White, B = Black, H = Hispanic, and ME = Middle Eastern; Status: Gang = Gang-involved youth; CRS = ‘Conflicting Retrospective Status’ youth

The overwhelming majority of Nashville youth (23 or 89%) discussed violence across two or all three domains (see Table 16). Interestingly, nearly all youth classified as gang-involved (17 or 94%) discussed violence within two or three domains.²⁵ Of the eight youth classified as having asserted ‘conflicting retrospective status,’ three discussed violence exclusively in the school domain, four discussed violence within two domains (i.e., neighborhood and school domains), and only Brandi discussed violence within all three domains.

Moving from most to least individual instances of domain-specific violence, most youth (13 or 50%) discussed violence across all three thematic domains. These youth were relatively balanced in terms of sex (i.e., Male: 7; Female: 6) and race and ethnicity (i.e., 5 white, 5 black, and 3 Hispanic youth), demonstrating a notable skew relative to the demographics of those interviewed in Nashville. Moreover, youth who discussed violence in all three domains were also disproportionately skewed in terms of their gang status (i.e., 12 or 92% gang-involved).

For those who mentioned violence within two domains (9 or 35%), five youth experienced violence in both the neighborhood and school domains while four experienced violence in the school and peer domains. The nine interviewees with violence in two domains tended to be male (6 or 67%) and white (5 or 56%). These youth were also roughly split in terms of their retrospective gang classification, with five deemed gang-involved and four ‘conflicting retrospective status.’

Finally, a few of the youth (4 or 15%) exclusively discussed violence within the school domain. All told, three were classified ‘conflicting retrospective status;’ Chelsea –

²⁵ Only Bill – an active Eurogang member at the time of the interview – discussed violence exclusively in the school domain.

a white female – was deemed to have ‘misdefined’ gang status while Jesse and Connor – both white males – were each classified ‘respondent error.’ Only Bill – a young man of Middle Eastern descent – remained classified as gang-involved because he was presently active (at the time of the interview) in a Eurogang group.

Closer inspection of the data revealed several patterns specific to the individuals found within Table 16. Of the 18 youth retrospectively classified as gang-involved, all but Bill discussed violence within two or more domains. Furthermore, 12 of the 13 youth who discussed violence within all three domains were classified as gang-involved. Those who had been classified as ‘conflicting retrospective status’ were most likely to discuss violence within the neighborhood and/or school domains. Relative to the demographic composition of the Nashville interviewees (i.e., 10 or 38% female), female youth were disproportionately represented in terms of the number of domains of violence discussed; in particular, young women were overrepresented in terms of those who discussed all three domains of violence (i.e., 7 or 50%) and were underrepresented in terms of those who discussed one (1 or 25%) or two domains of violence (3 or 33%).

Youth without Violence

Of the 30 youth interviewed in the Nashville site, only four did not discuss violence – whether objective or subjective in form – across any of the inductively identified domains. Demographically, three were white males, with Kiara as the lone exception (see Table 17). While all had prospectively self-identified gang status on the G.R.E.A.T. Evaluation study, each was retrospectively classified ‘conflicting retrospective status’ due to varying forms of ‘respondent error.’

Table 17: Demographics of Youth without Violence, Nashville

	Sex	Race	Age	Status
Joe	M	W	18	CRS (RE) ²⁶
Jeff	M	W	17	CRS (RE)
Kiara	F	B	17	CRS (RE)
Dustin	M	W	16	CRS (RE)

Both Dustin and Jeff appear to have attempted to respond to all G.R.E.A.T.

Evaluation survey questions in good faith, but subsequently revealed their groups to be ‘non-gang’ in nature. Dustin recalled that he “probably...tried to answer [the G.R.E.A.T. survey questions] about this lunch group” or as he referred to them on his Wave 4 survey a “community of idealists.” During Wave 4 surveying, Jeff similarly clarified that his middle school ‘gang group’ – which he self-identified as a gang at Waves 2, 3, and 4 – was actually his “Boy Scouts of America” troop that he had joined “to become an Eagle Scout.”

When pressed on why she had previously indicated gang membership, Kiara – a 17 year old black female – confessed: “See here’s the thing – I didn’t even read the questions. I just circled random things just so it could be over with. ‘Cause the tests were so long.” Joe similarly expressed that he “was just...circling things”; however, his open-ended responses on the G.R.E.A.T. Evaluation surveys suggest that he repeated falsified gang status in jest. This falsification was particularly evidenced during his Wave 4 and 6 surveying. On his Wave 4 survey, Joe wrote in several statements alluding to his participation in the massive multi-player online role-playing game *World of Warcraft*. This included writing in that he carried the magical spell “arcane shot” as a weapon for protection, that he “left [the gang] because [a *World of Warcraft* character] would kill me because I’m under-gear’d”, and finally that the means through which he left the gang was

²⁶ Table 17 Key: Sex: M = Male and F = Female; Race/Ethnicity: W = White and B = Black; Status: CRS = ‘Conflicting Retrospective Status’ youth and RE = Respondent Error

“I would type “leave guild””. During his final Wave 6 surveying, he crassly wrote in that he was motivated to join the gang “to beat up niggers” and that a consequence of leaving the gang was to be “eaten by a penguin”.

As school violence was the most commonly identified domain for youth with experienced violence, it is important to provide the youths’ assessments of their current and former schools. Dustin explained “I think my school’s the best...Everyone there comes from a higher economic class.” Indeed, it is important to note that at the time of the interview (as well as during prior G.R.E.A.T. Evaluation surveying) all four of the youth were attending schools which were well known for their academic prestige and commitment to the fine arts. Kiara explained that her schools, both middle and high school, were “a lot of ‘goody-two-shoes’...smart people” and that these schools were “place[s] where all the nerds come.” Jeff supported this assertion by noting that academically focused middle schools “kinda...feed-in to” similar high schools, “so it’s a lot [of] the same kids.” It is likely because of the unique school experiences – wrought by the exclusivity and academic rigor of select public schools – that these four youth were largely insulated from experiences with conflict and violence.

The Dallas-Fort Worth Area Community Site

Youth with Experienced Violence

Just as in Nashville, the overwhelming majority of Texas youth (34 or 94%) discussed experienced violence over the course of their interview (see Table 18).²⁷ Those youth who discussed violence were mostly male (23 or 68%) and Hispanic (24 or 71%). As indicated earlier, the 36 interviewees were retrospectively classified for their gang status; yielding a total of 27 gang-involved and nine ‘conflicting retrospective status’

²⁷ The two youth who did not discuss violence are presented as deviant cases towards the end of the section.

youth. At some point in their interview, each of the gang-involved and the vast majority (7 or 78%) of ‘conflicting retrospective status’ interviewees noted exposure to violence. Consistent with their Nashville peers, narrative analysis revealed violence within three major themes – the neighborhood, school, and peer domains – and each included discussions of objective and subjective forms of violence.

Table 18: Experienced Violence, DFW Community

	Total	Sex		Race/Ethnicity			Status	
		M	F	W	B	H	Gang	CRS ²⁸
Full Sample	36	25	11	4	7	25	27	9
<i>Violence</i>	34	23	11	4	6	24	27	7
<i>No Violence</i>	2	2	-	-	1	1	-	2

General patterns of violence discussed by the Texas youth largely mirror that of their Nashville peers. Of those who discussed violence (see Table 19), violence in the school domain was discussed by all but one of the interviewees (33 or 97%; excluding Veronica). Next, a total of 29 youth (or 85%) discussed violence in the neighborhood and 28 (or 82%) in the peer thematic domains.

Table 19: Domains of Experienced Violence, DFW Community

	Total	Neighborhood	School	Peer
Violence	34	29	33	28
<i>Gang</i>	27	24	26	26
<i>CRS</i>	7	5	7	2

Texas youth most commonly (23 or 68%) discussed violence within all three thematic domains (see Table 20). Relative to the demographics of those interviewed in the site, those youth with discussed violence in all three domains were disproportionately male (i.e., 78% relative to males accounting for 69% of within site interviews), Hispanic

²⁸ Table 18 Key: Sex: M = Male and F = Female; Race/Ethnicity: W = White, B = Black, H = Hispanic; Status: Gang = Gang-involved youth; CRS = ‘Conflicting Retrospective Status’ youth

(i.e., 79% relative to 70% within the site), and almost exclusively gang-involved (i.e., 96% relative to 79% within the site).

Table 20: Frequency of Domains of Experienced Violence, DFW Community
Three Domains (N = 23)

Sex		Race/Ethnicity			Status	
M	F	W	B	H	Gang	CRS ²⁹
18	5	2	5	16	22	1

Two Domains (N = 10)

Sex		Race/Ethnicity			Status	
M	F	W	B	H	Gang	CRS
5	5	2	-	8	5	5

One Domain (N = 1)

Sex		Race/Ethnicity			Status	
M	F	W	B	H	Gang	CRS
-	1	-	1	-	-	1

Ten of the remaining 11 youth (or 29%) discussed violence within two thematic domains. This included five youth with violence in the neighborhood and school domains, four in the school and peer domains, and only Veronica discussed violence in the neighborhood and peer domains. Relative to the demographics of those interviewed in Texas, youth with violence within two thematic domains included a larger proportion of young women (i.e., 55% relative to females accounting for 31% of Texas interviews) and ‘conflicting retrospective status’ youth (i.e., 55% relative to 21% of Texas interviews). Only Crystal, then a 17 year old black female, discussed violence exclusively within the school domain.

Analysis also revealed several general patterns which were discernible with regard to domains of violence for the interviewed Texas youth. Just one of the Texas youth discussed violence in a single thematic domain, whereas four of the Nashville interviewees recalled experienced violence exclusively in the school domain. Table 20

²⁹ Table 20 Key: Sex: M = Male and F = Female; Race/Ethnicity: W = White, B = Black, H = Hispanic; Status: Gang = Gang-involved youth; CRS = ‘Conflicting Retrospective Status’ youth

also demonstrates that nearly the vast majority of youth (23 or 68%) identified violence within each of the three thematic domains. This stands in contrast to the Nashville site, where 13 of the youth (or 50%) discussed violence in all domains. Moreover, the 27 Texans who were retrospectively classified as gang-involved discussed greater exposure to violence across multiple domains; the vast majority of gang-involved youth demonstrated violence in all three domains (22 or 82%) while only five (or 18%) discussed violence in only two domains. While the accounts of ‘conflicting retrospective status’ youth were far from devoid of violence, these Texas youth largely discussed violence in terms of two thematic domains (6 or 86%) with only Jalen discussing violence in all three domains and Crystal only in the school domain.

Youth without Violence

Of the 36 youth interviewed in the Dallas-Fort Worth area community, only Pedro and Xavier did not discuss objective or subjective forms of violence within any of the thematic domains. Each was a 17 year old minority male who had prospectively self-reported gang membership at two or more waves of the G.R.E.A.T. Evaluation study. Despite prospective self-nomination, both were subsequently classified ‘conflicting retrospective status’ based on their narrative accounts.

During G.R.E.A.T. Evaluation surveying, Pedro indicated that he was presently in a gang at Waves 4, 5, and 6. He also went on to note that members of his gang did the following together: fought (Waves 4 and 6), sold marijuana (Waves 4 and 5), sold other illegal drugs (Wave 5), and provided protection for each other (Wave 6). Over his 8th and 9th grade years, he also noted that he had joined his gang ‘for protection’ (Wave 4) and ‘for fun’ (Wave 5). Though he had repeatedly prospectively identified his peer group as a

“gang”, during the qualitative interview he thrice held that his peer group was neither a gang nor was it similar to one. When presented with the information that he had identified his group as a gang at three separate survey points, he replied: “I don’t remember” circling that and reaffirmed that “I never....I wouldn’t say they were a gang....[F]or what I know, I never, it was no gangs with me.”

Not only did Pedro staunchly repeat that he “was never involved in gangs”, but when questioned about the existence of gangs in his community he simply pled ignorance. Asked about the presence of gangs in his high and middle school, he replied, in turn, “Nah, I don’t think that. I mean they might be, but not that I know of” and “I don’t think so. There could’ve, but...” he didn’t know. As for his city and neighborhood, he continued:

Amber: Do you think gangs are a problem here?

Pedro: No, I don’t think gang[s] are a problem.

Amber: Why do you think they’re not a problem?

Pedro: ‘Cause, I mean, I don’t really see nothing about gangs and stuff like that. I mean around here, I don’t see nothing like that.

Amber: Okay. So you don’t know anything about...?

Pedro: Nah.

Amber: How about in your neighborhood – do you think there’s any gangs here?

Pedro: Um, like I said – I don’t see nothing going, like, like gangs and stuff. I don’t see them. I don’t see that. It’s just friends. You know?

Amber: Do you just think they’re ‘groups of friends’ – is that what you mean?

Pedro: Yeah. But like it’s nothin’. Like I don’t hear ‘bout doing bad. You know? I just, it’s just friends. Like we all know each other. Like it’s no...

Amber: Not gangs – you’re saying?

Pedro: Yeah.

Amber: So why do you think there aren’t gangs?

Pedro: ‘Cause I don’t, I don’t hear nothing bad going on in the neighborhood.

Earlier in the interview, Pedro had also noted that there was nothing really that he disliked about his neighborhood and that, overall, it's "safe – it's pretty safe."

It is important to demonstrate that Pedro's remarks during the qualitative interview were not entirely consistent with his prospective survey responses. This is clear not only from his own self-identified gang status (i.e., "now in a gang" at Waves 4, 5, and 6), but from other questions specific to gangs and neighborhood safety. Though he consistently indicated that "gangs in [his] neighborhood" were "not a problem" for five of the G.R.E.A.T. Evaluation surveys (i.e., Waves 1, 2, and 3 as well as 5 and 6), he did indicate that gangs were "somewhat of a problem" during the 8th grade (i.e., Wave 4). His responses to questions about fear of neighborhood crime during Wave 4 produced similar inconsistencies; in particular, Pedro indicated he was "somewhat afraid" to all six fear of crime questions. Finally, at Wave 6 he indicated he was "not at all afraid" of "being robbed or mugged" or "being attacked or threatened on [his] way to or from school." However, he also indicated being "a little afraid" of "having someone break into [his] house while [he was] there", "having [his] property damaged by someone", and also "being attacked by someone with a weapon". Lastly, he noted that he was "somewhat afraid" of "having someone break into [his] house while [he was] away".

Pedro's prospective responses to questions about his peers' delinquency (i.e., "how many of your current friends have...") also produced a similarly conflicting account. When asked how many of his friends "belonged to a gang", he only responded "none of them" at Waves 2 and 3.³⁰ During the waves in which he had self-identified membership (Waves 4, 5, and 6), the number of Pedro's current friends that he indicated

³⁰ Pedro did not respond to this question at the Wave 1 pre-test.

belonged to a gang fluctuated over time; “half of them” at Wave 4, a “few of them” at Wave 5, and “most of them” at Wave 6.

Lastly, it was the interviewer’s field notes that proved most illuminating in accounting for Pedro’s complete absence of thematic violence as well as his proclaimed ignorance of local gangs. The interviewer recorded the following after the brief 32 minute interview:

[Initially,] the respondent did not want the interview to be [audio-] recorded, but I was able to put him at ease. However, the respondent was very hard to interview because he was claiming he did not know anything.

Given this, closer inspection of the narrative seemed to indicate that Pedro’s cousin – who was “one year older” than the respondent – was central to his 8th grade and early high school peer group. Speaking about his middle school group, Pedro explained that “after school we wouldn’t see each other unless I was with my [particular] cousin.” Later he noted that he was introduced to “some of” his high school friends “‘cause [his cousin] was [at his high school] a year before I got there, so I mean he knew some people.” When being asked if he still considered himself part of that high school group, he continued “we’re just friends” but then conceded “yeah, I guess you can call it ‘a group.’”

Importantly, the interviewer’s field notes also noted:

When I left [his house], I noticed two of [Pedro’s] friends were sitting down outside playing dice. One of the [young men] was wearing one color from head to toe (i.e., hat, shirt, jeans, and shoes).

This field note appears consistent, in part, with his having twice circled – at Waves 1 and 2 – that his “gang has symbols or colors” when asked what “describes your gang”. Given Pedro’s trepidation about having the interview recorded while a friend or family member

sat in front of his home dressed in potential gang colors, it may be that he felt uncomfortable and unable to speak freely.

Next, Xavier positively indicated gang membership through a variety of questions at Waves 1 and 2. During both waves, he answered affirmatively to the questions “do you consider your group of friends to be a gang?” and “are you now in a gang?” At Wave 1, Xavier did circle “No” to the question “have you ever been a gang member” – though this was recoded to “Yes” given his indication that he was presently in a gang. At Wave 2, he circled “Yes” to the question of having ever been a member. Though he reported being 11 years old at the pre- and post-tests, he indicated on the Wave 1 survey that he was “10” years old when he first joined the gang – though he later recorded, at Wave 2, that he was age “11” when he joined the gang. He also specified that he had joined the gang “to fit in better” and indicated that members of his gang “help[ed] out in the community” and “provided protection for each other” (each at Waves 1 and 2). Only at Wave 1, did he denote that the gang “damage[d] or destroye[d] property together”.

While Xavier had prospectively self-identified his group of friends as a gang – through his responses to two gang measures at two consecutive survey points, when he was directly asked whether his 6th grade group was similar to a gang he said simply “[u]h, no.” Later when he was asked why he wouldn’t have considered it to be a gang he held that it was “‘cause we didn’t hang out like ‘24/7.’” At the close of the interview, Xavier was presented with the fact that he had twice indicated that his group was a gang and was asked “why do you think you possibly could have identified them as a gang?”

Xavier: ‘Cause I think [my] age – I like identified ‘a gang’ as a different.

Amber: Okay. So how did you [then identify] ‘a gang’? – Then as in 6th grade.

Xavier: People that just hang out with and [do] all this fun stuff with.

Amber: Okay. It was like a ‘good gang’? Like a...?

Xavier: Yeah.

Given his remarks, the members of the research team classified him as having prospectively ‘misdefined’ gang involvement.

Not only did Xavier exert a ‘conflicting retrospective status,’ but he also provided his assessment that his neighborhood was “[s]afe” and replied “[u]h, not that I know of” when asked whether there were gangs in his neighborhood. When pressed for why he thought this, he too pled ignorance – “Um, I don’t know.” When later compelled to explain why he felt there were no gangs in his middle school, he mused “I guess it was just like at a young age..., I mean, you weren’t as affiliated with that.”

Just as for Pedro, Xavier’s remarks during the youth interview were, at times, notably inconsistent with his earlier responses on the G.R.E.A.T. Evaluation study surveys. Again this was the case not only for his prospectively self-identified gang status (i.e., “yes” responses to both “now in a gang” and “do you consider your group of friends to be a gang” questions at Waves 1 and 2), but similarly to questions specific to gangs and neighborhood safety. Though he had indicated during the interview that gangs were absent from his neighborhood, he never once indicated they were “not a problem” across the six waves of surveying; he noted that “gangs in [his] neighborhood” were “somewhat of a problem” at four survey points (i.e., Waves 2 and 3 as well as 5 and 6) and “a big problem” at Waves 1 and 4. His prospective assessments of neighborhood safety, however, were more consistent with his retrospective assertions; he indicated that he was “not at all afraid” of neighborhood crime nearly uniformly across Waves 4, 5, and 6.³¹

³¹ During his 10th grade (Wave 6) surveying, Xavier only indicated being “a little afraid” of “having [his] property damaged by someone”. However, he responded “not at all afraid” to all other fear of neighborhood crime questions.

Xavier's prospective accounts of gangs in middle school similarly clashed with his retrospective assessments. Asked "how many of your current friends..." "belonged to a gang" in the 6th grade – the academic year he twice self-identified gang membership, he noted "half of them" at the pre-test and a "few of them" at the post-test.

Though his remarks provide an example of a youth who 'misdefined' gang status during the early years of the G.R.E.A.T. Evaluation study, it is not clear why Xavier's prospective and retrospective accounts of violence in his neighborhood and middle school are, at times, at notable odds. Like Pedro, Xavier's interview was also markedly brief – 22 minutes in length – making it one of the shortest in the entire Gang Desistance study. Though described as "relaxed", the interviewer's field notes highlight that "[t]he respondent was very quiet and it was hard to interview him and get him to speak."

For both Texas respondents, it appears that the dearth of discussions of violence in any of the thematic domains seems to have been greatly influenced by the respondent's level of comfort with the in-person interview format. This seems to be best demonstrated by the length of the interviews, relative to the 52 minute average study. Given the brief exchange, it would have been unlikely for either to have noted much in the way of experiences with gangs or violence so as to minimize the number of opportunities for the interviewer to ask follow-up or probing questions.

Conclusions

The chapter's overview of the data and methods as well as the patterns and prevalence of violence within provide the necessary foundation on which subsequent chapters more thoroughly develop and demonstrate the extent and role of violence in the lives of self-identified gang youth. As discussed, the vast majority of youth interviewed

in the two emergent gang cities indicated some exposure to violence. Importantly, three distinct thematic domains inductively emerged within and across youth accounts of objective and subjective forms of violence (i.e., the neighborhood, school, and peer domains). Though youth classification as ‘conflicting retrospective status’ did not predicate an absence discussed violence, gang-involved youth – across both sites – were uniform in having discussed exposure to violence and were more likely to discuss violence within multiple domains.

Given the inductive identification of the three thematic domains of violence (i.e., the neighborhood, school, and peer domains), the ensuing three chapters explore domain-specific violence and identify notable subthemes within each. Following the demonstration of the prevalence and effect of violence within each of the thematic domains (chapters 5, 6, and 7), chapter 8 satisfies the dissertation’s main research objectives by situating violence around each stage of the life-cycles of gang involvement. The final chapter provides a summary of key findings as well as a discussion of the dissertation’s theoretical and practical contribution to the field. The dissertation closes with a demonstration of how violence was often described as having a meaningful, complex, and often dualistic role in the lives of many of the gang-involved youth.

CHAPTER FIVE: VIOLENCE IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD DOMAIN

As demonstrated in the prior chapter, the vast majority of youth in both emergent gang cities discussed some form of violence over the course of their Gang Desistance study interview (i.e., Nashville: 26 or 87%; the Dallas-Fort Worth community: 34 or 94%). While respondent gang status did increase both the likelihood and degree of exposure to objective and subjective forms of violence, discussed concerns over individual safety and crime are largely consistent with the extant research on youth violence (Esbensen et al., 2010; Johnston et al., 2003). Through the use of an inductive modified grounded theory approach (Charmez, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Silverman, 2006), three thematic domains of violence emerged across the narratives of self-identified gang youth: 1) violence in the neighborhood domain, 2) violence in the school domain, and 3) violence in the peer domain. In order to satisfy the first of the dissertation's research objectives, this and the ensuing chapters demonstrate the extent of domain specific violence and notable subthemes within each. The use of a constant comparative approach (Miller, 2005) further allows each chapter to identify and substantiate systematic differences in domain specific findings across locale, gang status, and gender.

As the second most commonly discussed domain of violence, the present chapter demonstrates the extent and patterns of neighborhood violence. Concerns over crime and safety in the neighborhood domain are presented, in turn, for each of two emergent gang cities. Within and across the two sites, systematic comparisons were used to identify any substantive differences in neighborhood violence in terms of gang status and gender.

The Nashville Site

Within the Tennessee site, a total of 19 respondents discussed crime and safety concerns within the neighborhood domain. Those who experienced neighborhood violence were demographically representative of the site. On the whole, more male, white, and gang-involved Nashville youth discussed violence. However, it is worth noting that each of the six black interviewees who discussed more general exposure to violence also noted violence in the neighborhood domain (see Table 21).

Table 21: Demographics of Youth with Violence in the Neighborhood, Nashville

Total	Sex		Race/Ethnicity				Status	
	M	F	W	B	H	ME	Gang	CRS ³²
19	11	8	10	6	2	-	13	6

Table 22: Violence in the Neighborhood Domain, Nashville

Total	Total	Objective (N = 19)					Subjective (N = 17)		
		Crime	Gangs	G-Tag	Victim	V-Victim	Safety	Avoid.	Immigrants ³³
Total	19	17	14	8	10	4	15	11	3
<i>Gang</i>	13	12	11	7	6	4	12	9	3
<i>CRS</i>	6	5	3	1	4	-	3	2	-

Within the neighborhood domain, Nashville interviewees discussed violence in a variety of objective and subjective forms (see Table 22). Objective experiences with crime (i.e., crime and/or violence, gangs, gang tags or graffiti, victimization, and vicarious victimization) were discussed by all 19 youth. Subjective concerns over crime and safety (i.e., expressed concerns over safety, expressed instances of avoidance, and concerns over immigrants in the neighborhood) were also discussed by nearly all (17 or 90%), except Jesse and Megan. The most commonly discussed was instances of crime

³² Table 21 Key: Sex: M = Male and F = Female; Race/Ethnicity: W = White, B = Black, H = Hispanic, and ME = Middle Eastern; Status: Gang = Gang Status youth and CRS = ‘Conflicting Retrospective Status’ youth

³³ Table 22 Key: Objective Violence: Crime = Crime, Gangs = Gangs, G-Tag = Gang Tags/Graffiti, Victim = Respondent Victimization, and V-Victim = Vicarious Victimization; Subjective Violence: Safety = Safety Concerns, Avoid. = Avoidance Behavior, and Immigrants = Immigrant Concerns; Status: Gang = Gang Status youth and CRS = ‘Conflicting Retrospective Status’ youth

and/or violence in the neighborhood, for which a total of 17 youth (or 90%; excluding Jesse and Jamal) noted issues of gun violence as well as other personal and property crimes.

For those youth who experienced crime and violence in their neighborhood, a total of 16 youths (or 84%) discussed instances of gun violence; moreover, the vast majority of these respondents (13 or 81%) articulated a perceived association between neighborhood gun violence and gangs. Jeremy expressed his suspicions that “people walking around the neighborhood,” or gang members, “[t]hey look like they carry guns.” Eleven of the respondents (or 69%) also associated gunshots overheard in their nearby neighborhood with local gang members. Mary explained that she hears gunshots by her home “once every two weeks.” When pressed for the reason behind those gunshots, she posited “I’m gonna assume gang activity, because that’s the most immediate cause of gun shootings around here.” Haley also noted that “really big groups” of gang members walk around her neighborhood with “weapon[s] on them, like guns.” She further expressed that the nearby gang members “always be outside on the street shooting their guns into the air” which is “scary.” Finally, Shaquille, Haley, and Jamal each discussed one or more instance where gang-motivated gun violence was directed towards a family member (i.e., Shaquille’s gang involved cousin was shot at by members of their rival gang, but not hit) or killed a friend or acquaintance (i.e., an acquaintance of Haley’s as well as two of Jamal’s friends).

A few of the respondents did not exclusively associate gun violence with local gangs. Stephan explained that gunshots in the neighborhood were likely caused by “[p]eople more redneck than us,” because his own friends “they shoot up rounds

sometimes.” He continued “[e]specially on 4th of July. People take their guns and just start shootin’ up in the air.”

One salient instance of exposure to neighborhood gun violence was recounted by Tevin – then an 18 year old black male. Tevin detailed an instance – which had occurred sometime in the past year – in which his white neighbor drunkenly approached him as well as his family and friends in front of their home with “a stick in his hands” and declared “You niggers not suppose to be here.” After Tevin’s friends began “cussing him out,” the neighbor threatened to “call the police on y’all – to get y’all niggers out this neighborhood” while also “swinging [the stick] all up in they face.” The neighbor then started to walk back to his house, but called back to the group of young people that “I’m gonna get my 12 gauge shotgun and I’m gonna shoot you guys with it....I got my...shotgun waiting for you.” After this exchange, which also included the neighbor coming back and nearly punching Tevin as well as successfully hitting one of his friends, he and his friends went two doors down and told the neighbor’s wife what had transpired. While she was eventually able to get her inebriated husband to apologize and retreat back into their home, the man half-heartedly apologized only to mutter “Buncha ‘N-words” as he was “walk[ing] off” and back into the house.

About an hour later the neighbor set off to further provoke and intimidate Tevin. Now armed with his shotgun, the neighbor repeatedly drove slowly around the cul-de-sac in front of the youth’s home – where he was now sitting alone on his front stoop. Tevin explained how the neighbor was “leaning out” of his car yelling “What you gonna do?” while repeatedly banging his shotgun menacingly against the side of the vehicle. However, the neighbor failed to evoke a satisfying enough response from Tevin, who

noted that he merely went from a sitting position to standing on his front stoop where he called out “If you don’t get away from my house...” he would call the police. With this demonstration of nerve, the neighbor “comes back around again” and “drives as fast as he can and with the stick [out the window and] he knocks over my mailbox.” The damage to the mailbox was so extensive that “we had to get a new one built.” In fact, “we had to get three of them built. He did it twice.” While Tevin’s experience of racially motivated gun violence was unique in its severity, it is one of many instances in which the interviewed young people experienced gun violence firsthand in their neighborhoods.

In addition to gun violence, the Nashville youth also discussed a variety of other personal and property crimes within their neighborhoods. While it was not always clear that the interviewed youth could correctly differentiate between robberies and burglaries, many of the youth (8 or 42%) articulated that their neighborhood had instances of robbery (N = 5) and burglary (N = 3). Regarding robberies, Jason noted that “I’ve heard, uh, people getting mugged sometimes at night” and Rick explained how older neighborhood gangs would “rob people for money and stuff like that.” Jeremy detailed how he believed that gangs routinely broke into and burglarized homes, which he believed prompted many local residents to install security systems.

In the course of discussing their sense of safety within their neighborhoods, three interviewees raised concerns over illicit drug sales. Mary noted “I have a pretty good feeling that a guy [a few houses down] is a drug dealer. I can’t be sure. But there’s a bunch of in and out goin’ on.” Abby similarly suspected that a drug dealer lived “across the street” from her mother’s home, because “they would have random people over all the time....[and the] police [were] over there all the time.” In addition to a drug dealing

neighbor, Rick and Mary noted other instances of drug sales in their nearby neighborhood; Mary explained: “I hang down at a church [a few blocks away], [and] I see drug deals going on down there a lot.”

Finally, a few identified more atypical experiences with neighborhood violence. Both Rick and Haley discussed instances of homicides in their respective neighborhoods. Rick explained that “a couple years ago” a police officer “disrespected one of the” gang members and this led to the officer being shot “execution style in the woods....Shot him in the back of the head. No, no reason what-so-ever.” Haley noted that “they found a dead body...in the woods” near her home. She discussed how “the [one gang]...killed that [rival gang] dude at a party a couple weeks ago....Then the day of the dude’s funeral...the [rival] gang members came by there and started shootin’ at his funeral and killed the other dude that...they was trying to get.”

Other less commonly discussed experiences with the neighborhood included concern regarding nearby neighbors as well as other less serious issues. Both Haley and Mary asserted that a “pedophile” or “molester” lived nearby. When asked what made her believe that her neighborhood is unsafe, Mary bluntly responded “[t]here’s a pedophile living next door. So that’s one thing.” Haley too noted that “there’s some child molesters in this neighborhood.” What she found most distressing was that the man in question “like[s] to stare....every time that I’m getting my [elementary school aged] little sister off her bus. Like he always comes across the street and I just tell my little sister, “Come on, let’s go.””

Also common amongst discussions of crime and violence in the neighborhood was the presence and importance of local gangs (14 or 74%). Interviewees in Nashville

most commonly labeled these local groups as “gangs,” but also referred to them as “cliques” (N = 7), “crews” (N = 3), “a brotherhood” (N = 3), or “a community” (Savannah). Seven respondents explicitly noted that “a lot of gangs” were in their neighborhoods. Shaquille demonstrates how even a small geographic area could play host to several gangs, basically one gang is in his neighborhood, “but [another rival gang]...[is] like two streets away.” Rick similarly indicated that while gangs had “died down more,” his neighborhood still included at least five unique gangs.

Of those respondents who discussed local gangs, most (8 or 57%) emphasized the issue of gang graffiti or tagging in their neighborhoods. Several simply spoke more generally about gang graffiti; Haley described that “gangs...used to tag all over the walls” nearby. Jeremy emphasized how one gang monopolized the area, saying “[l]ike if you look through these neighborhoods you’ll see, like, these gang signs – where they spray-paint on people’s [or gang’s] signs.” For a few others, however, their neighborhood was home to several gangs who would each tag, then tag over each other’s names and/or symbols. Many of the youth explained that gang graffiti not only served to promote the notoriety of the gang(s), but served as visual indicators of local turf (N = 5) and intra-gang conflict over establishing said turf (N = 3).

Beyond discussing the mere presence of nearby³⁴ gangs or within a youth’s neighborhood, youth also associated local gangs with issues such as drug dealing, fights, and robberies in the neighborhood. In her former neighborhood, Haley explained that “all

³⁴ Defining, conceptualizing, and operationalizing “neighborhoods” has been and remains a widely debated and contested area of the social sciences (Sampson, Morenoff, & Gannon-Rowley, 2002). In light of this, youth were allowed to define their neighborhood in whatever way they saw fit. Often times youth identified their neighborhood as a geographically limited part of the street their home resided on. Given this, instances of violence and gangs which were discussed as being “nearby,” but which encompassed those homes and areas in relative geographical proximity (i.e., within a few block radius), were coded within the neighborhood domain.

[gangs] wanna do is, like, fight and stuff.” When asked who these people wanted to fight, she replied “[j]ust people out of nowhere.” Rick posited that there was an important difference between older and younger gangs and gang members: “The older ones...are more serious....They more do [more]...like sellin’, distributin’ ...rather than just always stealin’, robbin’, shootin’, [and] whatever” while the younger “[gang] kids...definitely fight a lot more.”

Tied also to issues of crime and safety, many individuals (10 or 39%) discussed direct victimization experiences in their neighborhood – including both property and violent victimizations. The six property crime victims recalled instances of petty theft from inside their home or vehicle (N = 3), burglary (N = 2), and Jeremy was unique in having discussed an instance in which his family car’s windows were broken while parked at the home.

The six who discussed personal crime victimization noted instances of harassment and unprovoked fights, having a weapon drawn on the respondent, attempted armed robbery, and being shot or fired at. Both Rick and Hunter discussed having had issues with harassment and unprovoked fights in their respective neighborhoods. Rick explained how harassment by a local gang member on the bus had subsequently led to a fight in front of his home.

Rick: Yeah, he was, he, he thinks he’s the stuff on the bus or whatever. And he wanted to fight me. And, um, so he actually came to my house. But he like, he throws up the gang, gang signs outta nowhere though. Like, he’ll be like, “It’s [his gang’s name]!” and all this, cussing me out. And, um, he used to live right down there [down the road]. And I know all of his friends. So you know, they claim [gang status] and all that.

Mike: And how does that affect your day to day then?

Rick: They don't mess with me anymore. Because I actually wanted to fight – that they came looking for. Like, I didn't mess with him, he just came messin' with me. And, uh, my Mom saw me walk out the door right here and she's like, "What are you gonna do?" – "I'm gonna fight because he keeps talking stuff on the bus and at school." Like, he tryin' [to] be seen – like trying to make it seem like, like I'm not all that, whatever. Like, trying to put me down in front of everybody else. And I'm not [going to] fight in school and get in trouble for him. So I'm like 'whatever.' And, um, so he came, he came to my house looking for me. So I'm just gonna fight him and get it over with. Um, and she [Rick's mother] caught me and she came out and said, "You need to leave" or whatever. And he's like, "Oh, well your son's a little bitch" – and he keeps talkin' shit to me – and he told her that right there. And I have really bad anger problems, and just, I lost, I was like all [up] in his face and I just hit him. And thought I beat him up.

Hunter also expressed a great deal of unprovoked harassment in his neighborhood. He noted that "I've been jumped before [while out] walking – from behind, didn't even hear the footsteps. Just got smacked in the back of the head." Often times this harassment was perpetrated by a similarly aged neighbor who would often "pick at [Hunter] over the phone." He also discussed instances where he and his friends had "been harassed [and assaulted] by adults" who were drunk and were "determined to get" or fight the teenagers.

A number of other youth discussed instances where a gun had been drawn or nearly drawn on them, or even fired towards or directly at them. Jeremy recalled a time when he was in a neighbor's yard and "this woman came out and said, "My husband was....about to shoot you." While it was not clear whether bullets struck her home, Abby discussed a recent Christmas Eve when there were "gunshots across the street" from her mother's home "[a]nd it almost, like, felt like they were shootin' at our house." Additionally, Mark described his recent attempted robbery victimization where a "Jeep pulled up from behind us and four guys jumped out...[and] they [all] drew weapons to rob

us....And then whenever they saw his [Mark's friend's] dad running out, they jumped in the car and started shooting at us before they left....I mean, there was like 15, 16 [fired] shells on the ground.”

Finally, several youth discussed meaningful instances of vicarious victimization, where a family member, friend, or neighbor had been victimized. The youth noted occurrences in which family and friends had been shot at, wounded, or even killed. Not only had his cousin – who was involved with a local gang – been shot at by a rival gang member, but Shaquille's own father had also been the victim of a nonfatal shooting in the neighborhood. Haley also noted a recent gang shooting “killed somebody that I knew.”

In addition to objective experiences, the majority of the interviewed Nashville youth also discussed more subjective experiences with violence in and around their neighborhoods. This was particularly the case in regard to youths' assessments of neighborhood safety. Fifteen of the respondents explained that safety was something about which they were concerned. While these youth generally believed their neighborhoods were pretty safe, most conditioned their discussions with specific caveats. Jason provided a particularly apt example when he described his neighborhood as “pretty safe,” but qualified the remark by stating that if you were to go outside at nighttime “you may have to just watch your back” because “people [get] mugged sometimes at night.” Anna similarly qualified her assessment of her neighborhood when she asserted that it was an eight out of ten – on a hypothetical scale of safety – because while “it's [generally] calm, [but] at the same time it can get crazy sometimes – like gun shootings and fights.”

Others expressed deep concerns for their own and their family's safety. This was particularly the case for Jeremy:

Mike: [O]verall how safe do you feel in your neighborhood?

Jeremy: I get really nervous at night. 'Cause I'm afraid someone's gonna break in. 'Cause my, my friend down the street got his house broken into one time.

Mike: Okay. And when you're feeling nervous, is there anything you do to try to make yourself feel safer or not so nervous?

Jeremy: I, I usually stay up late....Just trying to stay awake in case someone comes in – so I can knock them out or something.

For others like Mary, feeling safe meant “stay[ing] at home, indoors, [or] within [the] yard.”

For a few individuals, feelings of safety were expressly linked to changes in immigrant groups in their neighborhood. Mary explained that her concerns over safety were tied to the changing demographic makeup of her neighborhood. “I used to like [the neighborhood] a lot” back when it was largely made up of “Caucasians and blacks.” Beginning around her start of middle school, however, Mary noticed the neighborhood began to include more and more “Mexicans, and Muslims, and Islam's.” She credited this influx in feared immigrant groups as the reason she doesn't “even feel safe enough to walk to the end of my street.” Jeremy and Rick echoed these sentiments, whereby changes in the demographic composition of their neighborhood around middle school had a meaningful and adverse impact on their assessments of neighborhood safety and disorder (Chiricos, Hogan, & Gertz, 1997; Skogan, 1990; Taylor & Covington, 1993).

For eleven of the interviewees, less than ideal assessments of safety – as well as experiences with crime and violence – led to discussions of the youth and/or their friends, family members, and neighbors avoiding all or parts of the area as well as specific people or groups in the neighborhood. Shaquille and Hunter discussed that their neighbors

attempted to avoid local gangs while Haley and Abby noted their personal avoidance of “child molester” or other so-called “crazy” neighbors. In particular, several of the interviewees described the practice of spending less time outside of the home or completely avoiding going outside altogether because of concerns over neighborhood violence. Finally, Mary and Matt discussed spending a greater amount of time outside of their neighborhood; both went on to explain that this was because they personally felt safer in their friends’ neighborhoods than in their own.

Violence in Neighborhood Parks

One noteworthy subtheme that emerged within the neighborhood domain revolved around issues of crime and safety in nearby parks.³⁵ While questions pertaining to local parks were not part of the semi-structured interview, most of the youth who discussed neighborhood violence (10 or 53%) raised issues of park-based violence without formal prompting (see Table 23). These youth discussed generally, and often gave explicit examples of, issues of crime, violence, and gangs in their local park(s). Shaquille stated that his local “park is not very, not very fun” and that “it’s not really an environment that kids [can] go to.” When asked why a lot of kids don’t go to the park, he noted that bad teenagers go there to cause trouble. While Hunter discussed more minor

Table 23: Violence in the Neighborhood Domain – Parks, Nashville

	Total	Objective (N = 10)		Subjective (N = 3)
		Crime	Gangs	Avoidance ³⁶
Total	10	9	8	3
<i>Gang</i>	8	8	6	3
<i>CRS</i>	2	1	2	-

³⁵ The Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County operate more than 100 stand-alone parks and greenways (Nashville Metropolitan Board of Parks and Recreation, 2013).

³⁶ Table 23 Key: Objective Violence: Crime = Crime and Gangs = Gangs; Subjective Violence: Avoidance = Avoidance Behavior; Status: Gang = Gang Status youth and CRS = ‘Conflicting Retrospective Status’ youth

issues of youth harassment in parks, many respondents discussed how parks were an epicenter of more serious violence; Anna described how “every three [to] four months” there were “gun shootings and fights.”

The majority of youth who discussed issues of violence in their local park(s) associated these problems with local gangs, excluding only Shaquille and Jeremy. Half of these interviewees spoke broadly about gangs and the problems they caused in nearby parks. Jamal described that gangs “meet up at the park [and] they fight”. The other youth spoke directly to extreme violence caused by a large local ethnic gang in one park; Haley noted how “no other race [or ethnicity] can go in [the park]” because “the Kurdish people...[will] literally, like, start shooting at you.” The extent of gang violence in the park was so severe that, as Mary described, the city had recently instituted a public ordinance³⁷ which “outlawed” or “banned [the local ethnic gang] from the park.” Not only were youth acutely aware of issues of gangs and violence in their local parks, but a few even went so far as to have noted going out of their way to avoid spending time in them.

As has just been demonstrated, most of the Nashville youth (19 or 73%) discussed objective and subjective forms of violence in their local neighborhood domain. Youth accounts revealed the particular importance of gun and gang violence in neighborhoods and local parks. The accounts also demonstrated that experiences with neighborhood violence impacted individual assessments of safety.

³⁷ The Metropolitan Nashville Police Department successfully filed a civil injunction against the Kurdish Pride gang (i.e., KP or KPG) and 14 of its members on the grounds of that they fell within the definition of a public nuisance. The lawsuit – the first of its kind in the state of Tennessee – sought to prohibit Kurdish Pride from associating anywhere within a roughly mile-and-a-half square-mile area south of downtown Nashville, including city parks (most notably the one park repeatedly discussed by the interviewees) as well as an elementary school and several neighborhoods (see Greenberg, 2013).

The Dallas-Fort Worth Area Community Site

As in Nashville, neighborhood violence was the second most commonly discussed domain of violence within the Texas site (29 or 85%). In terms of demographics, these youth were relatively typical of those youth interviewed in the Dallas-Fort Worth site (see Table 24). However, a greater proportion of gang involved youth (i.e., 24 of 27 or 89%) – relative to ‘conflicting retrospective status’ youth (i.e., 5 of 9 or 56%) – demonstrated issues of crime and violence in the neighborhood domain.

Table 24: Demographics of Youth with Violence in the Neighborhood, DFW Comm.

Total	Sex		Race/Ethnicity			Status	
	M	F	W	B	H	Gang	CRS ³⁸
29	21	8	4	5	20	24	5

Table 25: Violence in the Neighborhood Domain, DFW Community

Total	Objective (N = 29)				Subjective (N = 23)	
	Crime	Gangs	Victim	V-Victim	Safety	Avoid. ³⁹
29	28	23	15	6	21	10
<i>Gang</i>	24	23	19	11	5	9
<i>CRS</i>	5	5	4	4	1	1

Texas youth also discussed neighborhood violence in a variety of objective and subjective forms (see Table 25). Objective experiences with neighborhood violence (i.e., crime and/or violence, gangs, as well as direct and vicarious victimization) were found across all of the 29 youth. Additionally, subjective forms of neighborhood violence (i.e., expressed concerns over safety and instances of avoidance) were further discussed by 23 respondents. Instances of crime and/or violence were the most commonly discussed form

³⁸ Table 24 Key: Sex: M = Male and F = Female; Race/Ethnicity: W = White, B = Black, and H = Hispanic; Status: Gang = Gang Status youth and CRS = ‘Conflicting Retrospective Status’ youth

³⁹ Table 25 Key: Objective Violence: Crime = Crime, Gangs = Gangs, Victim = Respondent Victimization, and V-Victim = Vicarious Victimization; Subjective Violence: Safety = Safety Concerns and Avoid. = Avoidance Behavior; Status: Gang = Gang Status youth and CRS = ‘Conflicting Retrospective Status’ youth

of neighborhood violence (28 or 97%; excluding Sean), which included gun violence as well as other forms of personal and property crime which impacted youth assessments of safety.

For those who discussed crime and/or violence in their Texas neighborhood, most discussed issues with guns and gun violence (18 or 62%). Most of the youth described having heard gunshots near their home, typically within the surrounding few blocks. Discussing such concerns, Kristen – a 17 year old Latina and former gang affiliate – gestured to the apartment complex across from her home and said “I always hear...that [gunshot] noise” about two or “three times a month,” “mostly at night,” and on the “weekend[s].” Another 17 year old Latina and former affiliate, Veronica likewise described how on “the other side...of this street...there’s always, like, shootings.” Manuel – an 18 year old Latino and active affiliate – speculated that late night gunshots were often “[people] shooting in the air. I don’t really think they’re shooting at somebody.” Others discussed having personally witnessed guns and gun violence in their neighborhood. Claudia – an 18 year old Latina – described how the “last time...it was like in the middle of the night [and] there’s a guy standing by our tree [in the front yard] with a gun.” Alexis – a 17 year old Latina and former gang affiliate – explained “not that long ago there [were] some gunshots, like, right in front of my house – from a car.” She continued “I guess one of the cars was chasing the other [car]...and they just happened to shoot right in front of our house.”

Amongst those interviewees who discussed neighborhood gun violence, the case of Omar – a 17 year old Latino – stands alone in its exceptional nature. When asked how safe he felt his neighborhood was, Omar – a former gang member – replied on “a

scale...[of] one to ten – ten being most safe – probably a nine...[p]retty safe.” He went on to explain that he “[r]arely” hears gunshots – maybe “once [every] six months.” Mere minutes later in the interview the following transpired:

- Steph:** [An audible nearby gunshot is heard] Oh, was that a car?
Omar: That’s a popped tire...No – that was, I think that was a gun.
Steph: Oh, you think it was a gun?
Omar: Yeah, I do.
Steph: Oh, really? From where?
Omar: Yeah, it was a gun.
Steph: Oh, that guy right there? [Gesturing towards the two men standing in front of an open car trunk parked on the other side of a fenced courtyard]
Omar: Yeah. There goes that ‘once in [every] six months.’
Steph: [Laughs] So you’re good for the next six months.
Omar: You’re right. Yeah, six months – I got that covered.
Steph: What is, do you think, did you see what he did? Or, like, was he just shooting it?
Omar: He just shot it at that tree. And then he put it back in the trunk.
Steph: Hmm. Just to make sure it works, I guess. [Laughs]
Omar: I guess. Now he’s just pulling off. [An adult emerges from inside a housing unit and begins to speak to several kids who had been playing near the two men] Now he’s driving off. I think he mighta shot someone’s house. ‘Cause he drove off like that. Somebody should probably call the cops.
Steph: You wanna go inside and do that [call the police] or...?
Omar: No, I’m good.
Steph: Okay. You want me to?
Omar: I – sure, I guess.
Steph: Okay. [Suspends recording to call the police]

Across the entirety of the Gang Desistance study, this was the lone instance in which a gun crime occurred over the course of a youth or parent interview. Despite its exceptionality, it provides a telling demonstration of how many youth give generally positive assessments of their surroundings and only qualify those assessments with instances of violence.

In addition to gun violence, interviewees also discussed a variety of other neighborhood-based crimes which largely impacted their assessments of safety. Many of

the youth (11 or 38%) described instances of residential burglary and theft from within cars in their neighborhoods. Both Hispanic males, 16 year old Fernando explained “[t]here have been some break-ins around here” and 17 year old Chris continued “one time [someone] ‘car hopped’ my mom’s car.”⁴⁰ Several (N = 5) also described instances of armed robbery in their neighborhoods. When asked to describe his neighborhood, Dalton – an 18 year old black male and protective group member – nervously explained:

N-n-neighborhood? Well it’s not really as good as it looks. It’s actually pretty bad. Like....because, um, well he, he wasn’t “a friend”, but he was someone that I knew. He, um, rode my bus. And, um, he like, he will rob people house. Like, he would kick down... Like, h-he would knock at [nervous intake of breath] people’s doors. And then if they wouldn’t answer to like the, um, the door – he would, like, sneak from the back and, come from the back then break the window. Then take all the stuff and leave.

Similarly, Mitch – an 18 year old white male and former gang member – explained that within his and “a few [other] neighborhoods around here” some people will commit robbery or “hit licks.”

A number of youth (8 or 28%) also described drug-related issues in their neighborhoods. Drug-related problems – discussed in terms of drug dealers and users in the neighborhood – were routinely described as particularly problematic and potentially unsafe in the dark of night. Gabrielle – a 16 year old Latina and former gang affiliate – attested to the presence of “a lot of, like, drug people” nearby while Manuel noted “there’s a lot of drugs around” especially around midnight. Nick – an 18 year old Latino and former member – continued “everything changes after light [or sundown]. Everything gets real bad over here...it’s real” dangerous or “hot.”

⁴⁰ ‘Car hopping’ refers to the act of walking along a series of parked vehicles checking for unlocked doors. Once an unlocked vehicle is discovered, any quickly found and portable valuables are stolen without causing any damage to the vehicle.

As a former drug dealer himself – having ‘hustled’ mostly marijuana and some cocaine “[f]or like six years straight,” Nick further explained how a lot of “drug actions” routinely occurred near his home. When asked to elaborate, he noted the presence of marijuana, “meth, heroin, ecstasy, PCP, [and] coke” and expressed that “it causes a lot of trouble.” He went on to articulate how the arrival of certain drugs adversely and affected the atmosphere of the neighborhood.

Mike: Has [the neighborhood] gotten worse? Has it gotten better?

Nick: It’s, it’s gotten worse.

Mike: Really?

Nick: At first it was calmed down. I mean everybody smokes weed, but...

As soon as that heroin got here, and the PCP, and meth – it changed a lot of people.

Mike: When do you think that happened? That you had that switch to those harder drugs [in the neighborhood]?

Nick: [Sigh] Four years ago.

The change in availability and use of these illicit substances, he continued, was at the root of the area’s lack of safety because it brought “a lot of hookers, gang[s], [and] gang-bangers” as well as contributed to a noticeable rise in “underage [drug use in] the park over here – like [a few] blocks away.”

As was found in Nashville, other less commonly discussed instances of neighborhood problems included nearby homicides, sexual predators, and unchained and loose dogs. “The cops found, uh, two people dead at the [nearby] park,” explained Nick, and “[t]hat’s what really scared me – like “Oh shit!”” Gabrielle similarly noted “I heard that someone shot a girl in those, like, apartments back there....like last year” – “it’s kind of creepy” that “someone got killed” nearby. She also went on to discuss another recent nearby homicide: “Oh, and there was like a corner store back there. And they robbed it and killed the [store clerk].”

Mariah and Kristen – both 17 year old Latinas – discussed specific concerns regarding violence against women in their neighborhoods. Mariah – a former gang affiliate – explained what made her feel so unsafe:

Mariah: ‘Cause like, I like, I’ve been walkin’ around and there was a point where I almost got raped in my neighborhood. And it was just right here...around the corner.

Amber: Was this somebody that lives in this neighborhood or...?

Mariah: I don’t know. I’ve never seen the truck before... This was two years ago. But it, but people do stop – like if I’m walkin’ around during the day.

Amber: Okay. They ‘stop’ to do what?

Mariah: Like just to talk to me or tell me to “Get in the car.” But that’s why I always walk around with, like, guy friends at night – if I do [walk in the neighborhood].

Kristen also expressed how “not too long ago we had a girl that – a guy, came into her window for, uh, [to] try to rape her. It’s around here, [around] the corner.” She also noted:

Not too long ago. And then my mom, she, uh, some guy like – how do I say it? Was showing something that was not supposed to be showed in public....like [his] private parts....And my mom saw. And she got scared, ‘cause of that.

In discussions of neighborhood-based crime and violence, nothing was more commonly described in the Texas site than the prevalence and problematic behavior of gangs. Local gangs and cliques – also discussed as “crews” (N = 5), “squads” (Ethan and Taylor), and “homeboys” (Tom) – were present in and around the vast majority of respondents’ neighborhoods (23 or 79%). Some interviewees merely asserted that gangs were “probably” in their neighborhoods; Ron – a 16 year old white male – noted “I mean there probably [are gangs], but, I mean, I don’t see ‘em or they don’t mess with me at least.” Alexis – a former affiliate – noted that there “probably [are]....a few [neighborhood] people” who are gang or clique members from her nearby high school.

Still others discussed a greater extent of gangs and members in their neighborhood. Nick described how his neighborhood had a large number of gang members from a variety of popularized gangs as well as a gang of “Nazi skinheads.” While he also discussed the presence of several gang sets or cliques in his neighborhood, Manuel described how the gang he would eventually associate with would congregate directly behind his home – “in the back...like right behind the fence of my house.”

Despite its prevalence in the Nashville site (i.e., 8 youth), only two Texas youth (Manuel and Reuben) discussed the existence and importance of neighborhood gang graffiti or tagging in delineating gang turf. Instead, Texas youth described their reliance on other indicators to identify gangs around their homes. Most often, these visual cues included directly witnessing local gangs using unique hand signs to “bang their set” or observing members dressing in designated colors or clothes. Hector – a 17 year old Latino and former Eurogangster – described how neighborhood gang members would “just say “I’m in a gang” [and] throw gang signs.” Ethan – a 17 year old Latino and active gang affiliate at the time of the interview – described an exchange just “the other day” where “some [rival gang members] they [started] throwin’ [their set] up. And I’m like, “Man, get outta here.” And [I] started throwin’ up [my gang] – ‘cause, you know, this is *my* neighborhood.”

Beyond discussing the mere presence of gangs nearby or within a youth’s neighborhood, most of the Texas youth associated local gangs with a range of neighborhood crimes. This included general “trouble” in the neighborhood (N = 3), gang fights (N = 12), gang harassment of unaffiliated youth (N = 7), gun violence (N = 8), and drug dealing (N = 4). Assaults and fights in the neighborhood were described by many of

the youth (13 or 45%), of which all but one was discussed in the context of local gang issues. Only Raul – a 17 year old Latino who had begrudgingly acknowledged “O.G.” or “original gangster” status in his local gang – described how his neighborhood used to have “lots of people just getting into arguments,” but that “people don’t really bring up the gang life here” because “[t]here’s no room for it.”

Many youth described how gangs, in particular, acted as a catalyst for neighborhood arguments and fights. Claudia explained “back then [the neighborhood] used to be bad – [i]t was just a lot of gang people and fights.” Edgar – a 17 year old Latino and member of a protective “neighborhood crew” – also noted how some gangs and crews “are just like, um, always tryin’ [to] look for the trouble....prolly [get] into a lot of fights.” Manuel concurred and explained how two local gangs would “just pop up outta nowhere and, like, just start a fight.”

Though gang fights were more commonly discussed as having been started and settled within the neighborhood, Reuben and Chris – both 17 year old Latinos – each discussed that neighborhood gang fights would often originate in the school yard. Reuben – then active gang affiliate – explained:

Amber: [D]o you think the [high school’s] school resource officer kinda helped out with the gang activity?

Reuben: I mean not, I mean [gang fights] would still happen. You know what I mean? People...just wait [until] after school, all, we all go to the [neighborhood] and just take it out there.

Chris likewise noted that while “over here people might say ‘they’re doin’ gangsters’” – or involved in gangs or cliques – “[t]hey just, [gangs are] just like a school thing.” “To be honest [arguments between gangs] never really escalated, like, during school. It was more like after school – [o]ff [school] grounds basically.”

Gang facilitated neighborhood fights were not exclusively a problem for local members or affiliates. A number of the respondents (7 or 24%) also discussed gang member harassment of unaffiliated neighborhood youth. Though gang affiliated himself, Reuben explained how local gang members would interact with other youth in the neighborhood:

I mean if you're wearing [a] different color [in the neighborhood] they [gang members] gonna start sayin' their set – like what they're bangin'....If you ain't in a gang [and] you just keep on walkin' – they ain't gonna say nothin'...[I]f, I mean, you go and like you walkin' away they ain't gonna do nothin'. But if you, like, say somethin' back or say somethin' – you gonna, they gonna end up fighin' [you].

This exchange, he continued, was known as “G-checking” – “they just, like, check you. Like, “Whatchu bangin’? Where you from?””

Aside from being challenged about their gang status, neighborhood gangs would also prey on their unaffiliated peers and neighbors. Mitch explained that it was “pretty common” for gang members in his neighborhood to fight “just random people. I mean it's kinda senseless violence. I mean, just “Ah, you have beef with me. So let's, after school – let's fight.” You know, it's senseless.” Asked how the four or more gangs in his neighborhood affected residents' day-to-day life, Nick stated:

I mean... Like for regular kid – that just goes to school and comes back home... I think he would feel afraid and stuff. 'Cause my neighbor right here [points two houses down] – he's one of the kids [who] just go to school and comes back. But I was in my car last time and I see these five kids walking close to him. But, I mean, I'm real cool with [the neighbor boy]. I don't want nothing to happen to him. 'Cause he's, like, one of my little and stuff. So I told him to “Get in [my] car.” 'Cause I knew they were gonna jump him. 'Cause they started pullin' up their pants, start, started taking off their shirt[s]. And it's not fair that they're tryin' to pick on a kid that don't know nothing about the street life.

He continued:

Mike: Is that something that's common? That, that would happen [to] someone that isn't, that isn't aligned? That's not representing?

Nick: Yeah, they, if they don't see you in the street – like you don't belong here – they'll try to do something then.

Mike: Okay. So feasibly someone like me walking through the neighborhood...

Nick: Yeah, alone.

Mike: ...I could have, I could have to, I'd have to pay attention?

Nick: Probably. Yeah.

In particular, Nick explained that “[i]f [the “Nazi skinheads” gang] see you walkin’ by yourself – they [will] try to do something.”

Youth also discussed neighborhood-based gun and drug problems in the context of local gangs. A number (8 or 28%) asserted a direct association between gangs and guns, while half discussed gang involvement in neighborhood drug sales. Most of the youth simply believed that gang members were the cause of nearby gunshots and that neighborhood gang members likely had handguns or drugs “concealed” on their person. Others, like Dalton, Nick, and Mitch, had more intimate knowledge of the asserted gang-firearms and gang-drugs connections. Asked whether his neighborhood had guns, Dalton emphatically replied “Oh, yeah. Most definitely” and went on to explain:

Oh, yeah! Um, because my [one] friend – he has a gun. And he just like right down the street from me. Then, um, there's [also] this, um, man.

Thug, he's straight [thug]. He, he, he just got out of jail, like, about, I would say two months ago. And he, um, showed us a gun. It's like that, like he, he's, h-h-he, he's pretty like a thug – like *real* [thug].

Nick described how he would “carry a gun – [a] Glock .40” with him – both during and following his period of active gang involvement. “I walk with it empty [without bullets]. Just in case someone tried to jack me – I'll, I'll pull it out to, to scare [them] so they can run away.”

Related to more general discussion of neighborhood crime and violence, the

majority of respondents (15 or 52%) discussed their own victimization experiences in their respective neighborhoods. Direct victimization included both property and personal crimes. The six victims of property crimes included residential burglary (N = 4) as well as theft of belongings from a family vehicle or from within a friend's home (N = 3).

Those 11 who discussed personal crime victimization included harassment and fights, gun violence, and armed robbery. Many of these youth (N = 8) discussed having issues with unprovoked harassment or fights in their neighborhood. Speaking to harassment, Mariah described how men driving through her neighborhood would sexually harass her and other young women. Dalton explained members of a local gang would "m-mess up....most parties" nearby, "like where I am" living; commonly they would walk up and "just push" some partygoer and "as soon as [that pushed person] turned around – "Pow!" [Punched] Right in the face."

Several others also discussed being involved in an unprovoked neighborhood fight. For a few of these youth, arguments and fights were due to romantic relationships with their then girlfriends. Jalen – an 18 year old black male – discussed how "one time I [almost] had to beat someone up" because "he was disrespectful to my, towards my girlfriend." "[W]e was at the [nearby] pawn shop....and he was like talkin' about how I took his girlfriend...but they [had already] broken up....[when] she [had] stopped me and got my number." Conflicts and physical fights over young women proved to be a rather recurrent issue for Ethan. He described having been in numerous fights; this was because one time "this dude [was]....checkin' on my girl" and another time it was because "one of the [high school] seniors – his girlfriend – well I, I'm not even gonna lie, I did some stuff with her." Also, he would routinely "go to [a nearby neighborhood] and go chill with one

of my girls over there.” Ethan’s reputation preceded him in said neighborhood and he would often be approached by unknown young men who would confront him and say “You’ve been messin’ around with my girl.”

In addition, several youth discussed having been directly involved in group or gang fights which they held as seemingly unprovoked. Omar explained several instances where he was involved in fights which were spurred by other gang members; for example, “this guy was just from a different gang, but he said he was from the same gang we were in and I just fought him” as well as another time when “like this dude’s trying to fight me...[because] I guess the word kinda spread” about my gang involvement. Though he conceded that he “liked fights – watchin’ ‘em [and] being in them,” Reuben also discussed how he had gotten involved in fights alongside his gang-involved brother because “I mean, they’re talking smack.” He also described a time when he was seen “wearing the wrong color...on the wrong side” of the neighborhood and a rival gang “called me out...[a]nd I got jumped.”

Though unprompted, a number of youth (N =6) provided accounts of vicarious victimization. Half discussed how their nearby neighbors found themselves victims of residential burglary. Having herself been robbed at gunpoint in the front yard of her home, Katelyn – a 16 year old Latina and former gang affiliate – explained how “maybe a week later, someone broke into a house down” the street and that “it [was] really surprising.” More generally, Kelsey – then a 17 year old white female and former member of a Eurogang group – explained how her closest friend lives “over the [nearby] bridge” and “there’s been broken houses over there.”

The remaining three youth described vicarious experiences with personal crime. Elaborating on what he meant by stating things were “going bad” in his neighborhood, Nick noted “one of my friends got shot over here [less than a quarter of a mile away], like a couple weeks [ago].”

Mike: And [your friend] was just walking through the neighborhood or...?

Nick: Yeah, he got jump[ed] and he got ‘pistol whipped’ – like they hit [him] with a gun until... And then they shot him.

Mike: Yeah? So were they trying to take stuff from him or were they...?

Nick: Yeah, they took his shoes, his money, his cell phone. Yeah.

“Then a couple weeks later, one of, someone else got jumped”. “Well that makes me feel like, I’m worried....I mean I wouldn’t like to have it happen to me.” Finally, Chris – a 17 year old Latino – noted: “well there’s this one time I saw this lady get, like, slapped outside the porch.”

In addition to the aforementioned objective experiences, the vast majority of those interviewed in the Texas site (23 or 79%) discussed more subjective experiences with neighborhood violence. Twenty-one of the respondents (or 72%) expressed that safety was at least somewhat of a concern for them within their neighborhood. Most of the respondents described a sense of overall safety in their surroundings, but later qualified their remarks with what particular aspects made them feel less than unconditionally safe. Both Ethan and Edgar expressed how their shared neighborhood was safe and generally calm. Despite this, Edgar went on to describe how his hearing of “police siren[s] around the neighborhood” contributed to his feelings of unease. Elaborating on these similarly uneasy feelings, Ethan continued that should anyone be foolish enough to break into his home:

God must be with ‘em. Got a baseball bat [and] skateboard [deck].
[Gestures to his makeshift weapons standing sentinel next to his bedroom

door]....[N]obody's messin' with...my family....[I]f somebody's here and they shouldn't be here, inside [my house], when I'm asleep or my family's asleep – it's [the skateboard deck or the baseball bat] going straight to their head.

Similarly, Edgar exercised particular caution regarding the safety of his family and home; “I don't really let people in my house that I don't know...I gotta keep my trust, you know, at 100 percent....[three of my friends] are like the only ones I would let in my house.”

Several others expressed more consuming concerns over neighborhood safety. Kristen explained how she only felt truly safe “[w]hen I'm inside” her home or on the front porch. Asked why she felt safe in those places: “Prolly 'cause from [the front porch] they can't really do nothing to you...[But] 'bout there [the sideway in front of her home]” it's unsafe – “the more you by yourself they, you can say that, you're not safe or protected.” Though he earlier stated “I'm not scared of nobody” in the neighborhood, Dalton later expressed extreme concern over the safety of his mother. Violence in the neighborhood “kinda m-makes me concerned. 'Cause, well, sometimes when I leave my mom – I wanna make sure that she's okay and all [that] stuff. And like, if I leave the house my mom, my mind is on, on her the whole time.” Asked if there was anything he did to make himself or his mother feel more safe: “Pray, t-that's what I do....I'll pray. Just, just, just tell God to make sure that my mom make it home and, and she gets home and sleep well...[s]o I can see her the next day.”

For many of the youth (10 or 35%), less than ideal assessments of safety – as well as experiences with crime and violence in the neighborhood – led to discussions of how the respondent and/or their neighbors avoided all or parts of their nearby area as well as specific people or groups within their neighborhood. A number of youth (N = 6) conveyed their practice of avoiding certain geographic areas of the neighborhood as well

as local parties which, they believed, gang members frequented. Still others expressed how they and their neighbors had to “watch their back” when moving through the neighborhood (N = 3) or would simply avoid going out at night (N = 5). Finally, four of the interviewees discussed how they made a concerted effort to spend the lion’s share of their time away from their home in other neighborhoods or nearby cities.

Violence in Neighborhood Parks

Just as the Nashville narratives, violence within neighborhood parks in the Dallas-Fort Worth community was discussed without explicit interviewer prompting. Many of the interviewees (10 or 35%) voiced their concerns over crime and violence in nearby public parks or recreation centers.⁴¹ Of the ten, all but Andrew expressed how local gangs congregated – and often caused problems – in nearby parks. In particular, a number of respondents (N = 6) described how they and their gang associates used to or currently hang out as a group and/or had gang meetings in a local park. A gang affiliate at the time of the interview, Mariah explained how she and her associates would “[g]o to school, meet up...and then we’[d] leave” or skip school and go “to a park” to hang out. Omar also explained how his gang clique would “hang out at a park” with the “big-bigger group” or gang about “two times a month.”

A number of youth (7 or 24%) went on to discuss how gangs were central to issues of crime, violence, and safety in parks. Trouble in the parks often included gang members threatening and harassing unaffiliated youth, causing fights between rival gangs, as well as drug using and dealing. Jalen explained that gangs “they’ll be there” at “the Rec” – a nearby recreation center, and that it’s when “they get in this certain area or

⁴¹ The Dallas-Fort Worth area community operates several dozen parks and recreation centers. The total number of parks is significantly fewer than operated in Nashville, Tennessee.

see somebody – that’s when the problems start – they just gonna fight each other.” He went on to explain how so-called “real gang” members, which often hung out at “the Rec,” are “bullies – like puttin’ people in trash cans an all this other stuff – fightin’ people, usin’ knives.” Similarly, Manuel recalled how “there’s a lot of drugs around and, like, gangs in the [nearby] park.” He continued: “Like a cop will come [by and] like they all take off runnin’. Like soon as the cop leave, they’ll be right there, right there again....[they just] sit there....[and] smoke weed and sell drugs.”

Though explicitly raised by only a pair of subjects, both young men expressed how they as well as their friends and neighbors avoided the nearby park. Since “[t]hat’s basically all [the his gang’s members] do is get high, sell drugs, [and] just stay right behind the park,” Manuel explained that the “famil[ies] and kids back there” – “they probably won’t not want to go back [to the park] ‘cause they’re over there smokin’ weed and stuff and they don’t want their kids around it.” Andrew – a 16 year old Latino and former gang affiliate – similarly explained how he and others would avoid the park:

Amber: Is there anything about your neighborhood that you dislike?

Andrew: Uh, like almost all the students that go to [a nearby high school], they mostly smoke weed – over there [by] the creek – and everything. So you can’t go over there to the park.

Amber: Why can’t you go over there?

Andrew: ‘Cause over there [at] the [park] tables they’ll be smoking and everything. And then sometimes when they, when they see you – that you’re lookin’ at them. They may like, they might get threatened or something – so they might come over there and beat you up.

He went on to note that this had become such a problem that “there’s always a cop over there, stationed over there at night. So you can’t, like, be at the park [after] 9:00pm.”

All told, 29 of the Texas interviewees discussed experiences with a variety of objective and subjective forms of neighborhood-based violence. Youth accounts

demonstrated the prevalence and importance of exposure to local gangs and cliques within neighborhoods and nearby parks as well as their perceived association with instances of gun violence. Youth accounts also revealed how these all too common experiences with violence, both direct and indirect, were discussed in terms of having a meaningful effect on assessments of personal safety as well as manifested into instances of risk-minimizing avoidance behavior. In particular, gang-involved youth were disproportionately more likely to discuss direct and vicarious victimization in the neighborhood domain as well as express concerns over crime and violence in local parks.

Conclusions

This chapter provided a detailed overview of the extent and patterns of the second most commonly discussed thematic domain of youth experienced violence – violence in the neighborhood domain. The large majority of interviewed youth in Nashville and the Dallas-Fort Worth area community described objective and subjective forms of neighborhood violence. In both sites, among those youth who discussed violence in the neighborhood domain, they unanimously discussed objective forms of violence; in particular, a majority recounted instances of crime and violence around their home. Though garnering somewhat less discussion, the majority of respondents further discussed having experienced neighborhood violence in more subjective forms. Finally, violence in nearby local parks emerged as an important subtheme of the neighborhood domain for youth in both cities.

Given the diversity of objective and subjective forms of neighborhood violence, systematic comparisons (Miller, 2005) were used to identify a few substantive differences across sites and youth gang status. Analysis revealed that accounts of neighborhood

violence were substantially different for Nashville youth in two regards: discussions of gang graffiti as well as expressed concern over immigrants. In contrast to the limited number of similar accounts by Texas youth, many of the Nashville respondents stressed both the prevalence and importance of gang tagging and graffiti in and around their respective neighborhoods. While it is not explicitly clear why neighborhood gang graffiti was discussed more within the Tennessee site, differences in the prevalence, type (i.e., gang, tagger, conventional, and ideological), and style (e.g., symbols as well as uniform and free-form lettering) of graffiti is documented across cities, jurisdictions, and regions (Hutchison, 1993; Weisel, 2002). As forms of communicative “convention”, Hutchison (1993) indicates that the variations in cultural products of gangs (i.e., graffiti as well as hand signs or signals, colors, tattoos, and style of hair and dress) across cities and regions reflect subtle differences in gang behavior and subculture. Through this lens, local gangs in Nashville appear to value maintaining and expressing their identity through gang tags; whereas gangs from the Dallas-Fort Worth area suburb appear do so through flashing hand signs (i.e., to “bang their set”) and wearing gang colors.

Though discussed by only a few of the youth, on-going changes in the demographic composition of neighborhoods emerged exclusively within Nashville. Concerns expressed by these interviewees over recent influxes of immigrant groups are, however, more easily accounted for. As noted in chapter 4, the city of Nashville has experienced notable population growth (10.2%) over the past decade (U.S. Census, 2012). Population growth has occurred, primarily (Cornfield et al., 2003), within in the same religious and ethnic minority communities (e.g., Arabic, Hispanic, and Kurdish)

that were discussed in suspicious, demonized, and fear-evoking terms by the few interviewees (Chiricos et al. 1997; Skogan, 1990; Taylor & Covington, 1993).

On the whole, those respondents who discussed violence in the neighborhood domain were demographically representative of their respective sites (see Tables 20 and 24). Despite this, comparative analysis revealed a few systematic differences across retrospectively classified gang status. In general, a greater proportion of gang-involved Texas youth discussed instances of crime and violence in their neighborhoods (see Table 25); in particular, gang-involved youth were more likely to have discussed a number of objective forms of neighborhood violence (i.e., direct and vicarious victimization). Similar differences were identifiable within the sample of Tennessee interviewees (see Table 22), whereby gang-involved youth were more likely to have discussed issues of gang graffiti as well as vicarious victimization within the neighborhood. Finally, the emergent subtheme of violence within nearby public parks was almost exclusively discussed – whether objective or subjective in form – by gang-involved youth within both emergent gang cities (see Table 23).

CHAPTER SIX: VIOLENCE IN THE SCHOOL DOMAIN

The present chapter focuses on the most commonly discussed of the three thematic domains – violence in the school domain. Importantly, instances of school crime and feelings of insecurity were conferred by all but one of the 60 respondents who discussed violence in any form or domain (excluding Veronica from Texas). The chapter first provides an overview of the prevalence of violence within each of the cities. Next, the chapter bifurcates school violence into the middle and high school years. Within both sites, the majority of respondents described objective and subjective forms of violence during their middle school years. During the more recent high school tenure, school violence increased to where the overwhelming majority of the youth discussed such concerns. Throughout the chapter, systematic comparisons (Miller, 2005) were used to identify substantive differences in school-based insecurity and violence in terms of site locale, school level (i.e., middle or high school), gang status, and gender.

Table 26: Demographics of Youth with Violence in the School, Nashville

	Total	Sex		Race/Ethnicity			Status		
		M	F	W	B	H	ME	Gang	CRS ⁴²
Violence	26	16	10	13	6	5	2	18	8
Middle School	21	14	7	10	5	4	2	16	5
High School	26	16	10	13	6	5	2	18	8
<i>HS Only</i>	<i>(5)</i>	<i>(2)</i>	<i>(3)</i>	<i>(3)</i>	<i>(1)</i>	<i>(1)</i>	<i>(-)</i>	<i>(2)</i>	<i>(3)</i>

The demographics of the 26 Nashville youth who discussed school-based violence were mostly male (16 or 60%), white (13 or 50%), and gang-involved (i.e., 18 gang-involved and 8 ‘conflicting retrospective status’ youth) (see Table 26). The vast majority (21 or 81%) discussed school violence at some point during their middle school years

⁴² Table 26 Key: Sex: M = Male and F = Female; Race/Ethnicity: W = White, B = Black, H = Hispanic, and ME = Middle Eastern; Status: Gang = Gang Status youth and CRS = ‘Conflicting Retrospective Status’ youth

(i.e., 6th to 8th grade), while violence in high school was raised by all 26 youth. Within both middle and secondary school, interviewees discussed school-based experiences with objective (e.g., crime and violence, gangs, and direct and vicarious victimization) and subjective forms of violence (i.e., expressed concerns over safety in school as well as instances of avoidance in the school).

Table 27: Demographics of Youth with Violence in the School, DFW Community

	Total	Sex		Race/Ethnicity			Status	
		M	F	W	B	H	Gang	CRS ⁴³
Violence	33	23	10	4	6	23	26	7

Middle School	24	17	7	4	4	16	19	5
<i>MS Only</i>	(1)	(-)	(1)	(-)	(-)	(1)	(1)	(-)
High School	32	23	9	4	6	22	25	7
<i>HS Only</i>	(9)	(6)	(3)	(-)	(2)	(7)	(7)	(2)

Concurrently, violence in the school domain was discussed by 33 of the Texas youth. Just as was found in Nashville, Texas youth discussed experiences with an assortment of objective and subjective forms of school crime and insecurity. Table 27 demonstrates that the demographics of these youth closely mirrors those of the larger site – being mostly male and Hispanic (23 or 70%, respectively) as well as gang-involved (26 or 79%). Of the 34 Texas youth who discussed violence in any of the three domains, the majority discussed middle school violence (24 or 71%) and the vast majority (32 or 94%; excluding Kristen and Veronica) discussed high school violence. Of the 33 respondents who discussed violence in the school domain, a large majority (23 or 70%) discussed violence in both middle and high school. Additionally, a number (9 or 27%) discussed violence exclusively in high school and Kristen discussed violence exclusively during her middle school tenure.

⁴³ Table 27 Key: Sex: M = Male and F = Female; Race/Ethnicity: W = White, B = Black, and H = Hispanic; Status: Gang = Gang Status youth and CRS = ‘Conflicting Retrospective Status’ youth

Violence in Middle School

The Nashville Site

On the whole, those with violence during their middle school years were demographically similar to those who also experienced high school violence (see Table 26). Male and gang-involved youth remained more likely to discuss middle school violence than their ‘conflicting retrospective status’ peers. Within middle school, all 21 youth discussed objective experiences while a number of youth (N = 6) also went on to discuss other subjective forms of violence (see Table 28).

Table 28: Violence in the School Domain – Middle School, Nashville

	Objective (N = 21)						Subjective (N = 6)		
Total Avoid. ⁴⁴	Gangs	W-be’s	G-Tag	Fights	Victim	V-Victim	Safety		
21	17	11	3	7	5	3	5	3	
<i>Gang</i>	16	13	9	3	7	3	1	4	3
<i>CRS</i>	5	4	2	-	1	2	2	1	-

In discussing objective forms of violence in middle school, gangs dominated youth accounts – including the importance of gangs (17 or 81%) as well as so-called “wannabe gang members” or “wannabe’s” (11 or 52%). A few asserted that there were a lot of gangs and cliques in their school while a number of others noted only a few gangs. Shaquille described that middle school was “when it was bad....That’s when people tried to fit in.” Many youth (N = 9) also discussed how there was a lot of “talk” about gangs in their school and that a person’s gang status was largely spread throughout the school by word-of-mouth. Tevin explained that “it be plenty of people coming up to me saying, “You know so-and-so?” I be like, “Yeah, I know ‘em.” [They be] like, “He G, right?”

⁴⁴ Table 28 Key: Objective Violence: Gangs = Gangs, W-be’s = Wannabe Gangs, G-Tag = Gang Tags/Graffiti, Fights = School Fights, Victim = Respondent Victimization, and V-Victim = Vicarious Victimization; Subjective Violence: Safety = Safety Concerns and Avoid. = Avoidance Behavior; Status: Gang = Gang Status youth and CRS = ‘Conflicting Retrospective Status’ youth

I'm like, "Yeah, he G" [or gang affiliated]. "He whatever he is." Mary also explained that gang status was more or less 'heard through the grapevine': "Just mainly people saying, "You know so-and-so? Joe Shmoe over there, [he] has just joined" a gang. Additionally, three interviewees discussed further confirmation of gangs in their schools by the presence of gang graffiti or tagging.

Eleven respondents (or 52%) also discussed the presence of "wannabe's" in their middle school. While some (N = 5) attested that their school held nothing but "wannabe's," others expressed a co-existence of gang and wannabe members. Though he noted the presence of two popular national gangs, Rick explained that his middle school also included groups of students who would "make up little cliques that wasn't gang related" but would fight each other. Youth often attested that "wannabe's" were not considered "real" members because of shifting or switching gang loyalties. "Well there were wannabe's," said Yesenia, they were "just changing back and forth, back and forth" between gangs. Haley also described how her gang-involved friend "was [first] in [one gang], and then...she's in [a second gang], and then [a third gang]." Some, like Stephan, reiterated middle school didn't include "any real gangs." He further explained that they were "[j]ust people saying that they're in a gang, but they were never actually in a gang. Just, just trying to claim they were a part of something bigger than what they really were." Jamal reiterated this point when explaining how there were a lot of kids "just throwing [a "C" for Crip] up everywhere," but that they were "claiming just for the sake of claiming....[just] to get attention."

It is important to note the particularly conflicting nature of Savannah's assessments of gangs in her former school. Savannah – a 17 year old black female – had

prospectively identified gang membership throughout middle school and was further retrospectively classified as a former middle school gang member based on her Gang Desistance study narrative. Despite this, she stated that there were “not [any gangs] in my middle school.” While she was discussing what made her middle school peer group similar to a gang, she noted that her friends “used to say...[and] act like they was in a gang, [but] [t]hey weren’t”. In this instance, the retrospective assertion that were not gang members trumped Savannah’s knowledge that her friends claimed status, acted like they were in a gang, and “if somebody get to arguin’...with one person [in her group], then [the group would] try to “gang” them.”⁴⁵

Beyond gang-related issues, several youth discussed issues with fights as well as direct and vicarious victimization within the middle school walls. A number (7 or 33%) discussed the prevalence of fights in their school, which ranged from infrequent instances to a wide-spread and serious problem. A few of the youth noted the relatively uncommon nature of fights in school; Aaron expressly stated that there were “maybe two fights” during his middle school tenure. Several others suggested that fights were more of a common occurrence. Importantly, all four youth associated the relative frequency of fights with their gang-involved peers. Evan believed that fights in school were a way in which gangs demonstrated “which gang you should be a part of. Which gang is better than this gang. Just who’s tougher, basically...Who could win in a fight.” Whereas Shaquille and Tevin suggested that gang-involved middle schoolers would occasionally fight other unaffiliated youth, because, as Shaquille suggested, “they feel like you in a different gang you should[n’t] disrespect them.”

⁴⁵ In this context, Savannah used the term “gang” or “ganging” to refer to when “the whole group...like 10 people...[would attack] one person.” This *in vivo* code (Charmez, 2006) is revisited later and is presented in a manner which discerns the act of “ganging” from references to a gang group.

Another six youth discussed having experienced direct and/or vicarious victimization in the school domain. Issues of victimization focused on having been picked on or bullied at school.⁴⁶ Jeremy expressed more generally that “most of the people [in middle school] were all jerks....they were all bullies” while Brandi explained that one of her female classmates had been “a bully” towards her. Though she eventually told her G.R.E.A.T. officer – a School Resource Officer/police officer – about her bullying, the officer’s attempted intervention with the aggressor only wrought worse consequences. Brandi described how her bully “ended up taking it out on one of my friends....she started bullying her....‘cause she thought she” had told the G.R.E.A.T. officer about her bullying.

Beyond being picked on or bullied, Harry described how he was nearly involved in a physical altercation while at school.

I guess it was like back in 7th grade – one of my friends, I don’t know what happened, him and another dude just got mad at each other. They were pushing – I tried to hold my friend back, but the other dude just kept getting us mad and mad. So...I got mad a little bit, because of what he was saying. So I was cussing at him while he was cussing back at me. He just kept walking away, so I was like, “Don’t bother with it.” The teacher broke us up, because other people thought we were going to fight. I didn’t really want to fight, ‘cause, ‘cause it’s pointless, but I still [got two days of] ISS [In-School Suspension] for saying the stuff I said.

A number of interviewees also discussed the importance of subjective violence and insecurity (i.e., expressed concerns over safety in school and instances of avoidance of parts of the school). Five respondents described their own and other’s concerns about safety. Mary stated how she generally “feel[s] a lot more safe [in her then high school] than I did [in middle school]. Simply because you would, maybe, see someone or know

⁴⁶ While explaining that he was never a victim of middle school bullying, Rick noted that “people [in his middle school] would, I guess, try to bully” other students.

that someone is in a gang [in middle school].” Though repeatedly picked on in school, Chelsea described that her friends would not come to her aid; dolefully she reflected that in middle school “you’re on your own...I hated it.” Jeremy also discussed how he was particularly worried that gang members in his school would “pull out a gun and start shooting people.”

Speaking to safety in middle school and what they and other students would do to avoid risks, Rick posited that gangs and cliques in school “probably scared other kids. Make ‘em think twice [about] what they might say” directly to or in earshot of them. Jeremy expressed that his desire to avoid his middle school peers was so great that he “changed schools⁴⁷ – [m]ostly [to] get away from people at that school.” While he personally did not exercise this option, Jeremy also asserted that students likely dealt with gangs by going to the school counselors or else they “probably talk[ed] to teachers about it.” Shaquille – who would later affiliate with a gang – detailed how a middle school student could avoid potentially violent encounters with gang members so long as you “don’t make yourself noticeable....Don’t communicate with them. Don’t even...say “Hi.”....Don’t try to...get involved with them.”

For the vast majority of the interviewed Nashville youth, violence – whether experienced in an objective or subjective manner – was a common concern during middle school. In particular, gangs and other gang-like groups were discussed as both common and a source of serious concern for involved and uninvolved students alike. Those youth who were retrospectively identified as gang-involved were disproportionately (16 or 76%) represented in the subtheme of middle school violence. Though fewer, a number of

⁴⁷ By having “changed schools,” Jeremy was referring his decision to attend a high school different than the school in which his middle school typically fed into.

‘conflicting retrospective status’ youth also gave their own accounts of middle school-based violence and insecurity (see Table 28).

The Dallas-Fort Worth Area Community Site

Just as in Nashville, Texas youth who discussed violence during their middle school years were demographically similar to those who also experienced high school violence (see Table 27). Male and gang-involved youth remained more likely to discuss middle school violence than their ‘conflicting retrospective status’ peers. Within middle school, discussion of objective experiences was universal and the majority of the youth (13 or 54%) also discussed subjective forms of violence (see Table 29).

Table 29: Violence in the School Domain – Middle School, DFW Community

	Objective (N = 24)						Subjective (N = 13)	
Total Avoid. ⁴⁸	Gangs	W-be’s	Fights	R/E	Harass.	Victim	Safety	
24	23	15	17	6	8	7	13	3
<i>Gang</i>	19	18	11	15	5	7	7	11
<i>CRS</i>	5	5	4	2	1	1	-	2

The presence of gangs and gang-like groups in middle schools was discussed by each of the 24 respondents.⁴⁹ The vast majority (23 or 96%) directly spoke to the presence of “gangs,” “gangsters,” and “cliques” in their former school. Most (15 or 64%) also discussed so-called “wannabe gang members” or “wannabe’s.” Many of the Texas youth (8 or 35%) described how their former middle school had “a few” gangs and gang members. Several discussed gang members as relatively innocuous or part of a passing

⁴⁸ Table 29 Key: Objective Violence: Gangs = Gangs, W-be’s = Wannabe Gangs, Fights = School Fights, R/E = Racial/Ethnic Conflict, Harass. = Gang Harassment, and Victim = Respondent Victimization; Subjective Violence: Safety = Safety Concerns and Avoid. = Avoidance Behavior; Status: Gang = Gang Status youth and CRS = ‘Conflicting Retrospective Status’ youth

⁴⁹ A total of 23 youth (or 96%) noted the presence of gangs in their middle school. Though Edgar did not expressly described “gangs” in his middle school, he did however note the presence “wannabe’s” (as did 14 other interviewed youth; 15 or 64%). Given this, it can be said that all 24 of the youth who discussed violence in the middle school domain included discussions of gangs or gang-like groups in their respective middle schools.

fad. Hector explained that gang members in his middle school “just, like, throw gang signs” and would “sometimes [wear] red and blue,” but weren’t a serious risk because they “basically....were [just] a lot of people [saying] like, “Yeah, I represent ‘this and that’.”” “It’s kind of like a fad” back then, said Mitch, “like they think it’s popular so they’ll try to just act gangster.”

Most (15 or 65%), however, discussed that there were “a lot” of gangs and/or members in their school. Herself a former gang affiliate, when asked if there were gangs in middle school Gabrielle relied “Oh, yeah. I remember there used to be like fights all the times” between four different gangs at her school. Nick went so far as to pontificate that “probably...like 40 to 45 [percent]” of his former middle school was affiliated with either the two main gangs. Pressed on why he believed that such a large proportion of the school was gang-involved, he continued:

Nick: Uh, [students] see that everybody used to get jumped. Some people decide to [gang] bang and stuff. So, maybe that’s what made ‘em try to join a gang.

Mike: Okay. So you think because they [were] seeing fights? They [were] seeing what people [would] do they have to, they kind of have to pick a side for protection?

Nick: Yeah. Yes.

Reuben – who was then, and was still at the time of the interview, an affiliate of his gang – professed that middle school “[y]eah, that was my best years, best years ever....[because] we fought a lot.”

Several of the youth also explained how middle school was a unique period in regard to their experiences with gangs. A few described how the transition from elementary to middle school (i.e., the start of the 6th grade) was central to the increased prevalence of gangs in school. Ron explained how he would “see people wearing red and

blue – you know, all the different gangs – uh, I’d see them walking around everywhere” shortly after the transition from elementary to middle school. Cesar also noted how he and several of his former fellows joined their gang at the start of middle school because “[w]e wanted to fit in, because I was barely entering middle school.” Lastly, Raul – himself a charter member of his Hispanic gang – explained:

Um, [middle school] – I’m gonna have to say...[our gang] – that’s where it started for us. It started in middle school....Junior High – because everyone wanted to be cool. So everyone wanted to be in a gang. So everyone was like, “Oh, I rep [the rival gang].” Or “[our gang].”

Five went on to also explain that there were a greater number of gangs and gang problem in middle schools than in there were in their then high schools. Ethan proclaimed “[t]o tell you the truth, when I was in [middle school] – more people used to gang bang than they do at [my] high school.” Kristen continued, “[w]ell I seen most of it in middle school. But ever since, uh, high school – I guess people kinda matured up and [I] started seeing less of it.”

Second only to the presence of gangs in middle school, discussions of school fights were also common. A large majority (17 or 71%) of Texas interviewees described instances of fights inside the middle school walls or grounds. Jarvis – an 18 year old black male and former protective group member – explained:

[T]here were fights *all* the time...I remember one [time] we had eight fights before [the] 1st period bell rang...[S]ome broke out at the same time – different lockers, cafeteria, gym, out back [behind the school]. And like you’d get text messages. And you’d be like, “Oh no, I saw the fight.” “No, this is a different fight. Oh, you didn’t hear they fought too?” And it’s just, like, our SRO [School Resource Officer/police officer] was in shape, ‘cause he had, he had to put in work [running from fight to fight].

Fights were also associated with disagreements during school sporting events. Edgar described in instance in which he and his 8th grade football teammates fought players of

another team while still on the field; “like 20 of ‘em....started fightin’...[o]ur [team] captain...[the] quarterback....But, like the whole football team just went for ‘em. That was like...70 [sic] against 20.”

More often than not, youth described these fights in terms of their perceived association with gangs in school. Ian – a 17 year old white male and former affiliate in middle school – explained that gangs would “try to stand out and try [to] fight.” Herself a former middle school gang affiliate, Kristen explained that “people [were] getting in fights.... ‘cause of the [gang] colors.” A former gang member while in middle school, Omar noted his personal involvement in these fights in “7th grade, 6th grade – I used to fight a lot for [the gang].... ‘cause people [were] disrespecting, like, the gang we were in.”

School fights were also discussed in terms of tension between different racial and ethnic groups (see Durán, 2013). Relative to Nashville, this theme emerged as unique to the Texas site. All told, a number of the Texas youth (6 or 25%) described the common occurrence of fights between black and Hispanic students. When asked about gangs in middle school, Sergio noted “I mean there were gangs” but fights and other unprovoked assaults were “not [about] gangs – [it’s] just about, um, race.” Dalton – then a part of a protective group – exclaimed: “*Ev-er-y day* something would happen and there would be a fight – it would be black versus Mexicans, or blacks versus whites, whites versus Mex[icans]”. Raul discussed how Hispanic students, as a group, were treated as a social pariah in his school; he explained that many of his peers “weren’t really big on Hispanics at [my middle school]. So we were mostly the outcast[s].” While fights between black and Hispanic youths were often discussed as having been motivated by racial and ethnic conflicts, fights were also discussed as having been gang-centered as well. He further

explained that he had “affiliated with [my gang] ‘cause....they’re the only Hispanics in my [middle] school;” in fact, most of the fights between black against Hispanic students were propagated by his Hispanic gang fellows fighting against the rival and predominately black gang.

Additionally, many (8 or 33%) described how gangs often harassed their unaffiliated schoolmates. Though explaining that gang members “didn’t ever really, like, pick on me because they thought I was, like, cute – I was [just] a little white girl,” Kelsey went on to note how some members would “go around bullying people” and “pick on other kids – like nerds” in particular. Chris continued that gang members “harassed other people – [or] bully them” and Hector explained how gangs would make “threats – They would say, ‘I’mma do something’....just to random people.” Finally, Reuben noted how “other kids that were not [gang-involved], sometimes they did get bullied” by “the people [who] were [gang] affiliated in that [middle] school.”

A number (7 or 29%) also discussed instances in which they had been harassed, bullied, or attacked. For several, these direct experiences with victimization were described as having been motivated by their own race or ethnicity. Sergio noted “all [the] African American[s] was just tryin’ to jump me and fight me every day. – [T]hey just want to follow [and try to fight] me” “[j]ust because I [am] Mexican”. Kelsey explained that during her 7th grade year, “one of the black girls....I guess she was just looking for a fight and....I’m like a little white girl....that was gonna get fought. And she beat me up because I cut her in line, like, supposedly.”

Still others (N = 5) described their victimization as attributable to their peer and/or gang associations. Not only did Dalton note that he “used to fight a lot” in middle

school “because I wanted to back my friends,” but he also noted that he “used to get bullied” by “a dude....in” a local gang. Being somewhat of a self-professed ‘Casanova,’ Ethan explained that on several occasions other young men had tried to or successfully fought him “because of females;” noting that the “couple times” people had bothered him was because of his romantic interests – “I was just pointin’ on females.”

In addition to objective forms of violence, the majority of youth (13 or 54%) also discussed subjective forms of violence and insecurity during middle school (i.e., expressed concerns over safety in school and instances of avoidance of parts of the school). Each of the 13 respondents indicated concerns about their own and others’ safety. When asked how it made them feel to have gangs as well as others forms of conflict and violence in their schools, the youth described varying levels of worry and fear. Ethan explained “[b]ack in the day, when I was [in middle school]” it was kinda scary – “You just gotta be watchin’ your back. I mean the devil don’t sleep. That’s just the saying: “the devil don’t sleep.” You gotta keep your eyes open all the time.” Similarly, Kelsey noted that middle school “was scary. Ouch, it was scary.” Chris stated that “in [middle] school....I try to have, like, a few people to walk around with me, you know, ‘cause walking by myself – I don’t, I don’t like being by myself.”

Others gave their perceptions of how school violence adversely affected their peers. Gabrielle suggested that “[o]ther people would be scared”. For a few, concerns over safety in their former school led them and their peers to attempt to avoid risky situations or people. Both Nick and Sergio aptly explained how some of their peers sought out gang membership as a means of protection from gang harassment and other

racially/ethnically motivated acts of violence, while others simply tried to avoid or “stay away” from said instigators or aggressors.

It is clear that violence – whether experienced in an objective or subjective manner – during middle school years was a concern for the majority of Texas youth. Each of the youth who discussed any form of middle school-based violence identified gangs and gang-like groups as both a particularly prevalent and problematic issue. Additionally, harassment and physical assault – whether perpetrated by gangs or spurred by racial and ethnic tensions – were commonly witnessed as well as experienced. Just as in Nashville, those Texas youth retrospectively classified as gang-involved discussed greater feelings of insecurity and exposure to violence – be it direct or indirect – during the middle school years (see Table 29).

Violence in High School

The Nashville Site

Each of the 26 youth who discussed violence, within any domain, raised issues with crime and insecurity during the more recent high school tenure. These youth were mostly male (16 or 60%), white (13 or 50%), and gang-involved at some point (i.e., 18 gang-involved and 8 ‘conflicting retrospective status’ youth) (see Table 26). As Table 30 demonstrates, each youth discussed some objective form of school-based violence and a number (7 or 27%) described more subjective experiences. Importantly, each of the retrospectively classified gang-involved youth recalled objective experiences with violence and were also more likely to have discussed subjective forms as well (Chelsea was the only ‘conflicting retrospective status’ youth to discuss avoidance in high school).

Table 30: Violence in the School Domain – High School, Nashville

	Objective (N = 26)							Subjective (N = 7)		
	Total Avoid. ⁵⁰	Gangs	W-be's	G-Tag	Fights	Harass.	Victim	V-Victim	Safety	
	26	24	8	3	22	8	7	4	4	4
<i>Gang</i>	18	16	6	3	14	7	7	3	4	3
<i>CRS</i>	8	8	2	-	8	1	-	1	-	1

Youth with objective forms of school violence overwhelmingly (25 or 96%)⁵¹ discussed the prevalence and importance of gangs and gang-like groups – including high school “gangs” (N = 24), “cliques” (N = 7), “crews” (N = 3), “a brotherhood” (N = 3), as well as “wannabe’s” (N = 8). For a few, gang tags or graffiti served as an additional indicator of the existence of gangs within the school walls or as Matt indicated: “people always write” gang names “in the [school’s] bathrooms.”

On the whole, assessments of gang and gang-like groups in high school ranged from sparse and inconsequential to extensive and problematic. A number (N = 8) discussed the existence of “a few” gangs or gang members in their school, but largely felt that these gangs didn’t present much of a problem. Jason recounted how gangs would occasionally be seen at “after-school activities” or sporting events and would mostly just be “throwing up [gang] signs.” Rick continued, “[t]here’s not really much gangs anymore. There’s like a few and they don’t really ‘cause problems though.” Jesse concurred, noting that gangs “just don’t cause that much trouble” in high school.

⁵⁰ Table 30 Key: Objective Violence: Gangs = Gangs, W-be’s = Wannabe Gangs, G-Tag = Gang Tags/Graffiti, Fights = School Fights, Harass. = Gang Harassment, Victim = Respondent Victimization, and V-Victim = Vicarious Victimization; Subjective Violence: Safety = Safety Concerns and Avoid. = Avoidance Behavior; Status: Gang = Gang Status youth and CRS = ‘Conflicting Retrospective Status’ youth

⁵¹ Only Evan – a 17 year old former Eurogangster – described a complete absence of gangs and gang-like groups in his high school; he associated the dearth of gangs with his high school’s well-known reputation for academic excellence.

However, many others (N = 9) indicated that their school had “a lot” of gangs which often amounted to a serious problem. Savannah proclaimed “we got a whole lot of gangs at our [high] school.” Though many noted the existence of high school gangs, youth differed widely in their descriptions and assessments of their gang-involved classmates. Several described high school gangs as being relatively quiet or comparatively less “loud” than the gang members they witnessed in their respective middle schools. Jesse explained that gang members “don’t like run around the school telling people what they, you know, like represent or whatever.” Shaquille continued, stating high school gangs were “not as loud as they used to [be in middle school]...[They don’t] really make it noticeable.” Conversely, just as many described gangs in their school as both loud and conspicuous. Stephan noted that gang members would often “get really loud...[and] draw attention to themselves” and Jason similarly described gang members as “kinda loud [and] prideful.”

Speaking to the seriousness of gangs in his school, Harry expressed how high school gang members differed meaningfully from those in his former middle school. “Now days they take everything serious about [their] gang. Like if somebody tries to put them down. [T]hey’ll take it very offensively.” Reflecting on his high school’s gangs, Jeremy described – with a mixture of fear and disgust – that “some of them are just awful. Like, they do bad things.” What’s more, discussions of a variety of gang-instigated acts of school violence (i.e., gun violence, fights, harassment of non-gang youth, and general school disruption) were often embedded within youth accounts of the seriousness of gangs in their schools.

Though only discussed by a few, instances of and concern over gang-related gun violence was also found within Nashville high schools. Rick described how one local ethnic gang, in particular, “they kinda ‘wild out’ [or crazy]....they always have guns and stuff. Even at school.” Having been expelled from school the year prior, Haley described the fear she felt on the occasion when she went to pick up her sister. Upon arriving to her former high school, she was startled to discover “about 50 cop cars [sic] there because somebody said [members of the same local ethnic gang] was gonna shoot up the school.” Jesse also noted how “two years ago at our [high] school there was somebody who got shot and I think it was a gang thing. ‘Cause it was like right outside of school.” He went on to explain how the victim “was leaving from school one day and a couple guys came up and, like, one of ‘em shot him...and then they all ran off....[T]hey had, like, closed down [the school] and, like, everybody who was in it couldn’t leave.”

Beyond the existence of gangs, gang fights (22 or 85%) were the second most commonly discussed form of violence in the high school subtheme. Aaron – a 17 year old Latino and former gang “solider” – described how he and his fellow members used to “make fun of the rival gangs...[to] try to...get [them] angry or pissed” enough to where “we’ll fight.” Yesenia – a 17 year old Latina and former affiliate – similarly recalled how she and other rival members would congregate “in a big area....up in the freshman hallway” where they would volley insults back and forth – “Oh, well fuck [one gang’s name]!...or [the other gang’s name]!” – and eventually fight each other. Jeremy also explained that “those [gang] fights get really bad,” so bad, in fact, that the police “have to tase them to get them off of each other.” Savannah expressed that “everybody, like, get along, like the gangs not beefin’.” While this was the case for “gangs” in her high school,

she later noted that school fights would occur between other gang-like groups – “some other gangs. Like they made-up, like, “Dream Team” and all that stuff, but it’s not really a gang like, they just made it up.”

For many (N = 7) gang fights were often associated with issues of territory or turf within the high school grounds. Matt described the existence of “a hallway that everyone refers to as the “Kurdish hallway.” ‘Cause they always, like, if you look down, it’s just all people in [the color of a local ethnic gang]. And they’re just standing up against the walls and talkin’ to each other.” Harry similarly discussed how gangs “all hang out in their own area of the [high] school and every once in a while they, like, might get each other mad by pushing each other. Or, like, they just get into each other’s area and they just fight.”

Issues related to informally recognized gang territories were exemplified in Brandi and Yesenia’s assessments:

Brandi: You got [one gang] sitting on one rail. Then [a second gang] sitting on one. And [a third gang] sitting in one hallway. Like, they all segregated – like, they’re not together....[And if] somebody disses [or disrespects] them or says something inappropriate about them, then they’ll collide.

Yesenia: [I]n between class we’d just, like, go....like, where the gym is [is] where all the black people, and then, like, upstairs near the cafeteria is where, like, all the Kurdish people, and towards the freshman hallway is where all the Hispanics stay. And the whites usually stay in one area.

As a former gang affiliate herself, Yesenia explained how the freshman hallway – where rival Hispanic gang members would routinely congregate – was an area where other students would “say like “Fight, fight!” and everything” to instigate individual or group gang fights between those students.

While they had each discussed gangs or gang-like groups in their high school, a few did not discuss gang related fights in school. For Mark and Tevin it appeared that the absence of gang fighting was associated with their assertions that their schools were largely host only to “wannabe gang members.” Likewise, Mary noted “we have a few Juggalos. But that’s not really a gang I suppose. It’s more of a “family.” But...some people take, interpret that as gang.” Asked if the Juggalos influenced day-to-day life at her school: “I wouldn’t say so. Not drastically like other gang members would. Maybe they’re a little loud in the hallways or they, um, goof off, or they’ll joke about, um, just crude jokes and things. But there’s nothing significant, they don’t carry knives or anything like that.” Though Juggalos – fans of the ‘horrorcore’ musical group *Insane Clown Posse* – have recently been recognized as a gang⁵² (National Gang Intelligence Center, 2012), Mary’s statements were informed by her ability to compare her experiences with Juggalos to the variety of more traditional gangs she had witnessed both in her middle school and neighborhood.

In addition to inter-gang fights, eight of the youth also discussed how gangs would fight, harass, and generally disrupt the school environment for their unaffiliated peers. The Nashville youth described numerous instances of harassment by gang members. This pattern of harassment “justified” if non-members inadvertently found themselves in a gang’s turf, wore a gang’s color(s), or in instances where the victim could be simply viewed as a source of amusement for gang members. Speaking to turf, Abby

⁵² Juggalos are fans of the musical group *Insane Clown Posse* and have been formally recognized as a gang by four states (Arizona, California, Pennsylvania, and Utah) and the U. S. Department of Justice. The National Gang Intelligence Center (2012: 22-23) defines Juggalos as “a loosely-organized hybrid gang” and “many Juggalos subsets exhibit gang-like behavior and engage in criminal activity and violence.” The report identifies that law enforcement in at least 21 states have identified criminal Juggalo subsets and concludes that they are “rapidly expanding into many US communities.”

described a particular hallway in her high school that members of a local gang as well as other ethnic Kurds had claimed as their own – “that’s, like, the primary spot – if you’re gonna see a fight, that’s where it’s gonna be.” The “Kurdish hallway” is “their turf...[and] if you invade it, then....it’s Kurdish kids fighting other kids.” Similarly, Rick attested that “if you wear their [the local ethnic gang’s] colors – and they don’t like you – they’ll beat you up.” He was able to provide a recent example of this sort of violence against unaffiliated high school students:

But, like, it was just one little, uh, it’s this one new kid that was wearing [the gang’s color] and they [members of the local ethnic gang] beat him up in the bathroom by hisself while he, like, like while he was urinating. And it, like, that was like [a] really low down move.

Conversely, Aaron and Brandi held that gang members would only bother other students if, as Brandi suggested, “somebody says something to ‘em or they dis [or disrespect] ‘em.” Others discussed how gang youth would harass other students simply for their own amusement.

Several also discussed how gangs were a source of general disruption in school. Tevin recounted how gangs routinely affected other students, noting how gang members would “try to gas someone’s head up while...in class and...trying to learn.” Jesse also stated that members would “[act] like a fool, you know, like getting mad at the teachers and stuff.” Asked why gang members might act up and disrupt class, he replied “people who are in gangs think they can, like, get away with everything, ‘cause they have so many people to back them up.”

In addition to gang-related safety concerns, analysis revealed that many youth had also witnessed other non-gang fights as well as other direct and vicarious forms of crime and disorder while in high school. While unprompted by the interview schedule, Jeremy,

Abby, and Jamal each discussed instances of non-gang fights. Jamal explained: “[I]t’s not the gangs that, that ‘cause a problem. Usually it’s the girls. The girls love attention, they love attention. They love arguing. They love, they love drama. And we, the boys, just like [to] watch it.” He further expressed that he felt as if he “kinda [has] to watch [the drama unfold] too, ‘cause it’s usually [happening] in my class.” When discussing non-gang fights in their schools, Jeremy and Abby each emphasized how fights occurred within groups of racial and ethnic minority students. Said Jeremy: “Well last year there this one instance where there was two Hispanic groups fightin’ each other – upstairs [in the school].” Though having described how she had witnessed fights between members of two rival ethnic gangs, Abby went on to emphasized that it was the “black people – they fight all the time. But they fight each other.” Asked what brought about those fights between her black classmates, she replied “I don’t think they’re gang affiliated. They’re just fights” between black students.

While more commonly found in high school, a little more than a quarter of respondents (7 or 27%) discussed having been directly victimized. A few discussed one or more instances of within school theft. Savannah recalled how her “phone [was] stolen, like, three times [from] school.” Evan also “had a video game stolen from” his school bag during one class period. Finally, Matt described how earlier in the year “I was just at my desk and I check my pocket and [my iPod’s] not there.”

Five of the youth also discussed having been the victim, or near victim, of a personal crime while at school. Haley and Jeremy spoke more generally about having been picked on and harassed during school. Haley noted “I don’t know why,” but “people would, like, pick on me all the time in high school.” Harry and Yesenia discussed times

when they were very nearly involved in a physical fight. Within the past year, Yesenia described “one [near fight which] was in school, [but the other girl] ran away crying” before it came to blows. Harry – a former member of a protective group – explained an instance where he “was going to hit” someone” – who “called me ‘a loser’” – “until the teacher stopped me.”

Only Matt and Haley described having been involved in a physical altercation while in high school. Matt provided little detail on the instance, but generally stated “I was in a fight in, uh, freshman year. Over, like, a kid throwing a ball at me.” Conversely, Haley gave a detailed account of her unprovoked assault by two classmates which subsequently led to her expulsion from school.

Haley: I got my GED because...these girls, they kept, like, pickin’ on me really bad and I got tired of it. And these two girls, they tried to “gang” me, but I’m the one who got kicked out of school.

Amber: What do you mean they tried to “gang” you?

Haley: They, like I was walking down the hallway and they pushed me into the, the locker – and I had a big ol’ knot on my temple. And then, like, her and her friend would just try to hit me and then, like, we got to fighting. And they kicked me out and told me that I couldn’t come back.

Later, she explained why she thought the two girls had decided to pick on or “gang” her:

I guess the girl, she just never liked me. She tries, she picks on everybody. And, like, the principals and stuff they don’t like, I don’t know why – they didn’t really care....[T]he day that they “ganged” me, uh, the [Physical Education] teacher, she had, like, [pulled] me to the side and asked me, “Why did they do that to you?” And I was like, “I don’t know. They did it for no reason. They pushed me into a locker.” And I had a big ol’ knot on my temple; like my head was hurtin’ really, really bad.

Though Haley never learned her victimizers’ motivations for the assault – or whether or how they were punished, the ring of perceived injustice was palpable in her throughout her account of the experience.

Just over a quarter of the youth (7 or 27%) discussed the importance of more subjective forms of violence or insecurity in high school. As noted previously, gang-involved youth were more likely to have discussed both forms of high school-based violence. Only Chelsea – classified ‘conflicting retrospective status’ – discussed instances of subjective school violence, notably avoidance. Four of the youth expanded on their own concerns over high school safety. Both Harry and Jeremy more generally described feeling “scared” in school; Harry “felt a little more kinda scared” and Jeremy stated “I’m pretty scared.” Haley recalled that it was when a gun was discovered in the locker of a Kurdish student that “I felt kinda scared, ‘cause I didn’t want him to go, like, shoot up the school or shoot anybody.”

Jeremy distinctively expressed extreme and all-consuming concerns for his and others’ safety in his school. Similar to Haley’s concerns over gun violence, he expressed a genuine belief that his high school principal was so “afraid [that]...a shooting at school...might happen” that she routinely “scheduled, like, frequent lock-downs. Like, where she’d actually have the school evacuate onto the football field.” While it is unlikely that scheduled school lock-downs and evacuation drills/exercises were motivated by the school principal’s ‘fear of gangs and student violence,’ he also expressed other noteworthy concerns over potential school-based gun violence scenarios:

I’m pretty scared. Because they were, like if you were shot...and you were on the ground and the S.W.A.T. team came in, they wouldn’t save you. They’d actually take down the people – instead of saving you – who had the guns. And then there are also, like, the last people to leave the school are the handicapped people. ‘Cause they’re the hardest to get out and they have to evacuate everyone else out first. And then I have a problem with whether these people with the guns started chasing you down to the

football field [the planned evacuation site for the school]. Where would you go?

He went on to express how he feels his safety is particularly compromised in the school cafeteria, in “some of the stairwells”, and while in his classes. Albeit atypical, Jeremy and others’ expressed concerns over school safety commonly manifested into discussed instances of avoidance.

Four youth explained how they and other students actively sought to avoid perceived threats to safety in their high schools. Chelsea and Matt described the practice of staying out of the way of people they believed to be gang-involved; in particular, Matt noted that he and his friends knew better than to “mess with, like, a Mexican kid or Kurdish kids” because they believed that “all [of] their friends are gonna help them” fight you if you did. Speaking about her former Eurogang group, Mary similarly expressed how some of her schoolmates would actively avoid her and her group – “we all sat behind the lockers at school...people wouldn’t really go by us.” Jeremy – who expressed pervasive concerns over school safety – denoted completely avoiding parts of the school; like “I don’t take some of the stairwells” because “I know a lot bad stuff happens [there].” He also described how he made a concerted effort not to “talk a lot at school, ‘cause if you talk too much people can overhear you and they’ll think you’re talking to them. And then they’ll get mad because....they’ll...[think] you’re making jokes about them.” While he later noted that “at lunch I talk a lot” – even though the cafeteria makes him feel particularly unsafe because that’s “where they start a lot of fights,” he did so only in the company of his friends who had told him that “they have my back at school – just in case something happens.”

Whether objective or subjective in form, high school-based violence was the most frequently discussed theme of violence for interviewed Nashville youth. While the 26 youth were largely representative of the site in terms of gender and race/ethnicity (see Table 30), experiences with violence and insecurity in high school were generally discussed by gang-involved youth (18 or 69%). Unlike the middle school subtheme, only those youth retrospectively classified as gang-involved expressed concerns over safety and direct experiences with victimization within their high school walls.

The Dallas-Fort Worth Area Community Site

Just as in Nashville, instances of violence in the high school subtheme were discussed by the overwhelming majority of Texas interviewees (32 or 94%). These youth were mostly male (23 or 72%), gang-involved (25 or 78%), and of racial or ethnic minority status (28 or 88%) (see Table 27). Table 31 demonstrates that all of the youth discussed objective form(s) of high school-based violence. Furthermore, most of the youth additionally described subjective forms of violence and insecurity. On the whole, youth classified as gang-involved were disproportionately more likely to discuss issues regarding racial and ethnic tension and fights, gang harassment of unaffiliated peers, concerns over safety, and instances of avoidance in their high schools.⁵³

Each of the 32 youth in the high school subtheme discussed at least one instance of objective violence – specifically, the prevalence and salience of high school gangs.⁵⁴ A number (9 or 28%) not only noted the presence of “gangs” or “cliques”, but also other

⁵³ Fernando was the lone ‘conflicting retrospective status’ youth to have discussed subjective forms of violence in high school. He noted that other unaffiliated students in his school would deal with the presence of gangs by “just avoid[ing] ‘em.”

⁵⁴ Of the 33 youth with violence in the high school *domain*, only Kristen – who had discussed gangs and violence in her middle school – explicitly noted the absence of any violence and did not discuss the prevalence of any gangs or gang-like groups in her secondary school.

Table 31: Violence in the School Domain – High School, DFW Community

	Total	Objective (N = 32)					Subjective (N = 16)		
		Gangs	W-be's	Fights	R/E	Harass.	Victim	Safety	Avoid. ⁵⁵
	32	32	9	29	12	8	9	12	8
<i>Gang</i>	25	25	5	23	12	8	7	12	7
<i>CRS</i>	7	7	4	6	-	-	2	-	1

gang-like groups or “wannabe gang members.” By and large, respondents were relatively split in terms of their assessments of high school gangs and gang-like groups. Most (17 or 53%) expressed that their school had “some” or “a few” gangs and members. Jarvis, who by this point was a former member of a protective group, explained that gang “affiliation decreased....when [students advanced] to high school.” He explained that by looking “at somebody’s picture on *Facebook*....it’s around like five [percent], 10 percent tops....[that are] flashing some kind of [gang] sign.” Though the groups often referred to themselves “little clique[s],” Katelyn explained that she “definitely” considered the handful of these groups in her school to be “gangs” and gang-like in their behavior.

Conversely, just under half of the youth (15 or 47%) discussed that their school had “a lot” of gangs and gang members. A former middle school gang affiliate, Gabrielle explained that “everyone’s kind of with their own crew” in her school. Sergio – another former gang affiliate – also asserted that many of the gangs would all “hang out in their own little group[s]” in school. Nick – who had been a gang member for part of his high school tenure – not only noted that gangs were “real bad” in his school, but went on to posit exactly how prolific membership had become:

Nick: [I]t was a lot of gangs. Everybody used to fight each other....

Mike: But you think there were a lot of gangs in the [high] school too?

Nick: Uh, yeah I think so. Like-

⁵⁵ Table 31 Key: Objective Violence: Gangs = Gangs, W-be’s = Wannabe Gangs, Fights = School Fights, R/E = Racial/Ethnic Conflict, Harass. = Gang Harassment, and Victim = Respondent Victimization; Subjective Violence: Safety = Safety Concerns and Avoid. = Avoidance Behavior; Status: Gang = Gang Status youth and CRS = ‘Conflicting Retrospective Status’ youth

Mike: And is that Blood, and Crip, and MS [Mara Salvatrucha] again?

Nick: -probably like 80 percent.

Mike: Eighty percent?

Nick: Eighty percent – gangs in [high] school. Only 20 percent of just nerds – I mean smart people....

Mike: So you think that many people. I mean, is that – the 80 percent – are those *true* initiates or are they just reppin'?

Nick: Yeah. No *true* initiates.

Mike: Wow!

Nick: Yeah. They, they'll throw it down for their set. [Laughs]

In this instance, it is exceedingly likely that Nick's assessment of the extent of membership in his school was skewed by his own gang involvement. While likely distorted, this comment does accurately reflect Nick's perceived reality – given his own intensive gang involvement and friendly relations with other gang sets and cliques in and around his neighborhood and within his school.

Most of the Texas youth also gave assessments of how noticeable gangs were to the casual observer. A number (7 or 22%) noted that most gang members were relatively "quiet" and didn't draw much attention to themselves. Former member, Omar explained that while his high school had a few gangs "they don't stir up trouble really." An active gang affiliate at the time of the interview, Manuel described how the "real people in a gang" in his alternative school "really didn't do nothing at school... 'cause if you got in a fight up there you automatically get sent to [juvenile detention] or jail." Taylor – a former affiliate – similarly explained that "real gang members don't go around sayin' they're gang members."

However, most (15 or 47%) discussed gang and "wannabe" members as "loud" and conspicuous. Having earlier explained that "real" gang members did not draw attention to themselves or cause trouble while at school, Manuel asserted that the so-called "wannabe's" at his former neighborhood high school had been much more

boisterous about their affiliation and would be “just disturbing class” a lot. A former Eurogang member himself, Hector described that “sometimes [gang members] get kinda noisy, you know, they make a lot of problems. They mostly talk like, “I’mma beat you”,...but they don’t really do anything.” Jalen also noted how “it’s like every time, like [members of one local gang] get into it with somebody – they always gotta scream out their gang name.”

Second only to the presence of gangs and gang-like groups, the vast majority of youth from the Dallas-Fort Worth community (29 or 91%) discussed instances of physical fights in their high schools. For many (N = 9) fights were far from a common occurrence. Jarvis stated that he had only seen two fights in the entirety of his high school tenure. Hector also emphasized that disagreements between students were “mostly [all] talk” and Jalen continued “[t]hey don’t really, like, go fight.” This being said, the majority of youth (N = 18) described school fights as having occurred with relative frequency. Dalton asserted that fights occur “almost every day” and Fernando noted that there weren’t really “problems, like, during the day” but people would “starting fighting” after-school.

While several described school fights in terms of disagreements or “drama” between their peers – often centering around romantic entanglements, Texas respondents mostly discussed high school fights in terms of “gangs” and “cliques” (22 or 76%). Having first suggested that school fights were mostly “because of females,” Ethan – then a gang affiliate – went on to note “I’ve had some homeboys fight because they gang bang.” Fernando continued that the “two or three” gangs in his high school would “always talk smack about the other ones, about the other [gang] groups.” Additionally, a

pair of respondents specifically stated how gangs would draw attention to themselves and their fights through the use of social media. Darius explained that not only did gangs use a variety of different whistles to alert their fellows of fights, but videos of these fights were recorded and “posted on *Facebook*” or, as Andrew attested, “on *YouTube*.”

Stating that “a few people used to fight each other [at school]...[l]ike every week”, Crystal noted that most often those involved – who would “end up all fightin’ each other” – were actually members of different cliques or sets of the same gang. Though sharing a larger gang affiliation, she noted that these students fought in part because they were in different “cliques” and because they “hate each other ‘cause of their race.” Crystal’s remarks demonstrate how tension between different racial and ethnic groups remained an omnipresent concern for many of the Texas interviewees.

All told, 12 youth (or 38%) discussed instances of harassment, fights, and general tension between black and Hispanic students at school. Kelsey stated that “if there was gonna be a fight [at school] it was gonna be....like blacks and Mexicans” and Dalton concurred that there were “fights almost every day like between the black and Mexicans.” Hector explained that these fights “were just like, “Yeah, brown’s better” [or] “Black is better.”” Mariah – a 17 year old Latina – poignantly described how her school would sometimes have “rumbles – where it’s black people versus, like, Hispanics. And that happens a lot at our school.”

A number (8 or 25%) also described how gang members would often harass other unaffiliated high school students. Dalton explained how other students would get scared when gang members would come up to them and “talk mess.” Noting how gang members bothered other students in their respective schools, Mariah and Kelsey both indicated that

this harassment often occurred just outside of the school. Mariah elucidated that gang members don't harass people "in campus, 'cause, I mean, obviously they're gonna get in trouble" and Kelsey continued "I've heard [of] people getting beat up on the side of the school [building] – like, you know, [gang members] bullying on people."

Discussed more commonly in high school, many of the Texas respondents (9 or 31%) described their own victimization at school. This included instances of having money (Alexis) or an electronic device (Edgar and Sean – an iPod; Tom – a mobile phone) stolen from their school locker or desk. Edgar explained "somebody had stole my iPod in class – I fell asleep with it on and I left it in my desk."

Edgar: 'Cause that iPod was like the first thing I've like ever really bought.

Mike: That's a big ticket item too. I mean those aren't cheap.

Edgar: Yeah, yeah. You know, it was an [iPod] Touch [model]. It was like when the iTouch barely came out.

Mike: Yeah, so like \$300.

Edgar: Yeah. You know, I was working with my dad in landscaping. You know? I wasn't old enough to get a job. You know? I was like 14 years old. So, yeah...

Mike: Okay. Yeah that's hard, that's hard to earn that much money. It's overwhelming.

Edgar: Yeah. You know, I saved it up. You know, got kinda pissed – I'm not gonna lie.

For more privileged adolescents, the loss of such an item may have been viewed with relative indifference. For Edgar, however, it was clear that the theft of an iPod – he had worked so much for – had great resonance.

Several (6 or 19%) additionally described having been a victim, or a near victim, of a fight within their high school. A few discussed having been in an unprovoked fight because of romantic entanglements. Andrew provided a particularly illustrative account of the circumstances surrounding a day in which he got into multiple fights:

Andrew: Well in this year I had a problem, ‘cause I had a girlfriend and she started cheating on me and everything...with some other guy. And the other guy he found out too – like [that] she was still going out with me. So both of us got mad and we couldn’t, he just told me straight up, he’s like, “I can’t beat up a girl, so I’m gonna beat up you.” So I was like, “Okay.”

Amber: And you guys got into a fight?

Andrew: Yeah, we got into a fight. He’s like,...“Let’s not do it here at school. We’ll do it over there in the McDonald’s parking lot [across the street from the school] where, like, the school can’t get involved or anything.”....Well he started pushing me and everything [while in the school hallway]. And then I had to, like, not totally look like ‘a helpless’... – ‘cause other people, when they see me, like, in the hall, they be like, “Nah, he doesn’t know how to fight. He’s easy.”

Amber: So you felt like you had to fight him?

Andrew: That’s why, yeah, we fought like about three times – three times continuously. ‘Cause the first time, yeah, like I fought him and then that’s when the McDonald’s [store] manager came out. And he’s like, “If you don’t get off [the property] I’m gonna call the cops.” And that’s when he ran. I was like, ‘Okay.’ And then in the hallway he ran into me again and that time we got into a fight in school. And then we just got into a fight and I had him on, like against the lockers. And that’s when the football [coach], he just grabs us both and tossed us.

Amber: Did you get in any trouble?

Andrew: Yeah. We got suspended – both of us....

Amber: And you said [there was] a third time when...

Andrew: The third time was after school; he just came up to me and punched me. And then that was the last time. That’s when, like, the teachers they got us into the [school] building and they were like, “If y’all fight again, like, you’re going to get expelled or sent to the [alternative school].” So we just, like both of us we just agree[d] we’re not gonna fight over a girl.

A few others discussed having been attacked or nearly attacked because of their race or ethnicity as well as their own gang affiliations. Ian – a 17 year old white male and former affiliate – explained:

I mean at school like, uh, all the ghetto Mexicans – like they think they’re the shit. I mean I got in a fight with one of ‘em....‘cause I don’t like, I don’t put up with their crap. So, like, they think they’re hard. I mean I’ll take ‘em on. I dunno. I’m not afraid of them....I don’t pick on anybody, I don’t fight anyone....[But] if I’m in a bad mood and like they start talkin’

shit – I mean I gonna, I'm gonna say something to them. And if they got a problem with it, then I guess it could be a fight.

He noted that this had happened three times in the prior year, where other Latinos schoolmates would try to instigate or draw him into physical fights.

Most of the Texas youth (16 or 50%) not only discussed objective experiences with violence in high school, but also described the importance of other subjective instances of violence or insecurity. Of those who discussed experiences with subjective forms of violence, half discussed concerns over safety (N = 8), a quarter noted instances of avoidance, and a quarter discussed both. Moreover, those who discussed both objective and subjective forms of violence were overwhelmingly gang-involved (15 or 94%; excluding Fernando) and included a greater proportion of males than would be expected.

All told, many of the youth (12 or 38%) discussed concerns over safety, whether their own or their peers, in their high schools. Both having stressed their concerns over gangs and crime in their respective high schools, Edgar noted “that’s why I told you, you know, I kept my guard up” and Mitch expressed how he felt notably at-risk for being robbed at school. Others also discussed how gangs – as well as the harassment and fights that their members caused – greatly contributed to concerns over safety throughout the school day. Explaining that his high school “get[s] kinda wild sometimes,” Dalton regarded gangs as the main source of his and others’ feelings of insecurity while at school.

Others stressed that while gangs and other forms of violence were troubling, it was knowledge of firearms being brought to school – or the concern of firearms being brought in the future – that posed the greatest safety concern. Gabrielle explained:

‘Cause I remember, like, last year at my [high] school – some guy said [posted online] he was gonna take a gun to school on *Facebook*. And like everything got crazy....Someone told someone and they ended up finding out and, uh, I think he did take [the gun], but they, like, caught him before he did anything....But then again, what if he actually did get crazy or they were, like, testing him and he actually did it?

Dalton recalled that “it was kinda scary” when one particular incident had occurred:

[T]-there was one time....we came outside after the school was over with. And there, there was like, um, a car. And it was packed full of [drops the volume of his voice] M-Mexicans. But the M-Mexicans was not after the blacks or nothin’. They was after the [local Hispanic gang]. So, um, the [local Hispanic gang] c-came out from a, out from our [high] school. And the dudes came, like, [highly nervous stuttering] I don’t know what gang that was. But they, they came out of their car and start doin’ all these [gang sets] and stuff gang sign stuff [mimes flashing nondescript gang hand signs]. Yeah, and, um, t-they came outside – then they just started fightin’! Like, just out of nowhere! Then some dude said, “Y’all, Y’all know who I am?!” And he pulled out the gun, right. So, uh, the principal came out – “Put that gun down! Go!” So they, they rushed [to] their car and just left. And like that could have been somebody life, ‘cause I, I done bet that. Yeah. I think that dude would have shot somebody, ‘cause he, he had like a tear[drop tattoo] like [gestures to his right side cheek under his eye]. I-I heard, like, if you have a tear[drop tattoo] on your, um, right eye – like on your cheek whatever that, um, one of your members of the gang have died or you have killed somebody.

Others expressed similar concerns regarding school gun violence; Andrew noted how “sometimes” people would use BB guns “to like scare people in school” and Mariah explained how gang members “do bring guns to my school – it’s been on the news.”

A number (8 or 25%) also expressed how they and others sought to avoid the perceived risk of interacting with or simply being in proximity to particularly “risky” students; most notably, respondents routinely considered many of their gang-involved or “wannabe” peers as “risky.” Most youth discussed how they and their peers gave gang-involved students a wide berth in school; Fernando explained that you have to “just avoid ‘em” and Sergio noted how he and others would all “stay to themselves.” In Alexis’

discussion of gangs and school safety, she articulated why she and others worked to avoid gang members. This was because of the popular belief that gang members would try to “get back at you....if you mess with them.”

As in Nashville, violence within the high school subtheme – whether experienced in an objective or subjective manner – was the most commonly discussed thematic domain of violence for Texas interviewees. The 32 youth who discussed objective forms of violence in the high school subtheme were consistent with the demographics of those interviewed in the site (see Table 27). However, youth who discussed experiences with subjective forms of violence and insecurity in high school were disproportionately gang-involved (i.e., gang-involved youth accounted for 96% of those with discussed instances of subjective violence while the same youth amounted to 75% of the youth interviewed in the site) and slightly more male (i.e., males were 75% of those with subjective violence while accounting for 69% of Texas interviewees). In contrast to the middle school subtheme, gang-involved youth exclusively described instances of racial/ethnic tension and fights, gang harassment of unaffiliated students, and expressed concerns over safety within their high schools.

Conclusions

This chapter provided an overview of the extent and patterns of violence within the school domain as well as within the middle and high school tenure subthemes. Not only was school-based violence the most commonly discussed thematic domain within both emergent gang cities, but it was almost uniformly experienced by all of the interviewed youth.⁵⁶ During both the middle and secondary school years, youth discussed

⁵⁶ Only one of the 60 interviewees who had conferred any exposure to violence did not do so within the school domain (i.e., 59 or 98%, excluding Veronica from Texas).

experiences with objective (e.g., crime and violence, gangs and gang-like groups, as well as direct and vicarious victimization) and subjective forms of violence in the school (i.e., expressed concerns over safety in school and instances of avoidance). With a diversity of school-based violence experiences, systematic comparisons (Miller, 2005) were conducted in order to identify meaningful differences in violence within both of the school level subthemes as well as specific to geographic location, gang status, and gender.

Within both sites, the majority of interviewees described violence during their middle school tenure (i.e., 6th to 8th grade) and were, on the whole, demographically similar to those with discussed high school violence. Of the 45 youth with demonstrated middle school-based violence, objective forms of violence were universal across both sites; particularly the presence of gangs or gang-like groups. Though subjective forms of violence and insecurity were generally discussed much less frequently, a clear difference in its prevalence was identifiable across the site locations. While over half of the Texas youth within the middle school subtheme discussed subjective forms of violence, only about a quarter of Nashville interviewees did the same (see Tables 27 and 28).

Analysis revealed further substantive differences between the two sites in regard to the type and extent of certain objective forms of middle school violence. While direct victimization was noted by a number of youth in both sites, a few of the Nashville youth discussed instances with vicarious victimization in school. Though a full third of the Nashville respondents described instances of fights having occurred in their middle school, this was in stark comparison to the roughly two-thirds of Texas youth who reported the same school violence.

Many of the interviewees in Texas went on to further note how fights were initiated by gang-involved students who sought to harass or pick fights with the unaffiliated. Not only did the large majority of Texas youth describe instances of fights, but a number went on to attest that these fights were often spurred by racial/ethnic conflicts. Harassment and physical assault – whether perpetrated by gang-involved peers or spurred by racial and ethnic tensions – were commonly witnessed, experienced, and discussed in the Texas site. The preponderance of discussion surrounding the tension and conflict between black and Hispanic youths was unique to the Dallas-Fort Worth area community – which has sizable populations of both groups (i.e., 14.5% black and 37.8% Hispanic) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). While not central to the dissertation’s objectives⁵⁷, the preponderance of this finding is consistent with research which has demonstrated that competition over the limited economic, social, and political capital available can foster conflict between racial and ethnic minorities in the United States (Blau & Blau, 1982; Durán, 2013; Kaufmann, 2003). This may be further conditioned by the interviewees’ locale, given the state of Texas’ history of popular and institutional discrimination of minority groups (see the Voting Rights Act of 1965).⁵⁸

Comparative analysis revealed a few other differences across gang status. For both sites, gang-involved youth were disproportionately more likely to have discussed middle school violence than their ‘conflicting retrospective status’ peers (see Tables 25 and 26).⁵⁹ Gang youth were particularly more likely to have discussed a multiple forms of

⁵⁷ This being said, racial and ethnic group conflict remains a potentially fruitful avenue for future research using Gang Desistance study narratives.

⁵⁸ See also Jurisdictions Covered Under Section 4(b) of the Voting Rights Act (2011).

⁵⁹ Though comparably fewer, a number of ‘conflicting retrospective status’ youth from both sites did provide accounts of objective and subjective experiences of middle school-based violence (see Tables 27 and 28).

middle school violence, including fights (within both sites), gang harassment of unaffiliated youth and victimization (both within the Texas site), and subjective concerns over crime and insecurity (within both sites).

The overwhelming majority of youth discussed instances of violence during their, then, ongoing high school tenure (i.e., 9th to 11th grade); in particular, high school violence was uniformly found across all Nashville interviewees with any discussed violence and by all but two within the Texas site (see Tables 25 and 26).⁶⁰ Consistent with findings from the middle school subtheme, objective forms of high school violence were found across all the 58 youth. Across both sites, fights and the presence of gangs and gang-like groups were the most commonly denoted instances of school violence. Subjective forms of high school violence, again consistent with those found within the middle school tenure, were a discussed less commonly and were patterned by site location. Just as before, half of the Texas respondents with violence in the high school subtheme discussed subjective forms of violence, while only about a quarter of Nashville youth did the same (see Tables 29 and 30).

Comparative analysis also identified several substantive differences between the two sites in regard to the type and extent of high school violence. While objective forms of violence were more generally discussed by gang-involved youth, many ‘conflicting retrospective status’ youth also expressed concerns specific to gangs and fights in their schools (see Tables 29 and 30). Gang-involved youth were particularly more likely to have discussed instances of gang member harassment of students as well as direct

⁶⁰ Two Texas youth did not discuss violence in the high school subtheme. Kristen – who discussed middle school-based violence, but did not denote violence during her high school tenure. Veronica discussed no instances – whether objective or subjective in form – of violence within the school domain within her narrative.

victimization across both sites. However, site specific differences in objective forms of violence did emerge across youth gang status. Gang-involved Nashville youth discussed greater exposure to gang-like groups or so-called “wannabe” gang members, vicarious victimization, as well as gang graffiti in their schools. Within the Texas site, only gang-involved youth discussed the importance of racial and ethnic group conflict in regard to school fights. Though a greater number of gang youth described the presence of “wannabe” members, it is important to indicate that a number of ‘conflicting retrospective status’ youth shared the same assessments of such groups. As was witnessed within the middle school subtheme, all but two of the youth who discussed subjective forms of high school violence were classified as gang-involved; in particular, gang-involved youth exclusively discussed less than ideal assessments of high school safety.

Discussions of violence within the school domain – whether in the middle or high school subtheme – did not appear to have been gendered or otherwise influenced by the race or ethnicity of the interviewed youth. Comparisons across the two sites demonstrated that interviewees in Texas were substantially more likely to have expressed instances of school-based harassment and fights – whether because of an individual’s gang status or perceived racial/ethnic minority group status – as well as have assessed their and other students’ safety in school as less assured. Though many of the ‘conflicting retrospective status’ youth expressed violence within both the middle and high school subthemes, the overall findings demonstrated that gang-involved youth in both sites discussed greater exposure to multiple forms of objective school-based violence and dominated discussions of subjective assessments school insecurity.

CHAPTER SEVEN: VIOLENCE IN THE PEER DOMAIN

This chapter presents the final of the three emergent thematic domains – violence in the peer domain. Across both emergent gang cities, instances of violence at the peer level – whether objective or subjective in form – were discussed by the large majority of youth. The chapter first provides an overview of the prevalence and patterns of discussed violence. Next, youth accounts are used to demonstrate the two emergent subthemes of inter- and intra-group level violence (i.e., conflict and violence between as well as within youth peer groups). Finally, substantive differences in peer conflict and violence are discussed in regard to location, gang status, and gender.

Table 32: Demographics of Youth with Violence in the Peer Domain, Nashville

	Total	Sex		Race/Ethnicity			Status		
		M	F	W	B	H	ME	Gang	CRS ⁶¹
Violence	19	11	8	8	5	5	1	16	3
<i>Out-Group</i>	16	9	7	6	4	5	1	15	1
<i>Within Group</i>	14	8	6	6	4	4	-	12	2

Nineteen (or 73%) Nashville youth discussed violence in the peer domain; those were mostly male (11 or 65%), predominately gang-involved (16 or 84%), and included a greater proportion of racial and ethnic minorities (11 or 58%) relative to white youth (see Table 32). Subthemes of inter-group or out-group (e.g., conflict and violence between the youth’s peer group and other non-group members) as well as intra-group or within group violence (e.g., conflict and violence within the youth’s peer group) emerged in relative balance across the large majority of the youth (i.e., out-group violence: 16 or 84%; within group violence: 14 or 74%). Within both subthemes, respondents discussed experiences both with objective (e.g., fights with and without the interviewed youth as well as within

⁶¹ Table 32 Key: Sex: M = Male and F = Female; Race/Ethnicity: W = White, B = Black, H = Hispanic, and ME = Middle Eastern; Status: Gang = Gang Status youth and CRS = ‘Conflicting Retrospective Status’ youth

group arguments and playful banter) and subjective forms of violence (e.g., expressed concerns over threats to safety, within group protection, and pressure to spend time with the group).

Table 33: Demographics of Youth with Violence in the Peer Domain, DFW Comm.

	Total	Sex		Race/Ethnicity			Status	
		M	F	W	B	H	Gang	CRS ⁶²
Violence	28	20	8	2	5	21	26	2
<i>Out-Group</i>	24	18	6	1	5	18	22	2
<i>Within Group</i>	27	19	8	2	5	20	25	2

The vast majority of Texas interviewees (28 or 82%) also discussed conflict and violence in the peer domain. Table 33 demonstrates that the youth were mostly male (20 or 71%) and overwhelmingly of racial/ethnic minority group status (26 or 93%). The respondents were also disproportionately classified as gang-involved, relative to all those interviewed in the site (i.e., 26 or 93% of the youth with discussed peer violence were gang-involved relative to 27 or 75% of the overall Texas site which was classified gang-involved). Discussions of peer violence similarly emerged within both the out- and within group subthemes; within each subtheme, discussions included both objective (e.g., fights with and without the youth, within group arguments, fights, and playful banter) and subjective forms of violence and insecurity (e.g., expressed concerns over threats to safety, within group protection, and pressure to spend time with the group). Just as in Nashville, the peer subthemes emerged in relative balance in terms of prevalence (i.e., out-group violence: 24 or 85%; within group violence: 27 or 96%). While a greater proportion of Nashville youth described inter-group violence relative to intra-group (i.e., 16 or 84% relative to 14 or 74%), the opposite was found within the Texas narratives.

⁶² Table 33 Key: Sex: M = Male and F = Female; Race/Ethnicity: W = White, B = Black, and H = Hispanic; Status: Gang = Gang Status youth and CRS = ‘Conflicting Retrospective Status’ youth

Moreover, not only did the overwhelming majority of Texas youth express instances of out-group violence, but within group conflict was discussed by all but one of the 28 youth.

Inter-group Peer Violence

The Nashville Site

The 16 interviewees who discussed out-group violence – perceived or experienced violence directed at the respondent or members of his/her group from other individuals or groups – were relatively balanced in terms of gender and race/ethnicity (see Table 32). Given this, the racial and ethnic distribution (i.e., 6 or 38% white, 4 or 25% black, 5 or 31% Hispanic, and one youth of Middle Eastern descent) is noticeably inconsistent with the site demographics and demonstrates an over-representation of minority youth. Moreover, out-group violence was almost exclusively discussed by youth classified as gang-involved (15 or 94%). Table 34 further demonstrates that a substantial majority of youth discussed both objective experiences as well as more subjective forms of violence within the out-group subtheme.

Table 34: Violence in the Peer Domain – Inter-group, Nashville

	Total	Objective (N = 11)		Subjective (N = 13)	
		Fights w/	Fights w/o	Protect	Threats ⁶³
	16	8	10	11	7

<i>Gang</i>	15	8	10	10	7
<i>CRS</i>	1	-	-	1	-

Discussions of objective experiences of inter-group violence included fights with other groups, both with and without interviewee’s participation. Most (11 or 69%)

⁶³ Table 34 Key: Objective Violence: Fights w/ = Fights with the Respondent and Fights w/o = Fights without the Respondent; Subjective Violence: Protect = Sense of Group Protection and Threats = Threatened by Others; Status: Gang = Gang Status youth and CRS = ‘Conflicting Retrospective Status’ youth

discussed how their peer group had engaged in fights with other youth groups – with or without interviewee’s involvement. Importantly, all 11 youth were retrospectively classified as gang-involved (i.e., a current or former gang member, gang affiliate, protective group member, or Eurogang member). The large majority (Aaron, Rick, Harry, Jamal, Savannah, Yesenia, Hunter, and Tevin) detailed instances in which they were personally involved in group fights; this ranged from participation in a few near fights (i.e., disagreements which very nearly became physical altercations) to extensive involvement in fights. Both Aaron and Jamal identified instances of near involvement in physical altercations with other youth groups; Aaron – a former “soldier” – explained how his gang “asked me to, like, ‘Get down, like, stand by them and fight’” a rival gang, “but I mean it was about to [happen], but...it got stopped by security.”

Others expressed not only the intent to fight alongside their gang fellows, but discussed having done so on one or more occasions. Savannah explained that “if somebody get to arguin’, like...with one person” in her gang, then her group would “try to “gang” them – like the whole group.” She clarified what she meant by ‘the whole group “ganging” someone,’ explaining that “it be like 10 people [against] like one person.” In discussing their involvement in numerous gang fights, Hunter stressed that his fellows repeatedly “proved that they had your back” by helping in countless fights and Tevin reiterated that “[i]f the younger people [in the gang] had an altercation with another gang then they would just call the big [older] people and [they would go over there and] see what’s going on.”

Rick also explained that “we made up cliques back” in middle school and “it was mostly cliques that...[would] fight” in school. He went on to illustrate how he and other

students would yell their group's name at other rival cliques – “like you repping your [clique]....and they get all of them jealous faces in there fightin'....you try to like battle.”

It, it actually did get out of hand though. Because it got to the point where we were getting in trouble – chasing each other down and, like, messing around. You know, like, like we play it, like we play fight each other – like wrestle. We wouldn't actually just fight and bring weapons and all that....The girls would fight, would fight against the girls [in other cliques]. And the guys would fight against the guys [in other cliques]...It didn't really get to a point where it [was] serious.

While he conceded that he “was actually getting into a lot of fights” in the fall of his 6th grade year – just before his involvement with his gang clique, it is clear that Rick and many others were willing participants in instigating and engaging in fights between other gangs or gang-like youth groups.

Of the eight who discussed having fought alongside their peers, only Harry – a 17 year old Kurdish male and former member of a protective group – did not indicate any instances in which his friends fought without his presence. All told, the vast majority (N = 10) discussed occasions when their gang fought without the interviewee being involved and/or present. Most discussed how members of their gang got into fights with “rival” members. Anna – a 17 year old Latina and former affiliate – explained how the guys in her group would “[t]alk about gangs...who they were gonna beat up...Like what they were gonna do...and crazy stuff.” A larger number also discussed how fights were facilitated by another gang or clique “disrespecting” the gang or infringing on their “turf.” Rick noted how his former clique would “go to [a rival clique's] hallway [in their middle school] and walk in their territory or whatever. And they get mad and they be like, “Ahh!” and they chase us through our [clique's] hallway. And then our [clique], and then our people would run back at them and they run back to their hallway.” Shaquille – a 17

year old black male and former gang affiliate – also expressed that “[y]ou couldn’t say certain ‘dis words’ [to gang members].” He explained that to call a Blood a “slob” or a Crip a “crab” was tantamount to calling a black person a “nigger” or a person of Hispanic descent a “wetback.” Those gang-involved youth who failed to show sufficient reverence to rival gangs found themselves – as Shaquille noted – “in a fight...or really hurt.”

A few explicitly discussed that their fellows engaged in one-on-one fights with rival members. Jamal explained how a fight between two gang rivals was “basically like a bootleg [or unsanctioned] boxing match” where the two would fight for “a 30 second count, or whoever bleeds first,...tap[s] out first, or whoever announces that “Oh, he’s knocked out...he ain’t fighting no more, he’s gone.”” The large majority (N = 8) explained how one-on-one fights could also evolve into larger group fights. This included instances in which a one-on-one fight became a lopsided assault – where a single member was “ganged” or attacked by multiple rival gang or clique members. Haley noted that “if they got into a fight then...their [fellow gang members], they would jump in and fight.” This also included occasions when numerous gang members, from both sides, would jump into the violent exchange. While Jamal had recalled instances where “someone was trying to “gang”” his former gang associates, he explained that “[i]t’s usually one-on-one fights...unless, if [their] gang...come[s] by, then that’s when everybody jump in for reals.” During the time of his own involvement, he continued that his gang wasn’t “gonna let me ride by myself [or go fight another gang member alone]. Like, “Heck no!” We gonna be there with you....[to] make [it] look like they [could] jump in at any time.” He also insisted that “there’s always a strap [or handgun] carried by somebody, just in case something goes wrong...they just have it in their back pocket...[so t]hey can pull it out,

like, automatically.” These accounts demonstrate how interpersonal conflicts or altercations between two members of different gangs had the potential, depending on the volatility of the situation, to move beyond a one-on-one fight into a larger and more violent group melee.

On the whole, objective experiences with inter-group peer violence were far from uncommon. Worth reiterating is that each of the Nashville youth who discussed experiences with out-group peer violence had been retrospectively classified as gang-involved. Of those 11 youth, five were gang members⁶⁴, five were former affiliates, and Harry was the lone former member of a protective group.

The vast majority of Nashville youth (13 or 81%) discussed more subjective experiences with violence within the out-group subtheme; these experiences were most commonly situated around concerns for individual and group safety. Most (7 or 54%) discussed experienced and/or perceived threats or harassment by other youth groups; importantly, these were exclusively discussed by gang-involved youth. The vast majority (11 or 85%) also discussed their gang or group involvement in terms of providing a supportive sense of protection. Similar to those who discussed threats or harassment by other groups, gang-involved youth also dominated this pattern (10 or 91%).

Seven of the gang-involved respondents discussed concerns over safety because of the real or perceived threat that other youth groups, cliques, or gangs presented. Jeremy and Rick acknowledged that their gang didn’t get along with or was threatened/harassed by other school-based groups. Rick explained how his and another cliques would harass and chase each other in the hallways of their school. Speaking more

⁶⁴ Hunter was classified as an active member of his local gang at the time of the study interview while the other four youth were classified as formerly involved.

generally, Jeremy noted that “at the time there was another group of people that we didn’t really along with that well...I’m guessing some of their people had some bad histories with some people from my group.” Aaron and Yesenia further discussed concerns over safety within their high schools because of the presence of rival Hispanic gangs; a former “soldier,” Aaron explained that “back then...I was afraid...[that a] rival gang jump me” particularly because rival Hispanic gangs outnumbered his gang.

In addition to perceived threats to safety from other youth groups, the vast majority (11 or 85%) discussed their peer group in terms of providing a sense of supportive protection. Of those who discussed a protective element to their peer group, all but one was retrospectively classified as gang-involved.⁶⁵ Chelsea – who was frequently picked on by the boys in her school – expressed that while she “had support from my best friend” in her group, she did not believe her larger group of friends was there for her. Mary also discussed her early high school Eurogang group as having done many supportive things for each other (i.e., “offer rides if they’re drunk or things like that”, “give them a place [to stay] if they’re kicked out of their house”, and “offer to get...pills – like Xanax or pain pills” for each other); these “supportive” acts were done so they, as a group, could “help [each other] with the pain of life.” Distinctively, Yesenia – a Latina and former affiliate during the 9th grade – described that she sought out gang association because the members would keep her informed about fights and other gang activity in school. “[L]ike [the members of my affiliate gang] knew stuff and...they would let me into, like, some stuff. Like let me know some stuff about just the group,...like what we’re gonna do and stuff, what was going on.”

⁶⁵ Only Chelsea retrospectively explained that her group was like a “Scooby Doo gang.”

Coupled with the supportive and informative nature of their peers, six discussed how their gang afforded them and their friends a sense of protection and safety. Formerly gang affiliated, Victoria described how “because I have friends....it felt like, uh, protect[ed].” Five of these youth explicitly expressed this sense of protection, in part, because their gang would “have their back.” Said Jeremy: “Well a lot, a lot of my friends say they ‘have my back’ at school. And I usually just hang around them – just in case something happens.” Many also described how their fellows would help them if a person or group was messing with or attacking them. “[I]f somebody was to mess with one of us then we all come, you know, to back that one person up” explained Rick, “If some random guy just comes and messes with one of our friends in our, like, circle – you could say we’d go defend them.” Matt likewise stated that if “there’s people “ganging” on one friend, we’re gonna have their back” and Harry concurred “if I were to get into an argument or a fight with somebody, I know they would come and help me.” Hunter further demonstrated this sense of protection afforded by his gang fellows:

Hunter: If I need somebody they’re there. Like if I drop, uh – if I picked up the phone, they’re gonna be dropping what they’re doing. Like if they’re working with their tools – they doing something – they gonna drop what they doing.

Mike: They’re gonna take your call.

Hunter: Yeah.

Mike: Okay. Now what were some things you liked about being part of that group?

Hunter: Just to know that they’re always somebody you can just call – need to talk to. Always somebody that’s gonna, you know, have your back. It’s like another family in a way...It’s just they’re always there to have your back if, you know... Most of the time they can [but] sometimes they can’t. But, most – I wouldn’t doubt they’re gonna have your back. That was the best feeling.

While still active in a local gang at the time of the interview, his account is indicative of how gang-involvement can afford an all-important sense of protection and safety – “[t]hat was *the best* feeling.”

For those who experienced violence in the peer domain, out-group violence – whether objective or subjective – was a particularly salient concern for gang-involved youth (see Table 32). The majority of the gang-involved youth discussed objective violence, noting that their gang had been involved in fights with other gangs and gang-like groups – both with and without the interviewee. Gang-involved youth also discussed other more subjective experiences with out-group violence. This included half of the youth discussing concerns over safety due to inter-group threats and harassment as well as the vast majority recounting a sense of supportive protection perceived to be afforded by their gang involvement.

Table 35: Violence in the Peer Domain – Inter-group by Sex, Nashville

	Total	Objective (N = 11)		Subjective (N = 13)	
		Fights w/	Fights w/o	Protect	Threats ⁶⁶
	16	8	10	11	7
<i>Male</i>	9	6	6	6	5
<i>Female</i>	7	2	4	5	2

Beyond the importance of gang status, comparative analysis revealed patterned differences in the extent and severity of out-group violence across gender (see Table 35). First and foremost, the out-group subtheme was discussed in relative balance across gender (i.e., 44% female) – demonstrating that females were overrepresented relative to their proportion of Nashville interviewees (i.e., 36% female). This overrepresentation was most notable in discussions of fights without the interviewed youth’s involvement (i.e.,

⁶⁶ Table 35 Key: Objective Violence: Fights w/ = Fights with the Respondent and Fights w/o = Fights without the Respondent; Subjective Violence: Protect = Sense of Group Protection and Threats = Threatened by Others

40% female) and the sense of protection believed to have been afforded by gang or group involvement (i.e., 46% female). Other objective and subjective experiences of out-group violence were more commonly described by male interviewees. Substantively fewer females discussed personal involvement in gang fights (i.e., only Savannah and Yesenia), and threats and/or harassment by other gangs or youth groups (i.e., only Anna and Yesenia).

The Dallas-Fort Worth Area Community Site

The overwhelming majority (24 or 83%) of the 29 Texas respondents with violence in the peer domain recalled experiences categorized within the out-group subtheme. Youth were mostly male and largely of Hispanic descent (18 or 75%, respectively) (see Table 33). However, gang-involved youth were notably overrepresented relative to the site (i.e., 22 or 92% of the out-group subtheme relative to 27 or 75% of Texas interviewees). Objective and more subjective forms of violence of inter-group violence were each discussed by the vast majority of youth (21 or 88%, each). The large majority (16 or 67%) discussed both forms of violence; of the remaining youth, a few recalled either only objective (N = 3) or only subjective forms of out-group peer violence (N = 3).

Objective forms of conflict and violence were discussed by 21 youth and included fights or near fights with other groups, with and without the respondent's participation. Expectantly, conflict and fights with other groups were overwhelmingly raised by gang-involved youth (19 or 91%); half of which indicated that their gang fought without their presence in addition to times when the respondents fought alongside their peers. This

being said, Christina and Jalen – both classified as ‘conflicting retrospective status’ – also discussed similar experiences between their and other youth groups.

Table 36: Violence in the Peer Domain – Inter-group, DFW Community

	Total	Objective (N = 21)		Subjective (N = 21)	
		Fights w/	Fights w/o	Protect	Threats ⁶⁷
	24	13	19	20	14
<i>Gang</i>	22	12	17	18	13
<i>CRS</i>	2	1	2	2	1

The large majority of youth (19 or 73%) discussed that their peers were involved in fights without the respondent being involved or present (see Table 36). Manuel – an 18 year old Latino and former affiliate – described his former group with particular disdain, noting “[t]hey, like, talked crap to everybody they see.” A former affiliate with a Texas clique, Sean similarly expressed that his gang would fight “[l]ike other people...[p]robably just ‘cause they bumped into each other – stepped on [their] shoes.” As a former gang affiliate, Veronica shared this assessment that her former gang peers would “fight – other people – a lot over little things”; “[l]ike if you were to [look or] stare at them wrong – they would, like, immediately jump on you and just wanna start something.” She also noted that they “would get into fights like, I guess, at night – they would go fighting for money.”

Still others indicated that fights between their peers and groups were often spurred by conflicts and rivalries between gangs and cliques. Alexis – a former gang affiliate and 17 year old Latina – noted how her associates “had a lot of fights this year” because of “misunderstanding[s]” with other groups. Another former gang affiliate, Taylor – a 16

⁶⁷ Table 36 Key: Objective Violence: Fights w/ = Fights with the Respondent and Fights w/o = Fights without the Respondent; Subjective Violence: Protect = Sense of Group Protection and Threats = Threatened by Others; Status: Gang = Gang Status youth and CRS = ‘Conflicting Retrospective Status’ youth

year old black male – described that during his sophomore year his friends increasingly “started gang bangin’ and fightin’” and “they [even] had a big ‘ol riot.”

[O]ne boy was fightin’ and then [that] boy started losin’. So everybody else [in the gang] jumped in. [Chuckles] It was a big ‘ol riot. And then other people jumped in and they all started fightin’ each other.

Cesar – a former affiliate and a 17 year old Latino – described how his group had a particular part of the “neighborhood where they hung out” and if his fellows “saw someone that was, like, not from our group – we would probably, like, say something to them.”

Though a founding member of his Texas gang, Raul – a 17 year old Latino – asserted that he was never involved in any gang fights: “they got into some fights, but I was never there – I witnessed ‘em [but I] never threw a punch.” He noted how his Hispanic gang fellows routinely fought against one rival gang; this was because “they were the blacks” and they “were like all about, you know, fighting” and they just “wanted to find trouble” with the Hispanic students. Similar to Raul’s account – which situated gang fights within the context of racial and ethnic group tensions, Ethan and Sergio suggested that gang rivalries were often mere microcosms of larger conflicts between black and Mexican youth within the suburban Texas community. Asked about gang rivalries, Sergio – an 18 year old Latino and former affiliate – noted: “Yeah, but like that’s only if somebody just messes with each other...Like when somebody just jumps somebody for being Mexican – like in school...Yeah, well right now it’s not [about] gangs – [it’s] just about, um, race” and ethnicity.

Most of the youth (13 or 57%) described instances in which they were personally involved in conflicts and/or fights between their and other groups. “Involvement” in

inter-group conflicts included: near fights with other groups (i.e., conflicts which were nearly physical altercations), relatively minor fights or scuffles, as well as involvement in “brawls” or “rumbles” with other groups. A former member himself, Cesar recalled one near fight with a rival gang member.

Um, there was this one time where, where I was wanting to fight someone. And, like, they were probably, there was like 10 of them with him – the guy that I was gonna fight. And so they were probably about to, like, all beat me up at once. But then my other [gang] friends – they just had gotten out of basketball practice – and they came out. And, like, pretty much were, like, there for me. And they were like, “What’s going on?”

Others not only discussed near fights – where youth expressed their intent to fight alongside their peers, but also noted having physically fought on one or more occasions.

Most who expressed having fought alongside their peers described these fights as having been relatively minor scuffles. Then a 17 year old Latina, Christina – classified ‘conflicting retrospective status’ – recalled one particular occasion where she witnessed “a friend” get jumped by other two girls. Seeing that the victim’s other “friends weren’t backing her up” and believing that the fight “was unfair” as it was “two-on-one” – Christina “just got into it” with them. Nick – a former gang member – explained “we used to fight [our rivals] a lot, but the cops used to just separate us.” Tom – an 18 year old Latino and former affiliate – similarly noted the regularity of these sorts of fights: “Like it[’s] probably every time we go up to a party it’s gonna happen... ‘cause, I guess, people just, like, wanna start stuff... [Others will] just come [up] doin’ some dumb stuff... or disrespect me” or my friends. Omar – a former gang member – uniquely explained that not only did he “used to fight a lot” with his fellows, but he believed that “the more people [we] would fight, like the more people, like, respected us.”

In addition to relatively minor scuffles between groups, a few of the gang-involved youth described having been involved in “brawls” or “rumbles”. Nick explained how “[i]t got real bad” in the early part of his high school tenure while he was a gang member. “It was a lot of gangs – everybody used to fight each other. Not even if they were in a gang....We had a big rumble at the football game last time. Dallas SWAT had to come.” A gang affiliate, Reuben recounted how there were “riots” or “rumbles” between “different cliques” and that he enjoyed both “watchin’ ‘em” as well as “being [involved] in them.” “[S]o we gotta get down – so we, we set ‘em up – we tell ‘em when, when to be there...and when to go.” Ethan – himself an affiliate of Hispanic descent – detailed how black students in his high school were “always trying to brawl” – “the black people were all like, ‘We gonna beat all the Mexicans up. All the Mexicans go to the [nearby] park.’” He continued, indicating that he and other Hispanic youths “fought them a couple times” and that this was because “Mexicans – give ‘em [black students] competition.”⁶⁸

Similar to their Nashville peers, a large majority (21 or 72%) of the Texas youth discussed more subjective concerns over safety at the peer level. All told, most (20 or 69%) discussed a protective function of their current or former peer groups. Though gang-involved youth overwhelming discussed their group in a protective sense (18 or 90%), Christina and Jalen – both classified ‘conflicting retrospective status’ – shared this assessment of their peers. Roughly half (14 or 48%) also discussed perceived threats of and/or experiences instances of harassment by other groups. Similar to those who

⁶⁸ While Mariah – a 17 year old Latina and former affiliate – did not discuss that she or her peers were ever involved in out-group fights, she further substantiated accounts of so-called “rumbles” between gangs as well as between students of different racial and ethnic minority groups (i.e., blacks and Hispanics). Explaining the substantial number of fights in her school, Mariah noted that students were usually fighting about “the color” – or gang status – and “sometimes there’s rumbles where it’s black people versus, like, Hispanics and that happens a lot at our school...Yeah they’re called ‘rumbles.’”

discussed the protective nature of their group, gang-involved youth dominated discussions of experienced and perceived threats and harassment by other groups (13 or 93%).

A total 20 of the Texas youth discussed their friends and respective peer groups as a common source of protection and safety. Most commonly, the youth expressed how their peers would “have their back” should anything remotely threatening occur. Speaking about his protective group friends, Dalton noted “I knew that they would have my back if anything went down.” He clarified that “anything” ranged from other students making fun of him or teasing him, “or try to jump me,” or – in the most extreme instance – when his “friend gave me [a] gun” that he had used to try to scare off another youth who “was talkin’ mess about me and my mom” and had physically bullied him (i.e., “he started talkin’ [mess] and he pushed me”). Taylor – a former gang affiliate – explained that “my homeboys....we just had each other[’s] back[s], basically through anything” and Darius explained that “two other people” in his middle school protective group “actually had my back.” This sense of others having had ‘your back’ led many to explicitly state their peers made them feel safe or protected. Cesar explained that his gang associates made him feel “sorta like protected” while attending a school with a larger contingent of rival gang members. Omar – a former clique member – similarly noted that he liked the sense of “collective security” – “if anything did happen, there’d be more” of his fellow gang members to have his back with a simple phone call.

One respondent best illustrates the sense of protection his former group afforded. An exceptionally articulate 18 year old young black man, Jarvis explained how the protective group he was a part of in the 7th grade were his football teammates; Jarvis had

prospectively self-identified this group as a gang on the Wave 3 survey of the G.R.E.A.T. Evaluation study. More specifically, he was closest with his fellow “starters” on the “first...and the second string.” Speaking metaphorically, Jarvis described that by “basically [being] in a trench” and “winning” together they had developed “a bond.” In fact, he likened this bond to that of “brothers” or enlisted soldiers.

Um, always having a friend in somebody. *Always*. No matter what. I’m saying, uh, there’s a reason Russians call them “comrades”, because they go above and beyond for any, just somebody you’re next to – someone you have a bond with. Like if I had a problem with someone or someone had a problem with me, I didn’t ever have to worry about it. Because I had 15 other guys behind me.

Having also noted a lot of his teammates in middle school were “gang affiliated,” explained that they all shared an important sense of “camaraderie and an overall willingness to do anything for a [fellow] friend.”

When later asked why he prospectively identified a subset of his teammates as “a gang,” Jarvis offered a truly apropos explanation and assessment of his former protective group:

My perspective of what “a gang” was, was “mon petit”. [Laughs]...There was, oh yeah – I guess my friends that [were] calling themselves [gang members], I guess. Maybe hanging out all the time, I guess. Maybe having each other’s backs or talking about bad things. Yeah, that could possibly make us “a gang”. But now that I think about it, we were just kids who need friends. Who – I wouldn’t say need friends – who *had* friends that would do anything for them. So a gang – we were not. Friends, at the time, till death, I guess – yes.

Pressed on the difference between his group and other middle school gang groups, he continued:

Jarvis: I guess my friends – and friends in general – were basically just like the Bloods and [the] Crips of middle school. Just friends who were together all the time, would do anything for each other....I’m

saying in middle school it's more of a *need*. In high school....gang affiliation is more of a *want*.

Mike: You mentioned there's a *need* inherent [for] kids who would want to get into groups like that. What is that *need*...compared to the *want* in high school?...

Jarvis: Kids in... Not everybody gets along. Kids *need* friends – and you're always gonna have, I guess, a group of friends that will have your back more than, uh, a random other group of friends that you might [have] met in one class or... But, I'm saying the people you see day-in-day-out, you, uh, sweat blood and tears....

Mike: Do you think there really is a stark difference between you and your [teammate] friends to someone that – in your middle school – said “I'm a Blood, I'm a Blood”?...

Jarvis: [Sigh] I guess, overall, not [a] huge difference. Because those Bloods and the Crips in middle school, they were just kids looking for friends. I guess. And so, I guess, that's what everybody was [doing back then].

Through this guided reflection, it's clear that Jarvis was able to articulate *why* he had self-identified membership by further elaborating on what made his protective group tantamount to a gang.

Three of the Latina interviewees discussed the sense of protection that their former gang affiliations afforded in gendered terms. What made these accounts gendered were the respondents' expressed perceptions that the young men they associated with would insulate them from or otherwise minimize exposure to sexualized harassment – whether verbal or physical.⁶⁹ Sixteen year old Katelyn explained that “the guys” she affiliated with “would protect the girls [in the group] if any guy tried to mess with” them. She explained that ‘messing with’ was chiefly when young men outside of the group

⁶⁹ While not included in the pattern of ‘gendered gang protection,’ Nick – an 18 year old Latino and former gang member – expressed similar gendered functions of his gang group. While asserting that girls “were a part of our gang” – “they weren't, like, our girlfriends or nothing,” he responded “nah” when asked if they were treated “the same” as “another guys in the group.” Rather he explained that he and the other young men of his gang would treat female members “[t]he same ways [you would] treat your sister.” “Give ‘em what they want. When we go to stores – if they didn't have money – you buy them whatever they wanted.... Taking care of them, pretty much yeah.” Importantly – and consistent with the three gendered accounts, he noted: “[a]nd if a guy like – if, if he wasn't in our gang [and] they try to mess with her – then we used to go and protect her.”

“tried flirting and the girl was like “Stop” and they wouldn’t.” If this undesired romantic attention persisted, then the young men “would probably fight them.” Asked if they had ever fought someone on her behalf, “[w]ell not for me – [but] for other girls they did.” Mariah – a 17 year old former affiliate – likewise described how she felt unsafe in and around her own neighborhood – particularly in light of the fact that she “almost got raped....just right...around the corner” and because men would drive through her neighborhood and stop and “just [try] to talk to me or tell me to get in the car” with them. “[T]hat’s why I always walk around with, like, [my] guy friends” if she goes out “at night.” Seventeen year old Alexis – a former affiliate – expressed how selective she and her peers were when considering whether or not to bring new friends into the fold. This was because she and her friends wanted to be certain that “they were gonna protect us and help us.” She further explained that while her mother had initially disliked her being a part of the mostly male group – “because of the fact they were mostly guys and I was the girl,” her mother later become “more comfortable [with] me being with them.” What was paramount to both Alexis’ and her mother’s comfort with her association with a largely male group was the belief that “if something was to happen to me, [the young men in the group] would protect me.”

Others provided examples of how, they believed, their friends were able to deter would-be aggressors. Often the ability of the group to dissuade harassment or aggression was predicated upon their collective “reputation.” Reuben explained “I always feel safe [when] I’m wit’ my brothers” from the gang. Since a “lotta people feared us” and “we had protection,” “I never got picked on” and “most of [my] friends...never got picked on” either. Sharing in these sentiments, Tom – a former gang affiliate – described that

“everyone on the [neighborhood] block knows...that ‘You don’t f-[uck], mess with’” his gang. Raul – considered an “original gangster” or charter member of his Texas gang – also noted “I guess no one would mess with us.... ‘cause we was rough – I mean we were Hispanics in a white neighborhood, we was rough.”

Beyond the abstract, a few described instances where their friends demonstrated that they ‘had their backs.’ Formerly gang affiliated, Andrew described one particular occasion where two people began to “jump me, but then some of my friends came [over] and they took off their shirts and they started jumpin’ [in too].” He continued “like if [a gang] mess with us, we’ll like fight back – ‘cause we’re friends.” Jalen also discussed a recent incident where another adolescent “set me off” because “he got ta’ talkin’ loud and disrespecting – my girlfriend – while I’m on the phone with her.” “So I went over there to try [to] do somethin’ to him – and then I, it came to mind, I stopped...plus it was like [my friends were] holding me back too.”

Several others also recalled instances where they personally looked out for and came to the aid of their fellow group members. Edgar explained that “I kept my guard up...I just keep my eyes on, like, my friends. Help my brother...and [all of] them” in his protective “crew.” Likewise, Taylor stated that “if I see ‘em – like my homeboys [or former gang affiliates] – hurt [then] yeah, I’d help ‘em.” Tom – a former affiliate – asserted that if “they’re tryin’ to fight one of my little friends and dudes are big, you know. I’ll get in it to help my homeboy out, you know, if he’s small and a big dude tryin’ to fight him, you know. I’ll fight for my homeboy.”

Additionally, roughly half of those youth (14 or 48%) expressed concerns over their safety because of experienced or perceived threats and harassment directed at their

group by other non-group members.⁷⁰ Some discussed threats or problems as having been relatively infrequent or were otherwise goaded on by one particular group member. Ethan explained “it’s rare when it happens...a lot of beef [or conflict] don’t set up around here” while Christina noted that one of her girlfriends “started, like, causing problems” and, in turn, “got in a fight...and so people...started, like, disliking us [and] saying things about us.” Still others indicated that threats and harassment from other groups were a common occurrence. Andrew explained that “[e]very day they be like, they be getting into fights and everything”. Taylor stated that it was his friends “[g]ang bangin’” that “started more drama with other people – they just get into it....I don’t know, they’re crazy.” It was because of this “drama” – that his gang associates had stirred up with other groups – that he later explained “I had people tryin’ to, like, fight me [just] ‘cause I hung with them.”

Several also described that their group had “enemies” or notable issues with other groups. Reuben – an affiliate with his gang – explained how organized gang meetings allowed him and his fellow members to find out “what’s happening around the ‘hood” as well as “who’s our enemies.” Speaking of his former protective group, Jarvis similarly recalled: “I’m saying if you’re an enemy of the team – [then] you’re an *enemy* of the team.” Omar – a former clique member – further suggested that between group threats and harassment were mostly “‘cause people disrespect, like, the gang we were in.” Then claiming affiliation, Cesar explained how “every now and then [our rivals] would [try to] jump me.” Mitch also explained that tensions between his gang and their rivals worried and scared him.

⁷⁰ Of the 14 youth, all but one had also discussed a protective element of the peer group in question. Only Sean – a former gang affiliate – indicated that fights between his fellows and rival cliques/gangs or other “random people” would occur simply “‘cause what they’re wearin’” or the because his fellows “just wore [a certain color].”

Though having discussed how his and other gangs would often threaten and harass their respective rivals, Nick – an 18 year old Latino and former gang member – gave a conflicting assessment of his own inter-group victimization risk. Though he noted “I carry a gun – [an “empty”] Glock .40” for safety in his neighborhood, he also asserted that nobody “try to mess with me....since everybody knows me in this neighborhood.” Moreover, he explained that his gang as well as another nearby gang both “gots beef with” third local gang. Even with the inherent risks of violence discussed within his neighborhood – whether posed by transient criminals or rival gangs, he asserted that “I’m not” at-risk – “not me.” What makes his account particularly unique was his elaboration on why he perceived his own exceptional standing and insulation from rival gang risks.

Mike: So you think, you think that you’re not as at-risk?

Nick: Yeah, yeah. I’m not. I know that for a fact. ‘Cause...

Mike: How do you ‘know that for a fact’? [Laughs]

Nick: [Laughs] ‘Cause I used to help a lot of people that... If they didn’t have money – I used to, like, tip ‘em a \$100. I mean, ‘cause back in the-

Mike: You were hustling [dealing drugs] back then, so...

Nick: -6th [grade] year I, I was hustlin’. I didn’t really care about the money. I just gave it away like that.

Mike: Okay. And that was only with the guys in [your gang] or was that, you know, if you had a friend that was [in a different gang]?

Nick: No, it’s [those in a rival gang]. They used to call me as “Big Daddy”, ‘cause I used to, like, take care of ‘em and stuff.

Though conflicting in nature, Nick’s deviant case status appears largely conditioned by his perceived reputation in and around his neighborhood as well as his long-established associations with an assortment of nearby gangs and their affiliates.

As demonstrated, the out-group subtheme of peer violence was an expressed concern for the vast majority of the interviewed Texas youth. Discussions of both forms of violence and insecurity were comparable across respondents; particularly as both were

disproportionately (or 92% respectively) discussed by gang-involved youth. In sum, youth demonstrated objective forms of inter-group violence through discussions of group fights with and without the interviewee. Youth who discussed concerns over insecurity described their gang/group in terms of affording them a sense of supportive protection while paradoxically demonstrating how their group status wrought some level of threatening and harassing attention from others.

Table 37: Violence in the Peer Domain – Inter-group by Sex, DFW Community

	Total	_Objective (N = 21)		_Subjective (N = 21)	
		Fights w/	Fights w/o	Protect	Threats ⁷¹
	24	13	19	20	14
<i>Male</i>	18	12	15	16	13
<i>Female</i>	6	1	4	4	1

In addition to the importance of gang status, patterned differences in the prevalence of out-group violence emerged across gender lines (see Table 37) – just as was found within the Nashville site. While female respondents were only slightly underrepresented in the whole of the inter-group subtheme of peer violence (i.e., 6 or 25% of out-group violence versus 11 or 31% of Texas interviewees), they were grossly underrepresented within each form of discussed out-group violence. Within the Texas site, the proportion of females who discussed specific instances of out-group violence ranged from a high of 21 percent (fights without the interviewee) to a low of just one girl who experienced threats and harassment from other gangs and gang-like groups. As was demonstrated earlier, four female respondents also discussed the sense of protection afforded by their gang/group in uniquely gendered terms (i.e., that the young men of the

⁷¹ Table 37 Key: Objective Violence: Fights w/ = Fights with the Respondent and Fights w/o = Fights without the Respondent; Subjective Violence: Protect = Sense of Group Protection and Threats = Threatened by Others

group would protect the young women from unwanted sexual advances or harassment from outside group members).

Intra-group Peer Violence

The Nashville Site

Youth within both cities also discussed instances of conflict and violence within their own peer group. The 14 Nashville respondents who discussed within group or intra-group violence were relatively balanced in terms of sex (i.e., 8 or 57% males) and race/ethnicity (i.e., 6 white, 4 black, and 4 Hispanic youth) (see Table 32). Just as was found within the out-group subtheme, intra-group conflict and violence remained disproportionately discussed by gang-involved youth (12 or 86%).

The vast majority of these youth (12 or 86%) described objective forms of conflict and violence (e.g., arguments as well as picking on and/or playing around with each other). Over half of these youth also discussed more subjective issues within their peer group (i.e., feeling that their peers picked on or otherwise played around “too much” as well as feeling pressured to spend time with those in the group). Importantly, all seven of the youth who also discussed subjective peer issues were classified as formerly gang-involved; including four former gang members, one former affiliate, and two former Eurogangsters (see Table 38).

Table 38: Violence in the Peer Domain – Intra-group, Nashville

	Total	Objective (N = 12)		Subjective (N = 7) ⁷²	
		Arguments	Pick/Play	Too Much	Pressure
	14	7	6	5	3
<i>Gang</i>	12	5	6	5	3
<i>CRS</i>	2	2	-	-	-

⁷² Table 38 Key: Objective Violence: Arguments = Arguments and Pick/Play = Picking on/Playing with Peers; Subjective Violence: Too Much = Picking on/Playing with Peers Too Much and Pressure = Peer Pressure; Status: Gang = Gang Status youth and CRS = ‘Conflicting Retrospective Status’ youth

Discussions of objective experiences with conflict and violence within group were varied, both in type and seriousness. Arguments between friends were one of the most commonly discussed manifestations of intra-group conflict. Most recalled instances in which conflicts had occurred between fellow group members. These conflicts or arguments typically stemmed from pedestrian concerns (e.g., who to hang out with and what to do when hanging out). Victoria – a former gang affiliate – explained how the young men in her group would argue and fight over her and the other young women in her group in a territorially manner. These sort of conventional adolescent concerns were demonstrated by two ‘conflicting retrospective status’ classified youth. Brandi explained that “some [of my friends] don’t like who I hang around with.” In fact, it was Brandi’s almost compulsive collecting of friendships – which appeared to have been wrought by an obsessive desire for “everybody to know” her – and the fact that she didn’t “wanna lose any friends” which often times “cause[d] a lot of animosity” between her and some of her friends. Speaking to disagreements over what activities the group would engage in, Stephan noted how he used to “kind of clash with” one particular member of his former group because of “the whole leadership thing...[like] deciding what game we were gonna play. What we’re gonna do.” Most recalled that their peer groups got along pretty well and when pedestrian conflicts/arguments emerged, they were largely able to settle the disagreements amicably. Matt – a former protective group member – demonstrated this when he explained “if someone did, like, something that would piss the other off – they’d argue, but they wouldn’t, like, fight about it.”

While certainly less severe, many of the Nashville youth discussed meaningful experiences which were centered on within group “play” or banter. Many gang-involved

youth (N = 6) described how some members of their gang would “pick on”, “mess with”, and “play with” other members. Evan explained how his former Eurogang “clique” would “give [new members] a hard time...[T]hey make fun of you” and were “mean [in a] joking way.” Both Mary and Evan described how they and others in their former Eurogang groups would “mess” with each other; Mary stated that they would “just mess around – jump on each other. We call it “glomping” – it’s when you run up and jump on somebody and tackle hug them.” Evan furthered that “[t]here’s always one person in the group that’s...kinda, like, on the bottom basically – just in the way you treat ‘em” and that this lowly position “was kinda cycled between a select few in the former group.” Similar to Mary’s description of the practice of “glomping,” Evan referenced “the whole, uh, random holler your name and you’re attacked thing”:

[Members of the Eurogang group] were just randomly hollering uh... What was it? [One friend] and a couple other people just randomly hollered just, like, a random... “‘Somebody’ in the room?” Then it would, just everybody would just, like, run after them and just jump on them basically.

When asked what she meant by stating that people in her middle school gang would “play” with each other, Savannah clarified “[l]ike they all wanna poke you ‘till...[or] they’ll take your phone and start runnin’ and then they’ll bring it back to you and they see you get mad.” Likewise, Rick explained that his middle school “clique” would “play around” with each other; by this he was referring to “random confrontations – it’s nothing serious” where other middle school boys in his group would “usually [be] hitting and wrestling” each other.

While this sort of playful banter was typically discussed as having occurred between same sex peers (e.g., males “playing” with other males), Haley and Mary both

discussed this sort of behavior as having been more sexual in nature within their former groups. Haley explained how she and the other girls in her former group “were kinda mean” to the boys “because the boys would, like, always pick on the girls a little bit ‘cause, I guess, they liked each other.” Mary further noted that intra-group “[sexual] intimacy....was the biggest problem” that dogged her former Eurogang group. This was particularly the case “when certain, like, couples would breakup or someone would cheat on someone with another person from the group.”

Mary’s experiences were particularly distinctive compared to other gang-involved girls interviewed in Nashville. She explained in rich detail how the boys were sexually inappropriate and exploitive of her and other girls in their Eurogang group. When first asked how her friends would have described her in early high school, she exclaimed “[a] prude!” Further along in the interview, however, she acknowledged that her friends would have described her as “[f]lirtatious,” because “we all flirted with each other. That’s how we just got, got through our day. That’s how we got along.” She also went on to explain in greater detail how the males in the group were also sexually inappropriate and opportunistic of her and others (see Miller, 2008). Asked how the boys treated the girls in the group, she continued:

Mary: Um...not respectfully. They would like throw them over their shoulders. They’d spank them and stuff like that. But the girls were really submissive to it and didn’t mind too much. ‘Cause that’s just how it was. It wasn’t like...they weren’t...the girls were accepting towards it. And they didn’t fight back against it.

Mike: Okay, why do you think the girls were so submissive?

Mary: Probably because they came from broken families or they haven’t had any real male, um, interactions in their lives. Or their fathers had been abusive or something.

Mike: Okay. And was this something that you experienced in the group – that this was a problem for you as well – or was this just for the other girls in the group?

Mary: Mmm... Um... I didn't, hmm...a problem. I didn't see it as a problem – that's just the way things worked at the school. Everyone was really touchy and lovey. And in this group it was just more like sexual lovey, I guess. So I did experience getting picked up, being slapped on the butt, um, things like that. But nothing that I wasn't consensual with.

Mike: Okay. But you, overall you think that you were treated the same way as the other girls were and that guys were treating them with less respect?

Mary: Mmm. Uh, I was not treated exactly like the other girls. Because they would go off and hookup [euphemism] and I wouldn't be sexually, um, I would not go off and have sexual intercourse with any of these guys.

Though Mary's experiences were certainly atypical in their overtly sexual and provocative nature, larger concerns surrounding "play" and banter were not uncommon across Nashville interviewees.

Dovetailing sexual and non-sexual issues of "play" and banter within the gang group, each youth who raised such a concern (except Haley) went on to assert that their peers, at times, went "too far". Savannah explained that members of her middle school gang would "sometimes...play too much and you'd get mad." Rick also noted his group would "all play around....[and] somebody would [eventually] go too far. Make me mad or something." While within group "play" and banter may be initially viewed as normal and inconsequential, some recalled instances in which they assessed that the banter simply had gone too far.

While noted by only a few former gang-involved youth, Aaron, Yesenia, and Tevin each discussed instances in which they felt subjectively pressured to spend a greater amount of time with their gang friends. During their period of gang involvement, both Yesenia and Tevin indicated that they actively sought to keep some distance between themselves and their gangs. This attempted distancing occurred in spite of

discussions of omnipresent pressure to spend their time outside of school with their associates; Tevin noted “I kinda distanced myself on the weekends. ‘Cause that like *my* time.” Aaron explained that while his gang friends would call him a lot to say “Aye, you wanna hang out?,” his parents were seemingly strict and “never allowed [him] to go out with them.”

Amber: And did the gang members, did they get upset that you...?

Aaron: Yeah I had, you know – I received a few calls from them, you know, sayin’ like, “You don’t hang out with us. You’re not down” or whatever, but you know I couldn’t. You know I have to follow my parents’ rule.

Amber: So how, how did they handle that then?

Aaron: Uh I, I just, they couldn’t do nothin’ about it.

Amber: So they didn’t, like, get angry? There was no...?

Aaron: Yeah, I mean they got angry, [and] the next, next day be like, “Ah, I see how it is – you not hang out with me.”

Though experiencing pressure to spend a greater amount of time with the gang was only discussed by a few, Aaron’s account fittingly demonstrates the subjective nature of ‘experiencing’ and ‘interpreting’ within group peer pressure.

Conflict and violence within the peer group subtheme was discussed by roughly half of all Nashville interviewees. Those with discussed experiences of intra-group violence were predominately gang-involved. Importantly, gang-involved respondents were the most likely to discuss objective forms of violence (i.e., within group arguments, within group banter, as well as organized rules and consequences for violations) and exclusively discussed more subjective forms of violence (i.e., expressing that within gang “play” or banter went “too far” as well as having felt pressured to hang out with their gang peers). Unlike in discussions of out-group violence, the only identifiable gendered pattern was in regard to within group “play.” This was particularly well demonstrated by Mary’s account of her former Eurogang group, but was also witnessed – albeit to a lesser

extent – in Haley and Savannah’s discussions of “play” between male and female group members.

The Dallas-Fort Worth Area Community Site

Relative to the experiences of interviewed Nashville youth (19 or 73%), conflict and violence in the within peer group subtheme was discussed with much greater regularity in the Texas site. The 27 youth were mostly male (19 or 70%) and were overwhelmingly of minority and gang-involved status (25 or 90%, each) (see Table 33). The vast majority (24 or 89%) described experiences with objective forms of intra-group conflict and violence (e.g., picking on and/or playing around with each other as well as arguments and fights). A large majority (22 or 82%) also provided accounts of more subjective issues within their peer group (i.e., feeling that their fellows picked on them or played around “too much” as well as feeling pressured to spend time with their peers or conform to their behavior). All told, a number (5 or 19%) exclusively discussed objective forms, a few discussed only subjective forms, and the remaining youth (19 or 70%) discussed both objective and subjective forms of intra-group violence. Importantly, respondents who discussed subjective forms of conflict were almost exclusively classified as gang-involved (21 or 96%); this included five gang members, 14 affiliates, as well as one protective group and Eurogang member. Of the pair of ‘conflicting retrospective status’ youth in the within group subtheme, Jalen alone discussed both forms of intra-group conflict and violence (see Table 39).

Just as in Nashville, objective experiences of within group conflict and violence were varied by type and severity. As would be expected, the most commonly discussed forms were less serious arguments as well as playful banter. A substantial majority (18 or

Table 39: Violence in the Peer Domain – Intra-group, DFW Community

	Total	Objective (N = 24)			Subjective (N = 22) ⁷³	
		Arguments	Pick/Play	Fight	Too Much	Pressure
	27	18	15	13	17	18

<i>Gang</i>	25	16	15	12	16	17
<i>CRS</i>	2	2	-	1	1	1

75%) of the Texas youth described conflicts and other arguments within their group of friends. Speaking of his middle school gang, Raul explained that “everyone got along. We had some stupid arguments, but we all got along the next day.” Describing how he and his former protective group members had gotten along in middle school, Jarvis noted:

Like brothers...I’m saying every now and [then], um, like all brothers – we fight....I’m saying we ridicule. We might joke around. We might fight. We might toss around a little bit, but....the thing I like about being a guy, I guess, is that, uh, we can like have a fight one day and then everything’s fine the next [day]...There’s not that, there’s none of that begrudging the other people they, um, I’m sorry to say that women can do [that].

In an aptly parsimonious account, Jalen concurred by suggesting that even “good friends” will sometimes “get into a disagreement.”

Several (N = 5) described how conflicts and arguments within their group often stemmed from romantic entanglements and jealousy. Ethan recalled one such instance where he and a friend had a falling out:

[W]e were super cool – we used to say “We were brothers.” But then he started messin’ around with this female. Started tell, tellin’ her that I was cheatin’ on her. Like, “Come on bro! You said ‘We were homeboys’[Y]ou tellin’ my girl I’m messin’ around with another girl? Come on!”So he was out the crew.

Others described how members of their group became jealous over the romantic attention that particular individuals would receive. Katelyn explained that the girls in her group

⁷³ Table 39 Key: Objective Violence: Arguments = Arguments, Pick/Play = Playing with/Picking on Peers, and Fight = Peer Fighting; Subjective Violence: Too Much = Playing with/Picking on Peers Too Much and Pressure = Peer Pressure; Status: Gang = Gang Status youth and CRS = ‘Conflicting Retrospective Status’ youth

would sometimes fight one another “if they’re trying to talk to the guy they wanted to talk to.” Alexis also noted “me and my other girlfriends would get jealous” if the young men in the group would “start talking to [other] new girls.” This jealousy and conflict over the romantic attention of one’s peers was not exclusively discussed by female respondents; Andrew expounded that “sometimes they get jealous” of the attention a group member received from a female member “and get into fights.” Jalen similarly expressed how his dating a friend’s ex-girlfriend – at the time of the interview – was a habitual source of conflict within his group of friends.

A number (N = 6) also noted how intra-group arguments were spurred by “drama”. This “drama” was typically centered on within group disagreements as well as a belief that friendships had been somehow betrayed. Omar explained that “most of the times we wouldn’t agree with” the other cliques within the larger gang and Taylor continued that his friends “started getting into it more” when “everybody switched up” their gang affiliations. Others described having felt a sense of betrayal because of their friends’ actions. Erica noted that “I trusted somebody and then they, they turned their back on me” and Christina explained how this sort of problem often left her feeling “kinda, like, betrayed.” Alexis, perhaps, best demonstrated issues of within group arguments and drama.

[O]nce I started hanging out with more [of the] girls [in the group] – it was more drama. And it was more, like, dramatic and emotional: “She looked at me funny.” – “No.”; “She mugged you.” – “No, she didn’t.”;“Are you gonna go sit with her?”; “Are you gonna go talk to her?”;“Don’t talk to her.”; and “Don’t sit with her.” ... You know, it was always that kinda thing.

For two of the interviewees, within group drama was spurred by the respondents voicing their personal disapproval of their friends’ behavior. Since she “didn’t consider [drugs] a

fun thing to do,” Kristen explained how she had “tried to talk to” her friends about her disapproval “but they just didn’t care what I had to say.” Erica similarly confronted her friends about their persistent skipping of classes – “I would tell them, “Don’t do that. That’s bad for you” or stuff like that.” Despite her well intentions, Erica’s voiced disapproval subsequently yielded within group consequences – “they would get mad at me and then they wouldn’t talk to me.”

In addition to outright arguments and conflict between group members, most (15 or 63%) noted issues surrounding “play” or banter between their friends. For 10 of these interviewees, playful banter common included talking “trash”, “mess”, or “shit” to each other. Edgar explained that “it’s [a] daily thing – we always talk trash to each other.”

Asked how group members treated each other, Sergio continued: “you know how guys are – they just like messin’ around and [trying to] score on each other. Like just makin’ fun of each other....for fun.” For a few, this kind of instigative behavior amongst friends would sometimes result in group members getting in disciplinary trouble at school.

Veronica noted “they would basically get kicked out of class.... ‘cause it would be, like, funny [to] argue with teachers and stuff” and Dalton laughingly professed “they would do something to get me mad and then I would say something – like a cuss word or I yell somethin’ – then the teacher would hear me out of all of them and I would get in trouble.”

Five of the interviewed males went on to discuss within group “play” in gendered terms – whereby the respondent and their male gang associates would playfully box or fight each other. Asked how everybody got along in his gang, Mitch noted that he and his fellows would sometimes “joke around and, like, box for fun – but never really [got] mad

at each other. It was just play fighting.” Ian also explained how he and his friends would get “drunk” and get into “friendly fight[s]” – “Like you, whenever you’re [done] fightin’ you hug and shit.” Boxing also proved to be a mechanism through which to assert dominance over others within the group. Sean explained that “we would just talk mess about each other – [about] who could whoop [or overpower/beat in a fight] who;” in an effort to demonstrate his own physical prowess, he confidently asserted that “it was only [ever] two people [in the group] that could beat me.” Describing a typical day in the gang, Reuben similarly stated: “we fight amongst ourselves....[to] [s]how each other [how] tough.... [W]e do cage matches...[in the high school] restroom – just like a rumble, but [between] your own people.”

Lastly, several discussed how other instances of within group “play” was gendered (Reuben) or more sexual in nature (Andrew, Katelyn, and Mitch). Asked how the young men treated their female peers in the gang, Reuben ambiguously stated that “we respect ‘em, but we gotta show ‘em tough love too.” The remaining youth detailed how playful banter between the boys and girls was more sexual in nature. Katelyn noted the sexualized nature of the interactions between members of her former gang; she explained that the girls would be “[t]rying to get their attention” and the boys would also be “trying to get with them.” Andrew indicated that “sometimes [the males in his gang] would like go up to ‘em and act like they were going out [or dating] and just...[start] kissing ‘em and hugging ‘em.” Asked how the girls handled this, he continued “[s]ometimes they [would] go along with it – sometimes they get frustrated and slap ‘em.”

Though the Texas respondents demonstrated how within group arguments and conflicts were generally settled through non-violent means, roughly half (13 or 54%) also discussed instances of violent exchanges between friends. Chuckling about how much of “a mess” romantic attractions were within her former group, Katelyn recalled how members of her gang would “physically fight – if they didn’t like one another or if they’re trying to talk to the [guy or girl] they wanted to talk to.” For other male respondents, friendly boxing matches between associates progressed into more mean-spirited exchanges. Most indicative of this was Ian’s account; having first described how he and his friends used to partake in “friendly fight[s]”, he later explained how the tension between friends could build exponentially over a “friendly” but protracted fight. To demonstrate this, he described one fight that he had been involved in with a friend: “we got pretty mad” at each other over the course of the fight and then “started [really] fighting” – so much so that another one of our “friend[’s] was like, ‘Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa! Y’all aren’t gonna do this like this. Put on the [boxing] gloves.’”

Asked whether everybody in his group got along, Dalton similarly replied “[n]ah” – “fights would happen....once every two [to] three weeks” because someone would “want to be, like, a leader,” usurp authority, and “tell us [all] what to do.” He explained that the normal progression of playful banter to physical fights would be: “call each other names and stuff,” then “we fight and I beat you up or whatever,” then “we would still be friends, but like, like the leader [or winner of the fight] would go up” a level within the group. Once a person had proven physical superiority over another, “it would mean, like, ‘Don’t mess with [that person] no more.’”

Additionally, the vast majority of Texas youth (22 or 82%) described more subjective issues within their group (i.e., feeling that their friends picked on them or played around “too much” as well as feeling pressured to spend time with their peers or conform to their behavior). As was previously noted towards the start of the chapter, the overwhelming majority (19 or 86%) of those youth discussed both forms of intra-group conflict; the three remaining respondents exclusively discussed within group conflict in a subjective manner. Also, those who discussed subjective within group concerns were almost entirely gang-involved (21 or 96%).⁷⁴

The vast majority (18 or 82%) of youth who discussed subjective issues within their group described having felt “pressured” to either conform to their peers’ behavior or spend a greater amount of time with them. Those who discussed feeling pressured to conform to their peers primarily referenced their peers’ delinquent behavior in a general sense (11 or 61%). Youth described having felt pressured to engage in a range of delinquent behavior alongside their peers; ranging from low level delinquency and status offenses (e.g., vandalism, skipping classes or school, and just “being bad” in general) to more serious property and violent crimes (e.g., breaking and entering as well as burglarizing homes or commercial buildings, “car hopping” – or stealing from within unlocked vehicles, running and dealing drugs, as well as auto theft). Though she initially enjoyed the opportunities to “leave” school with her gang associates and go “to a park or to an apartment” to “listen to music and just chill,” Mariah later noted that this caused her to “get in trouble [with] my mom” and viewed it as the primary reason “why I failed” the 10th grade. After she got in trouble with her mother, “I would go to school – [but] if I go

⁷⁴ Only Jalen – classified as a ‘conflicting retrospective status’ youth – discussed any subjective instances of within group conflicts or pressure.

to my classes” then her friends would “get mad at me and be like, “Oh, well [you] can’t be with [or hang out with us while at school].”....They would, like, just leave me and they would go their own way.” Alexis also explained how she felt pressured by some of her former gang girlfriends because of within gang conflicts. She described this sense of within group pressure by noting how some in her gang would say to her: “Are you gonna go sit with her [at school]?” “Are you gonna go talk to her?” – “Don’t talk to her.,” and “Don’t sit with her.”

Also, many (7 or 39%) discussed feeling pressured to approve of as well as conform to their peers’ substance use. Speaking of her former affiliates, Gabrielle nervously explained “I’m scared. ‘Cause, like, at [her friends’] parties, like the cops tend to get [called] there and they’ll, like, get you and stuff.” Ethan noted “I had some friends [that] wanted me, me to go with them to go “hit a brew run” – go steal some alcohol from the store. Walk in there, take off runnin’ with it....And I’m like, “Nah, fuck that!”....“[D]on’t you think it woulda taste better if you’re paying for it?” ‘Cause it’s hard work paid off.” Hector – a former Eurogangster – described how his former friends “sometimes brought drinks” and would ask “You want one?” He went on to explain that “they were bad news last year – like getting too drunk....[and] go out so they do drugs.” Though he eventually “tried....weed” with them, they would often “tell me I was, like, always killing the mood” because of his typical rebuffering of offers to engage in substance use along with them.

Others similarly conceded to this pressure to use along with their peers. Manuel explained that his peers in the gang “were bad” and would “like constantly” ask “You wanna go smoke? You wanna go smoke? You wanna go smoke?” Eventually, Manuel

gave into this pressure and “they got me involved in smoking weed.” Though “[a] lot of [his gang friends] did cocaine a lot,” Mitch clarified why he “tried as hard as I could not to really get into that:”

[‘C]ause I’ve seen people just totally get the shakes from not having it. And I’ve never wanted to be that addicted, ‘cause my birth mom was an addict. So I was born addicted [to cocaine].

Sean also noted how one gang member “just told me to try” marijuana and eventually “I was like, you know, ‘Whatever – screw it.’”

A number of the gang-involved interviewees (6 or 27%) also described feeling pressured to become more involved with/committed to their gang as well as to conform to the fellows’ behavior. When asked why he repeatedly self-identified gang status on the G.R.E.A.T. Evaluation surveys, Tom – a former gang affiliate – stated that he probably did so because “when I used to hang with them” his fellows “would always say [that] I’m in [the] gang.” At the time of the interview Reuben was also an affiliate; though his brother had asked him to join the gang – “he really doesn’t try to convince me [to join] ‘cause I’m his younger brother.” While having never been formally initiated into his brother’s gang, he would often “chill with the O.G.’s – [or] Original Gangster[s]” of his affiliated group. Despite spending a lot time with the leaders or “O.G.’s,” he described the particular caution he took during these instances:

Reuben: Yeah, since I’m older [now] – [I] chill with the O.G.’s now – they, they really don’t like chillin’ with the youngsters. But since I’m older, I chill with them. But I just don’t try to talk as much, ‘cause then they’ll try to be like, try and put you in the clique...And after you say “No”, I mean they just see you as another person, but different.

Amber: Do you think since...you said “No”, they see you differently?

Reuben: Yeah. I mean, they just think you’re scared.

Likewise, Veronica noted that while “sometimes” her gang friends would try to convince her to join, she just “said “No.””

A few discussed other perceived pressures from within their gang group. Reuben noted that members “gotta show what’s up” and “they gotta put in work” for the gang.

This pressure to ‘put in work for the gang’ was echoed by Nick:

I mean if you don’t have a family, if your parents don’t care for you – the gang will feed you, give you money, they’ll buy you clothes. If you own a house – they’ll help you pay it. You just gotta do some work to it...Like, sell some weed. Sell... sell something...Just help what’s going on.

Alexis also explained that she often felt pressured to not associate with, or socially exclude, certain girls because of romantic entanglements within their gang group.

The vast majority (17 or 77%) also expressed feeling that their peers’ behavior (i.e., delinquency or play/banter) was “too much” or went “too far”. Unlike in the Nashville site, the Texas youth overwhelmingly (14 or 82%) referenced their peers’ delinquent behavior as having been excessive at times. Assessments of peers going “too far” encompassed a range of delinquent behavior, including concerns over: frequent minor delinquency or disruptive in-school behavior (N = 5), arguments and other physical fights between peers (N = 9), substance use (N = 4), as well as more serious involvement in criminal behavior (N = 3). To the point of frequent minor delinquency, Erica explained that her fellow gang members “would always [skip class and] go to the [school] restroom. And I’m...like, ‘Okay, like I’m getting tired of it.’” Asked if there was anything he disliked about his former group of friends, Jalen bemoaned:

It was only one thing. And I just didn’t...like how they talked....[when] good friends they get into a disagreement. So it’s like how they talk to the other person....[like] proly tell [someone] like, “You, you shut up.” or stuff like that.

Sean similarly described that he disliked that his former gang peers “would always get in trouble – for talkin’ or just disrupting the class” as well as “for like bigger stuff – like they would fight during school” or get caught with marijuana.

In addition to Sean, many others (N = 8) also noted how arguments and other physical fights between friends became intolerable over time. Having used “drama” as a catchall statement for arguments, “talkin’ trash”, and fighting, Taylor explained that “the drama” was the reason why he eventually “didn’t wanna be a part of it. [I] got tired of it”. Katelyn continued that “they were getting too, too crazy....and I didn’t want to be a part of that.” Several others noted how substance use within the gang group eventually became an important point of contention. In addition to her associates being “too crazy”, Katelyn also explained that “[t]hey started doing drugs, alcohol, [and] partying.” Also, Hector noted that over the past year his Eurogang-defined friends were just “getting too drunk”.

On the extreme end of severity, a few described how fellow gang members took it “too far” with their criminal involvement. Mariah explained that if one of her former gang associates had “a gun on them,” not only did she consider this “a problem” but she “wouldn’t hang out with them” because she felt “[i]t wouldn’t be safe.” Omar drew a similar line in the sand, noting that there were “[t]imes where...they’ll do stupid things and I didn’t like it. Robbing people – stuff like that. I just wasn’t, that was just never me – that stuff.”

As a founding member of his gang, Raul was uniquely situated to demonstrate the change of behavior which had occurred within his gang over time. Though the gang had formed and organized at the start of his 6th grade year (i.e., adopted the gang name and

asked people to be a part of the gang), Raul stated: “Middle school year[s] – I would not [have] considered us [to be] a gang. High school year[s] – I’m gonna have to consider us a gang now.” He explained that in the earlier years of the gang’s existence “we were just a group of friends that just named ourselves. I mean we were just little [or young]. We were just some Hispanic teens doing stupid things.” As the years passed, however, the “newer” members made a concerted effort to “make this into a *real* thing” – despite the objections of Raul and his older friends in the gang (i.e., “me and my friends were like, ‘Really, really? Come on.’”). He continued that the newer members “they get in trouble for fighting, drugs, [and] all that.” Reflecting on the present state of his gang, he mused:

Well my friends,...they also enjoyed the middle school lifestyle, our middle school lifestyle – where we just chilled...I guess now we look, I look...at what has happened to us – our little group – it’s all changed. I think [the other founding members] look at it [the] same way. I bet they look at it like, ‘Man, the name that we made... And [the newer members] just destroyed it.’They wanna live [like] what they see on TV...[W]e had a *Frankenstein* moment where we made a monster and now we’re screwed....I wanna say it’s not my problem, but at the same time I could be blamed for it – me and my friends could be blamed for it....I’m just gonna say I was there when it started [and] I’ve been there since....We just look at it as, you know what [the younger members], [if] they wanna claim it – it don’t matter. [As the older founding members] [w]e’re just gonna, we’re gonna stay ‘the originals.’

Though Raul’s account is unquestionably unique – given his ability to speak to the formation and tenure of the local gang, his perceptions of his gang associates having gone “too far” with their criminal and violent behavior remained consistent with 16 others who spoke similarly.

Additionally, two other respondents noted that gendered play and banter between fellow group members would occasionally cross the line. Having described how other boys in his gang would “go up to” the girls and try to kiss and hug them as “if they were

going out” or dating, Andrew further noted that “sometimes [the girls would] get frustrated and slap ‘em.” Mitch continued that while “I’ve always had a lot of respect for females or women” – and therefore he “didn’t really mess with them that much,” his fellow gang members were not always as chivalrous.

A few of the other [boys in the gang] would, I mean not seriously, not like seriously harass them or touch them when they didn’t want to be touched. But [they] definitely, uh, made like sexual remarks sometimes and... I mean, teenaged boys.

It is important to note that within the Texas interviews, only female interviewee – Katelyn, a 16 year old Latina and former gang affiliate – discussed more sexualized “play” or banter within her group. Though she framed this sort of sexualized exchange between the boys and girls in her gang as a problem, she failed to develop her thoughts beyond the behavior causing fights between other jealous peers (e.g., boys fighting other boys over a young woman’s attention and affection).

Whether experienced in objective or subjective form, conflict and violence between group members was discussed by the overwhelming majority of Texas youth. As was the case in Nashville, gang-involved youth almost exclusively accounted for the prevalence of the intra-group subtheme of peer violence. More specifically, of the numerous forms of conflict or violence discussed, only within group arguments was ever discussed by more than one ‘conflicting retrospective status’ interviewee. While several forms of objective subtheme violence were shared across the two sites, nearly half of all the Texas youth identified a further three forms of conflict: physical fights and victimization.

Select gendered patterns of intra-group conflict and violence were also identifiable within the site. These patterns included the finding that a few female

respondents discussed how their safety was enhanced because they believed that their male associates actively sought to insulate them and other females from unwanted sexual advances. Just as was found in Nashville, this perceived protection from out-group risks was muddled by the finding that many of the young women were at-risk for sexualized “play” or harassment by their male peers in their groups. Other forms of within group “play” were also discussed in gendered terms by several; in particular, several of the male interviewees denoted how their peers would engage in playful fights or boxing matches – but that these physical fights exclusively occurred between the young men of the group.

Conclusions

The chapter provided an overview of the prevalence and extent of violence in the peer domain – the final and second most commonly discussed thematic domain. The large majority of interviewees detailed numerous forms of peer violence within both emergent subthemes: conflict and violence between as well as within adolescent peer groups. While the pair of subthemes emerged in relative balance within each site, the proportion of each discussed by Nashville youth (i.e., out-group: 16 or 62%; within group: 14 or 54%) was notably lower than found in the Texas site (i.e., out-group: 24 or 71%; within group: 29 or 79%). Moreover, while out-group violence was most commonly identified by the Tennessee respondents, the opposite was demonstrated by the Texas interviewees. Given this, substantive differences in peer conflict and violence – within and across the out- and within group subthemes – were examined through the use of systematic comparisons (Miller, 2005) specific to site locale, gang status, and gender.

The large majority of youth discussed instances of conflict and violence within the out-group subtheme. Importantly, all but three of those who demonstrated violence in

the intra-group subtheme were gang-involved (see Tables 33 and 35). Though the Texas respondents were otherwise consistent with the demographics of their site, those who discussed out-group violence in the Nashville site included an over-representation of minority and female youth.

Within and across both sites, the large majority of youth discussed objective forms of out-group violence; in particular, most discussed instances in which their peers fought others without their presence and half also discussed personal involvement in inter-group fights. A substantial number also indicated more subjective concerns surrounding out-group violence; with most having discussed the perceived sense of protection their group afforded them and roughly half having expressed concerns over out-group threats to safety.

In addition to the importance of gang status in regard to discussions of inter-group peer violence, analysis also revealed varying gendered differences within both emergent gang cities. Female interviewees from Nashville were substantially overrepresented in the general prevalence of out-group violence relative to their overall proportion of those interviewed in the site. In particular, just under half of those who discussed fights – without being personally involved – and a sense of protection believed to have been afforded by gang or group involvement were female (see Table 35). Consistent with the gendered patterns found within more subjective forms of inter-group violence, inspection of the Texas narratives revealed that female respondents discussed the subjective sense of protection afforded by their gang/group in uniquely gendered terms (i.e., that the boys in the group would protect the girls from unwanted sexual advances or harassment from outside group members). Conversely, girls were also notably underrepresented in other

forms of out-group peer violence. Within the Texas site, girls were markedly underrepresented within each objective and subjective form of out-group violence (see Table 37). While the extent of gendered patterns varied, substantially fewer female respondents – within both sites – discussed personal involvement in gang fights as well as threats and harassment by other gang or youth groups.

A substantial number of respondents also discussed instances of conflict and violence within their own peer group. All but four who noted within group conflict and violence were classified gang-involved (see Tables 31 and 32). Though intra-group violence was discussed with much greater regularity by the Texas interviewees, the subtheme included an overrepresentation of racial/ethnic minority youth for both sites as well as a greater number of female respondents than would have been expected within the Nashville site. Of those who discussed violence within the second peer subtheme, the vast majority noted objective forms of conflict and violence (see Tables 37 and 38); overlapping forms of objective violence found across the sites included: arguments and “play” or banter between group members. The majority also discussed more subjective forms of within group violence (i.e., feeling that their peers picked/played “too much” as well as feeling pressured by those within their peer group). Notably, all but one of the interviewees who discussed subjective peer issues had been retrospectively classified as gang-involved.

Comparative analysis identified several substantive differences across the two cities in regard to the type and extent of intra-group violence. While there was considerable overlap between the sites in the forms of conflict and violence discussed, closer inspection revealed dramatically greater intra-group violence within the Dallas-

Fort Worth area community. Comparisons demonstrate that the greatest convergence occurred in regard to within group/gang “play” or banter (i.e., Nashville: 6 or 50%; Texas: 15 or 63%), arguments (i.e., Nashville: 7 or 58%; Texas: 18 or 75%), as well as the subjective assertions that peers played around “too much” (i.e., Nashville: 5 or 71%; Texas: 17 or 77%) – relative to the proportion of youth with violence in the peer domain for each respective site. Conversely, notable divergence was principally demonstrated within group physical fights which were uniquely discussed by over half of the Texas interviews.

Table 40: Violence in the Peer Domain – Intra-group by Sex, Nashville

	Total	Objective (N = 12)		Subjective (N = 7) ⁷⁵	
		Arguments	Pick/Play	Too Much	Pressure
	14	7	6	5	3
<i>Male</i>	8	4	3	3	2
<i>Female</i>	6	3	3	2	1

As was found within the out-group subtheme, analysis of youth accounts of intra-group conflict and violence identified gendered differences within both sites. Within the Nashville site, the proportion of males and females within each form of subtheme violence was relatively balanced (see Table 40). Conversely, Table 41 demonstrates that Texas girls were notably less likely to discuss almost all forms of within group conflict and violence. In addition to differences in the overall prevalence of subtheme violence, a few gendered patterns emerged within both sites. Though the lone gendered difference within the Nashville site, a number of respondents from both sites discussed within group “play” and banter in a gendered sense. More specifically, several demonstrated how within group/gang “play” was often overtly sexual in nature and was, at times, considered

⁷⁵ Table 40 Key: Objective Violence: Arguments = Arguments and Pick/Play = Picking on/Playing with Peers; Subjective Violence: Too Much = Picking on/Playing with Peers Too Much and Pressure = Peer Pressure

Table 41: Violence in the Peer Domain – Intra-group by Sex, DFW Community

	Objective (N = 24)			Subjective (N = 22)	
Total	Arguments	Pick/Play	Fight	Too Much	Pressure ⁷⁶
27	18	15	13	17	18

<i>Male</i>	19	12	12	13	12
<i>Female</i>	8	6	3	4	6

unsolicited and inappropriate by the youth. Moreover, several of the males in Texas expressed how they would engage in ‘playful’ boxing or fights with their male gang associates. Finally, discussions of the sense of protection afforded by gang peers also emerged in gendered terms in the Texas site. To this effect, three Latina interviewees⁷⁷ expressly articulated their belief that the boys of groups helped to insulate them from or minimize exposure to instances of sexualized harassment.

Whether within the inter- or intra-group subthemes, peer violence was the second most commonly discussed thematic domain which emerged across youth narratives for both emergent gang cities. On the whole, gang-involved youth dominated discussions of conflict and violence at the peer level. Comparisons across the two sites demonstrated meaningful differences in patterns of peer conflict and violence across locale and gender. In particular, the overall prevalence of youth who discussed violence in the peer domain was markedly lower in Nashville than in the Dallas-Fort Worth area community. Moreover, several forms of inter- and intra-group violence emerged uniquely within each of the sites; interviewees in Nashville discussed exposure to gang-related gun violence

⁷⁶ Table 41 Key: Objective Violence: Arguments = Arguments and Pick/Play = Picking on/Playing with Peers, and Fight = Peer Fighting; Subjective Violence: Too Much = Playing with/Picking on Peers Too Much and Pressure = Peer Pressure; Status: Gang = Gang Status youth and CRS = ‘Conflicting Retrospective Status’ youth

⁷⁷ This gendered pattern of protection was also substantiated by in the account of one young man in the site (see Footnote 69).

while the Texas youth noted instances of direct and vicarious victimization from out-group members as well as within group instances of fights and victimization.

The findings also demonstrated that accounts of out- and within group violence occasionally varied along gender lines or were discussed in gendered terms. Along with a greater proportion of female respondents having discussed their peers in terms of affording them an overall sense of safety, a few of the Texas females specifically noted this sense of safety was derived from the sense that the males in the group would insulate females from instances of unwanted sexual harassment. Issues of within group “play” or banter were also discussed in uniquely gendered terms. While only an emergent form in the Texas site, several of the interview males described how they and their male peers would playfully box or fight each other. Finally, several youth in both sites discussed how within group “play” was often overtly sexual in nature. Despite several female respondents believing that their peer groups afforded an insulating effect from out-group sexual attention and harassment, this often left them at-risk to sexualized “play” from their perceived protectors.

CHAPTER EIGHT: THE ROLE OF VIOLENCE WITHIN THE GANG TENURE

Thus far, the dissertation has provided an overview of the three domains of violence which emerged within and across the lives of self-identified gang youth. The prevalence and extent of domain specific violence, identified subthemes, and the diverse array of objective and subjective forms of violence were detailed for all 66 interviewed youth in the two emergent gang cities. Drawing from a comparative analytic approach (Miller, 2005), each chapter demonstrated and contextualized meaningful differences in youth accounts of violence across location as well as gender and gang status. The findings demonstrate that instances of violence and insecurity were commonly expressed by the vast majority of interviewed youth.⁷⁸

The preceding chapters have provided the necessary foundation for the dissertation to demonstrate violence's role within and across the lives of gang youth. Given the finding that violence was strongly associated with a youth's retrospectively classified gang status (i.e., gang-involved or conflicting retrospective status), the present chapter focuses on a restricted sample of 45 youth. Using both prospective and retrospective accounts, these 45 youth were classified as gang-involved (i.e., a gang member, affiliate, protective group member, or Eurogang-defined) and they each expressed the salience of violence proximal to their period of gang association.

In order to satisfy the dissertation's main research objectives, this chapter draws on both the qualitative narratives and quantitative survey responses of gang-involved youth. Using the youths' retrospective and prospective accounts, the extent and influence of experiences with and perceptions of violence and insecurity are presented around each

⁷⁸ Of the 66 interviews, only six conflicting retrospective status youth failed to discuss violence in any of the three domains (i.e., neighborhood school, and peer) (see chapter 4).

of the stages of membership (i.e., the period around the formation of gang ties, active involvement, as well as leaving/disengagement). Instances in which experiences and perceptions had a demonstrated effect are then used to illustrate the salient and interactive role of violence within and across the life-cycle of gang involvement.

Violence around the Formation of Gang Ties

Just as with the formation of non-gang friendships (Warr, 2002), adolescents consider a sweeping variety of motivating factors and experiences when first initiating and solidifying associations with gang-affiliated peers. Importantly, violence is often a central experience and consideration for many around the time of gang involvement (Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Esbensen et al., 1999; J. Miller, 2001; Peterson et al., 2004). As such, the chapter first focuses on instances in which perceived insecurity and experienced violence played a noticeable role around the formation of gang associations.

As demonstrated earlier (see chapters 5 and 6), the vast majority of the interviewees in the two site sample discussed concerns regarding gangs and violence within the neighborhood and school domains. Further analysis of the restricted sample of 45 gang-involved youth identified 20 respondents who conveyed the importance of conflict and violence in these domains just before initial gang interactions. These youth were relatively balanced in terms of location (i.e., Nashville: 8; Texas: 12) as well as their retrospectively classified gang status (i.e., 7 gang members, 6 affiliates, and 7 protective group members). However, the youth were almost exclusively male (19 or 95%, including only Yesenia from Nashville) and included a much greater proportion of racial and ethnic minorities (15 or 75%) relative to white interviewees. For these individuals, the period immediately preceding formation of gang associations witnessed notable

change – both in terms of feelings and assessments of insecurity or safety (i.e., fear of crime and perceptions of risk) as well as direct exposure to victimization.

Changes in assessments of safety commonly coincided with major school transitions. For twelve of the respondents, the move from elementary to middle school – in the 6th grade – brought more easily identifiable problems with violence and disorder. Another eight youth expressed similar sentiments around the time of their transition into high school. Among the discussed changes in perceptions of safety was the emergence of gangs and gang-like groups. Shaquille explained how the transition into middle school “sparked up a lil’ trend” of students claiming to be gang affiliated. Reflecting on his own experience, Ethan clarified:

Middle school changes everybody....[L]ike you go from elementary school, you know what I’m sayin’, from being a good kid...to gettin’ in middle school – then you start gang banging. Everybody start sayin’ that they’re from the ‘hood....their neighborhood, you know?...They gang bang their neighborhood.

For others, like Matt, it was upon arriving to high school that things “completely changed.” Demonstrating this change, Andrew stated “a lot of my friends that I used to hang out with from middle school – once they got into high school, they changed. Drugs changed ‘em, they started acting all hard and everything. Just getting into gangs.”

Though often associated with the perceived emergence of gangs and gang-like groups, the youth also discussed important increases in the extent of physical harassment and violence around both major school transitions. Reflecting on their middle school tenures – during which both affiliated with their protective groups, Dalton exclaimed that his school was “crazy” because it had fights every day and Jarvis recalled that “there were fights *all* the time – about 20 a week.” Similar upsurges in fights were described by

several of the youth who affiliated shortly after starting high school. Demonstrating this, Matt noted “[t]here’s a lot of fights at school” and Victoria likewise shared that “when you get to high school it’s more about violence.”

For these youth, the mounting prevalence and extent of both gang-like groups and physical violence had a particularly substantive effect on individual assessments of safety. Darius explained that the magnitude of gang precipitated violence in middle school made it “terrible” for him and other unaffiliated students. The effect of violence was such that he became increasingly “[n]ervous and not so very happy.” Jeremy likewise expressed that high school is “pretty bad”, “it sucks” because “a lot of people there make me nervous.” Asked to clarify how people at his school make him nervous, he continued:

All the fights they have. Like, supposedly a lot of them are in gangs and... Like, they even have cops tasing people at my school. Like, those fights get really bad – they have to tase them to get them off each other....And then some random [unaffiliated] people get throw into [the fights] that had nothing to do with it....[S]ome of them are fighting other gangs, but they’re also picking on [unaffiliated] people. Beating ‘em up for no reason....Like, they’ll get into fights with people who get good grades and never do anything wrong. And they’ll put it on *YouTube* for everyone [to] see it.

Sharing similar concerns, Andrew noted how gangs would “get in fights in the [high school] hall and then you get pushed around and everything. And then [the gang members] think you pushed ‘em so you might get [dragged] into the fight.” Though having never experienced this directly, he explained that it had happened to “one of my friends” – “he got punched over there in the eyebrow and...he had to get seven stitches.”

Compounding the effects of gang and gang-like group violence on individual assessments of safety were the racial and ethnic group tensions discussed in the Texas

site. Expressing that his middle school had a lot of fights, Ethan clarified that they were not exclusively “gang fights – they were mainly ‘cause of race” and ethnic conflicts – just “a lot of blacks and Mexican fights.” Raul recalled that at the very start of middle school all the new students “met in the gym.” Having initially gravitated towards demographically similar classmates, he described how he and his Hispanic peers collectively scanned the gym and “we only saw white people.” “We were scared at first, [we felt like] we don’t belong” at the school and realized, at that moment, that “we’re...literally the outsiders.” Raul subsequently described how he and the other Hispanics in his school banded together and “we made ourselves our own, our own little country, in a way. Like, we made ourselves one little group.” On the whole, the perceived threat of physical harassment – posed by gangs, gang-like groups, as well as racial/ethnic group conflicts – had a resoundingly adverse effect on these youths’ personal sense of insecurity (see Durán, 2013).

In addition to more general concerns about gangs and violence, a few discussed direct experiences with violence just before joining their gang group. In these instances, perceptions of safety were directly and adversely affected by victimization. Speaking more generally about middle school, Reuben reflected that “the first year I went there” he “got picked on” and Sergio voiced how his black classmates would try “to jump me and fight me every day – ‘cause I [am] Mexican.” Others provided more nuanced descriptions of a particular victimization and its consequential effects on their outlook and peer associations. Later in his interview, Sergio recalled “one time where they, [some gang members] corner me in the middle of the hallway” and they tried “to fight me and they would push me around.” Asked how it made him feel when the school administrators –

by his account – “just basically [told] ‘dem to stop”, he sighed “I just try [long pause] to keep goin’.” Having earlier described how gang members would pick on and beat up their unaffiliated high school classmates, Jeremy stated: “I’ve had people do that too – to me. Like, they just start callin’ me names for no reason and they’ll start throwin’ stuff at me.” He conceded that he was “pretty scared”, largely because he felt that “I can’t do anything about” the harassment or else the gang members “they might hit me.”

Exemplifying the peculiar effect of violence, Tevin and Nick each described the importance of a single victimization episode along their pathway into gang membership. At the time of his interview, Tevin was an 18 year old black male and former Tennessee gang member. Asked how he met and became involved with his gang, he described a series of harassing incidents around the start of middle school. “I was new to [middle school]” and “I was [also physically] small then”, at that time “I had, I say, prolly...eight or six guys pick on me, be picking on me – the guys that were picking on me...they were in the gang.”

[A]bout the third time [they picked on me], uh, [the group of six to eight gang members] caught me outta school...walking down [the street], um, by myself. And they said something about, they said something about “We know your sister.” So I like, “What that got to do with me?” And they said, “We know your brother too.” And I said, “What that got to do with me?” And they’s like, “You getting smart?” And I was like, “No! What that got to do with me?” So they just popped off and pushed me on the ground, started kicking me – stuff like that.

Scared and confused, he explained that “right then and there, I’m young – I didn’t know what to do. I didn’t call the police, I didn’t. I just came straight home.”

Nick – an 18 year old Latino and former gang member from Texas – also demonstrated the resounding impact of a violent, gang perpetrated incident shortly after arriving to middle school. “I was in 6th grade when this happened. And this dude – some

black guy, uh, [an] 8th grader – tried to mess with me.” Just as with Tevin, Nick also described an escalating series of harassments:

[I]t was like three days straight he was picking on me. I mean I let it slide [at first] ‘cause, I mean, I didn’t wanna fight. I didn’t want no troubles at that school. Then the last time,...the fourth day, he, like, pushed me against the lockers. And I didn’t even, I don’t like that when people push me so...

Despite that he “was little” in size and stature, Nick laughed as he let his above remark trail off. Unbeknownst to this 8th grade gang member, Nick had already been “boxing for five years.” After being pushed against the lockers, “I hit ‘em. And then he tried to swing at me back, but he put his head down [while cocking back to swing a punch at Nick] so I uppercut him....And, like, I knocked him out cold blood.” These cases demonstrate the important effect of gang precipitated violent victimization in the lives of future members. What’s more, both accounts further illustrate the often paradoxical effect of violence – seeing as how both were victimized by the gangs they would join shortly after.

Given evolving youth accounts of the increasing extent and severity of violence in their lives – most often perpetrated by gangs and other gang-like groups, several (N = 11) described how they and their peers were faced with a worryingly oversimplified decision: *avoid or join* their future gang (see Curry et al., 2014; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Spergel, 1995; Vigil, 1988). Demonstrating this, Mitch posited how changing concerns over the risks posed by gangs and gang-like groups left the unaffiliated with these two options: “They either try to get really close with [the gang members] – [p]robably [for] protection – or they try to stay completely away [from] them.” Asked how he and other students dealt with these changes in gangs and violence at school, Shaquille held that they “just stayed out their way. But if, if they didn’t – they really joined.” Andrew similarly held that “you need friends in school to survive”, “‘cause, like, some groups

they...get together and then they'll be like, 'Oh, let's go pick on them' and everything – so you have to, like, get some friends.” Reflecting on his own experiences – where violence was dramatically more pervasive and severe in his middle school, Jarvis explained:

I'm saying, in middle school [gangs are] more of a *need*. In high school,...gang affiliation is more of a *want*....Not everybody gets along [in middle school]. Kids need friends and you're always gonna have, I guess, a group of friends that will have your back more than, uh, a random other group of friends that you might of met in one class.

Jarvis' articulation of the changes witnessed at the start of middle school perhaps best encapsulates the role of violence prior to gang joining.

Overall, many of the youth (20 or 44%) conveyed the salience of issues of conflict and violence just before joining or affiliating with their gang group. The effects of violence were most keenly demonstrated by *change* in the ways which interviewees assessed, experienced, and interpreted violence and disorder. Largely coinciding with major educational transitions (i.e., middle school transition: 12; high school transition: 8), assessments of personal safety were adversely effected by perceived increases in the prevalence and extent of gangs, disorder, and physical violence – experienced both personally and vicariously – in their lives. Expressed by just under half of the 45 gang-involved interviewees, these accounts reaffirm the potentially important effect of violence in the formation of associations with gangs and gang-like groups for many. On the whole, gang ties gradually emerged as the youth discussed changes in their own exposure to violence as well as expressed worsening perceptions of disorder and their own safety.

Violence during the Period of Gang Involvement

Joining and Affiliation

Having established the importance of changing perceptions of and experiences with violence around the formation of gang associations for many, the actual process of gang joining is now traversed. Though adolescents generally affiliate through a passive and more innocuous process (Spergel, 1995; Lauger, 2012; J. Miller, 2001; Monti, 1994), research has demonstrated that a minority join through active and sometimes violent means (Curry et al., 2014; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996). Further still, many propagate the pervasive belief that gangs must have a violent joining initiation – whether or not an individual personally experienced or even vicariously witnessed others affiliating through such a process (Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Klein, 1971; Miller, 1996; 2001). Whether objectively experienced or subjectively perceived, violence can play an important role in the gang joining process.

Analysis of the 45 gang-involved narratives revealed that youth overwhelmingly (40 or 89%) attested to having joined their group through a passive and non-violent process (e.g., gradually spending more time with their gang peers as well as acting and dressing in a similar manner). Demonstrating this process of passive joining and affiliation, Manuel noted “I came in [affiliated] more like after, like, I chilled there [with them] for like two or three months straight” and Cesar met his future gang peers through mutual friends and “we just, like, started talking” and asked him to “come over and hang out and stuff.” This said, 23 respondents prospectively described their gang, at some point, as having “initiation rites” on the G.R.E.A.T. Evaluation study survey.⁷⁹ Also, 19

⁷⁹ Unless otherwise noted, consensus responses were created using youth responses during all waves of active gang involvement as well as the first wave of self-identified gang desistance.

discussed the role of violence – whether experienced, witnessed, or mythic – in the process of joining or affiliating with their gang group during their qualitative interview. These youth were relatively balanced in terms of location (i.e., Nashville: 11; Texas: 8) and gender (i.e., Male: 13; Female: 6). However, there was a greater proportion of racial and ethnic minorities (14 or 74%) relative to white interviewees and gang members (11 or 58%) relative to other retrospectively classified youth (i.e., 6 affiliates and 2 Eurogangsters).

Several conveyed their belief that the marker of a “*real* gang member” was to have joined through a violent initiation ceremony (N = 9); thereby perpetuating a component of a common myth system of gangs (Klein, 1971). Cesar asserted that joiners “they have to like fight some[one] or, like, do something bad to, like, get into the [gang] group” and Erica believed that “the ones that are [in a] gang, they have to do something for the main person” or leader. Demonstrating the expressed importance of the myth system of violence within gang-life, Raul explained how his gang group had evolved over time – “the newer ones [in the group] were like, ‘Oh no, we gotta make this into a *real* thing.’” The “younger little thugs” eventually “morphed [the gang group] into [the] *Hollywood* lifestyle, like they want to be about guns and [the] *Scarface* life” and they started practice of jumping in new members. Referencing the popular notion that girls may affiliate with gangs through sexual violence (see Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; J. Miller, 1996; 2001; Portillos, 1999), Yesenia furthered the belief that “in order” for girls “to get in it – you can roll the dice [and], I think, that [determines] how many people you have to, like, sleep with.”

Additionally, the predominance of the mythic belief of violent gang group joining clouded discussions of gang status. Because “there was like no special things” that he and his friends had to do to join or become a part of their gang, Cesar concluded that this was “[p]robably ‘cause we weren’t like a real, like, gang.” In this and other instances, the rhetoric and mythos of violence being the definitive means of joining was also used by youth to retrospectively distance themselves from earlier self-identification as a gang member on the G.R.E.A.T. Evaluation study surveys. Savannah similarly described how her friends would “act like they was in a gang, but...they weren’t certified – like, they didn’t get put in” through an initiation. Though having described himself as a “soldier” for his gang at the time, Aaron best demonstrates how the absence of such an experience was used to substantiate his assertions of non-member status.

Amber: [D]id you think you considered yourself to be a gang member?

Aaron: Yeah, I mean I was like, “Yeah, I’m a gang bang, um, member of the gang” but, you [know], I really wasn’t.

Amber: Why is that?

Aaron: Because, well gangs suppose to have rules or whatever. And if I wasn’t jumped in, you know, I wasn’t part of it. So I was just *involved* with them, I wasn’t *in* it.

The 17 year old was later asked if the normal process of affiliating and joining his early high school gang was to be “jumped in”, but he shrugged off question by noncommittally noting “I think they did, [but] I can’t remember” what happened just two years earlier.

While Aaron could not recall an instance in which a “soldier” had initiated into the gang, a dozen others described having personally witnessed at least one fellow joining through a more active or violent process (N = 12). For some, being accepted as part of the gang group was the end result of an active process (N = 8). This process included a variety of ways in which the potential new member seemingly demonstrated their

commitment to being both a friend as well as a member of the gang group. Rick explained that the girls in his middle school gang “would just rep it – the girls would just write [“our clique name”] on their arms. So [we’d] be like, “Yeah, okay – you’re in.”” Hunter recalled how his gang would “make sure you’re gonna stay” and not abandon the group “before you’re let in.” Asked how new “buddies” or “brothers” were brought into the fold, he continued:

Hunter: Come across them and meet them, I guess. And get with...the standards of being a constant [or a member] – you just had to prove you was cool and not a snitch, for one. ‘Cause [the gang] don’t want somebody that’s gonna go and tell [the police] if something goes wrong. You know? Not snitch on your brother.... You know, protect the ones you love.

Mike: Understood. And so that was, probably, the typical way that most people joined?

Hunter: Yeah, it was pretty much showing that ‘I got your back [and] I’m not gonna walk out’. [Also,] it took a little while for people to get in too. ‘Cause, you know, you had to prove it. You wasn’t [just] let in.

This process of actively demonstrating loyalty to the gang was witnessed by others as well. Discussing how he and others had affiliated, Shaquille stated that they were basically in the process of “earning [their] stripes to become gang member[s].” Often this process involved “do[ing] some work” for the gang (Nick) – this included “making a run” to deliver illicit drugs that would be sold by others (Mitch) or actively “slinging”, “hustling”, or selling drugs (Shaquille and Nick). Only Omar recalled how some prospective joiners would have to complete “a deed”. He described an instance in which he had personally helped someone successfully complete their “mission” – “I helped this guy when, when [the gang] told him that he could join...[if he would] take this, this car thing from a Cadillac. And the he had to return it to the dude [in their gang] who asked for it. And then the dude who, who asked for it would have to tell the “main guy” or

leader of the gang that he or she had satisfactorily completed the task and should be granted membership.

For one Nashville interviewee, in particular, the active process was uniquely sexualized. At the time of her interview, Mary was a 17 year old young woman who had been an active part of a Eurogang group beginning at the start of high school. She expounded on the peculiar way in which she and the other girls solidified their place in the group during the first “few weeks” of their freshman year:

Mary: I had made out [sexual euphemism] with, uh, the guys there. It was – I don’t wanna say “initiation,” but that just sorta made you more as a whole [within the group].

Mike: Okay. So...so being together with, being together romantically with other people in that group was one way of gaining some acceptance in the group?

Mary: Definitely.

Mike: Okay. And was that both guys and girls? Or was that just exclusively something that was encouraged between, like, heterosexual pairings?

Mary: Um...it was between [both the] guys and girls. But for me it was only heterosexual.

Mike: Okay. So you were atypical in that sense in gaining, um...

Mary: Mmhmm, yeah. But the other girls would make out [euphemism] with each other and stuff.

While the account does not appear altogether consistent with the popular mythic means of joining a gang group by being “sexed in” (i.e., Yesenia: “in order” for girls “to get in it – you can roll the dice”), it is clear that Mary and the other girls expedited their acceptance into the Eurogang through acts of physical intimacy – both with the boys of the group and each other (i.e., heterosexual and homosexual coupling).

Also, some described witnessing how others were required to undergo a violent rite of passage (N = 10). Tevin stated simply that his gang would “either bless you in or they beat you in.” “I’ve seen it happen”, Manuel explained, “whenever I use to go back

there a lot [to spend time with the gang] they use to, like, jump people in for like 30 seconds. Like they'll just, like, beat 'em like for 30 seconds and after that they'll be in [the] gang." Omar and Shaquille similarly recalled how they "saw stuff like that" (Omar) where new members "have to get jumped by five [members] of the gang" and "survive" for a set amount of time (Shaquille). "I saw it once", said Raul, "it was like watching UFC [Ultimate Fighting Championship mixed martial arts fights] – I first saw the first punch get thrown then I saw a bunch of kicks" by three members against the one initiate. "[E]very gang will jump you" in, Nick reflected, but the newest gang in his neighborhood was particularly "different – they'll jump you until they get tired of hittin' you." He went on to describe how he was pressured to violently initiate a new member of their gang.

[First] they asked me, then they told us, "Jump this kid, this kid in." [S]ince [the kid] didn't have the balls to fight one of our own, own comrades – [they told us], "So you have to jump him in." But our – the [gang] – we just gotta spell out the [letters of our gang's name:]. So it's, it don't really take that long. But we be hittin' 'em – like we kick 'em [too] – if they fall, you got kick 'em. They do, they gotta get back up [if they fall]. If they get back up it's better for them. They just get nothing but fists.

Even Rick – who staunchly asserted that his middle school "clique" was not a gang⁸⁰ – later conceded that in order to "get into" his gang group "you'd have to get jumped by like, by, be jumped in by...[long pause] I guess it kinda simulated, like, a gang."

Despite witnessing and conveying the sentiments that an active and sometimes violent process was routine, some of the youth expressed that they had not experienced such a process because they were unique amongst their peers (see also Miller, 1996;

⁸⁰ **Mike:** And looking back, do you think that group was at all similar to a gang?

Rick: Um, no. I, I think I gave you an answer to the question [on the G.R.E.A.T. Evaluation study survey] that I didn't fully understand. 'Cause, nobody, they didn't take the time to explain to me the survey as well....'Cause I, I marked – I think there was like, "Are you affiliated with any group?"....And I was like, "Yes." Later on realizing that, I think they was asking if I was in 'a gang.' [nervous laugh] I thought it meant like, you know, like if I belonged to a friend, like a group of friends.

2001; Miller & Glassner, 2011). Shaquille confidently asserted that he had circumnavigated the standard affiliation process – or “earning your stripes” – because he, unlike others, “was welcomed” by the members of the gang. Mary posited “I was not treated exactly like the other girls” since she, unlike the others, was a “prude!” “Because [the other girls] would go off and hookup [euphemism] and I wouldn’t be sexually, um, I would not go off and have sexual intercourse with any of these guys.” Rick similarly inferred that he didn’t have to “get in” by “hav[ing] to get jumped in by” members of his clique because “I was like the little popular kid at that school.” Personifying the narrative of exceptionality was Nick, then an 18 year old Latino from Texas. As was earlier demonstrated, he described how a series of bullying and harassing incidents culminated with a physical altercation with an older member of his future gang.

Nick: I knocked [the 8th grade gang member] out cold blood. And after that I got everybody’s respect [in the gang]....

Mike: [Y]ou stood up to him. You can clearly fight if you knocked him out.

Nick: Yeah. And that’s why the [members of that gang] liked me. And that’s why they told me, “We have your respects. We’ll have your back.”...So, I don’t know. I was like...that’s when that [I] got involved.

Later in the interview:

Mike: So, but what made you different that...I mean you mentioned that you took part in helping jump someone else in.

Nick: Yeah.

Mike: What makes you different that...?

Nick: Than others?

Mike: Yeah, than others that, that have to go through that?

Nick: I, I don’t know. I guess it was just that one fight.

Based on his own accounts, Nick’s process of entry was atypical (i.e., being invited or blessed into the gang) because of the respect he had earned by demonstrating his toughness, nerve, and aptitude for fighting.

All told, few expressed having personally joined their gang through an active process (N = 5). Evan described how he and other new members of his gang group were subjected to a hazing-like process. More established members of the Eurogang would “give you a hard time” – someone would just “random[ly] holler your name [out] and you’re attacked – everybody would just, like, run after [that new friend] and just jump on them.” Tevin indicated how he “took the vouch” for a gang member’s marijuana at a party and this led to the gang’s “overseer” telling him: “If you want a position [in the gang], you know, [you’ve] got it” and to “think about it.” After reflecting on the invitation, “I say about a month later. They called a meeting and they axed me to come. And [at the meeting] they said, ‘We gonna bless you with this flag.’ And I accepted it.”

For two of the interviewees, a violent experience was central to their process of gang affiliation. At the time of his interview, Hunter – a 16 year old white male – was still actively involved with his Nashville gang. He first met his future gang while out walking through the woods not far from his home. Coming across one another along a path, the boys ended up spending the day walking the nearby railroad tracks together and eventually exchanged phone numbers. He went on to describe the pressing nature of his very first phone call to his new acquaintances.

Hunter: Like the first time I ever needed help – they came down. [I call them on the phone and said,] “I need help!” Like, I, I [had] never called them [before]. But when I had called them for help and they came and they actually help. You kinda see that they’re gonna have your back. And then later on they’re like, “You know you’re like brother now right?” ...Like, “You’re part of it. You’re one of [us].”

Mike: So that was the point at which you really thought you were a member of that group – is [that time you called for help and] they came?

Hunter: Yeah. Mmhmm.

The unique circumstance through which he first bonded with his “brothers” demonstrates exactly how impactful friendship in the context of a violent experience can be.

Mitch – an 18 year old white male from Texas – explained that during his freshman year “I was smoking on the side of Walmart and, uh, [some of the gang’s leaders] just walked up to me and asked if they could hit [it].” Since he was “smoking a [marijuana] blunt,” he agreed “and we just started talking from there.” Gradually Mitch “started hanging out with them after school and going to parties and all that” with them over the course of “maybe two months”.

Mitch: [O]ne day they just asked me, “Hey, do you wanna join our little clique?” And I was like, “Sure.” So they actually, what’s it called? They jumped me in.

Amber: How many people?

Mitch: Just the two leaders.

Amber: Okay. What was it like to be jumped in?

Mitch: Um, [long pause] I just stood my ground, posted up and they, we just fought for about 60 seconds and they just punched me as hard as they could and if I got through it – for the 60 seconds – and didn’t fall down or anything then I was part of it.

Amber: ...[Were] you allowed to hit back or anything.

Mitch: Mhmm.

At least within his gang, the jumping in rite proved to be “the norm”. What’s more, he reasoned that the ceremony was brief was “‘cause it’s [so] extensive – they go all out” in hitting the initiate for the 60 seconds window. In stark contrast to the prevalence of violent initiations reported in earlier ethnographic studies⁸¹, Mitch remains the only youth across the two emergent gang cities to have discussed joining through a formalized jumping ceremony.

⁸¹ For example, Decker and Van Winkle (1996) reported that over 90 percent of their sample of gang members in St. Louis, Missouri had participated in an initiation ritual. More recently, Durán (2013) found that 90 percent of interviewed gang members in Denver, Colorado and Ogden, Utah personally entered through a jumping in ceremony.

This section has demonstrated the nature of objective and subjective accounts of violence in the joining and affiliation process. The predominance of joining through passive and nonviolent means identified by the present sample (40 or 89%) is consistent with the emergent literature on adolescent gangs. However, the passive association process appeared to complicate many of the youths' retrospective accounts of their status with their gang group. A number perpetuated the pervasive belief that the only measure of "real" gang membership is to have experienced a formal initiation ritual. In the absence of personal – or even vicarious – experience with a violent joining process, many concluded, in hindsight, they had never really been a "member" of their gang or that their peer group simply could not have been a gang at all.

All told, a few had personally joined through an active or violent process (e.g., being hazed, blessed, or jumped into their gang group). Despite this, a substantive minority expressed the genuine belief – whether informed by indirect experiences or mythic gang lore – that violence was a key feature of the process of gang joining. While not having personally affiliated in such a manner, a number recalled having directly witnessed or aided in an individual's joining (e.g., "repping" or "doing work for" the gang group, completing a deed or mission, or a jumping in rite). These youth, in particular, conferred that their innocuous method of joining was atypical and believed it to be due, in part, to their extraordinary standing amongst their gang peers. While passive means of entry were the lived experience of the vast majority, many still expressed violence as a potential aspect of more active pathways into gang involvement.

Active Gang Involvement

Prior research has demonstrated the pervasiveness of violence throughout the tenure of gang membership or affiliation; gang-involved youth face an increased risk of victimization from a variety of inter- and intra-gang sources. What’s more, changes in exposure to violence – whether experienced directly, vicariously, or more subjectively through perceptions of mythic gang violence – can influence individuals’ feelings and assessments of their own risk and safety during the period of active involvement (Decker, 1996; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Melde et al., 2009). Given this, the chapter builds on earlier domain-specific findings to demonstrate the prevalence and effect of violence experienced during the period of active gang involvement.

Table 42: Demographics of Youth with Violence during Gang Involvement

	Total	Sex		Race/Ethnicity			Gang Status			
		M	F	W	B	H	GM	A	PG	EG
	42	29	13	9	8	25	11	21	7	3
<i>Nash.</i>	16	10	6	7	4	5	5	6	3	2
<i>DFW</i>	26	19	7	2	4	20	6	15	4	1

As presented in chapter 7, experiences with and concerns over interpersonal conflict and violence were discussed by the vast majority of interviewees (N = 47) from both emergent gang cities (i.e., Nashville: 19 or 73%; Texas: 28 or 82%). Further analysis revealed that the extent and influence of violence was most pronounced within the restricted gang sample. All told, 42 of the 45 gang-involved youth described experiences with and expressed genuine concerns over conflict and violence during their period of active involvement (see Table 42).⁸² For these youth, newfound status within their gang group wrought a complex array of experiences with and concerns over violence.

⁸² Three youth did not explicitly discuss conflict, violence, or disorder – notably within the peer domain – during their period of gang group involvement. Each had been classified as Eurogangsters based on their

Whether in the neighborhood or in the school halls, gang-involved youth often found themselves faced with an ever-changing variety of hazards to their safety and security. What's more, the concerns and challenges of active status were often in addition to the rise in violence that many had experienced just before joining or affiliating with their gang group – demonstrated earlier in this chapter. In light of this, an expressed desire for protection remains one of the most important ways in which the role of violence was demonstrated during the tenure of gang involvement.

The Role of Protection

The importance of a desire for protection from violence was a common theme across many of the youths' accounts. Prospective responses on the G.R.E.A.T. Evaluation study surveys were one way in which violence's impact was demonstrated. At each wave, all participants were presented with a list of "good things" that possibly "would happen to you as a gang member" – whether or not they believed themselves to be a member at the time (see chapter 4). Each of the 45 youth responded to this question at the wave in which they first self-identified gang group involvement. Just over half (N = 24) selected "I would be protected" as an expected benefit of gang status.

Participants were also asked "why did you join the gang" and presented with several possible motivations. All told, 29 responded to this question at the first wave of self-identified gang group involvement.⁸³ Of these youth, ten indicated that they joined

prospective responses on the G.R.E.A.T. Evaluation study surveys. At the time of the interview, Mark (Tennessee) and Kelsey (Texas) were no longer involved with their former Eurogang group while Bill (Tennessee) still remained active with his group.

⁸³ A total of 16 youth failed to respond to the joining motivation question during the first wave of gang group involvement. It is important to note that nine had exclusively satisfied the Eurogang membership definition (i.e., had not affirmatively responded to "are you now in a gang?") and, therefore, would not have been expected to respond to the question. While four gang-involved youth would never respond to the question in any subsequent surveys, three of the youth would provide motivations at later waves.

their gang “for protection”.⁸⁴ Being motivated by the want for protection – at least in part – was further substantiated by several of the corresponding youth narratives. Finding himself “pretty scared” at his new high school, Jeremy explained how he gravitated towards his protective group because they “say [that] they ‘have my back’ at school.” Matt had also first met the members of his future protective group at the beginning of high school. While he and his “friends [would] try to, like, stay away from” the school’s gangs, they banded together and he asserted that “if, like, there’s people ganging on one friend, we’re gonna have their back.”

At the time of his interview, 16 year old Hunter was still actively involved in his Nashville gang. Around the start of his high school tenure, he serendipitously met his future gang at a point in his life when he was actively seeking out others because of a need for protection. Having described how he faced gang perpetrated risks and problems “*ev-ery-where*”, it was when members of the gang came and helped Hunter in his hour of greatest need that he realized “they’re gonna have [my] back” and he became “part of it” or “one of them” – as demonstrated earlier in the chapter. Later reflecting on the things he liked about being actively gang-involved, he continued:

Just to know that they’re always someone you can just call – need to talk. Always somebody that’s gonna, you know, have your back. It’s like another family in a way....It just, they’re always there to have your back if, you know?....I wouldn’t doubt they’re gonna have your back.

His steadfast belief that his fellows provided him with a supportive sense of protection was what he referred to as “*the best feeling.*”

⁸⁴ In rank order, the most commonly cited motivations for gang joining reported by these youth on the G.R.E.A.T. Evaluation study surveys were: “a friend was in the gang” (N = 13), “for fun (N = 11), as well as “for protection” and “for respect” (N = 10, respectively).

Beyond being motivated by a want for the expected benefits of gang group protection, many expressed lived experiences of protection during their period of active involvement. First assessed through prospective, quantitative survey responses, 27 of the respondents indicated that members of their gang “provided protection for each other” at some point over the full tenure of membership.” Though meaningfully descriptive, the corresponding qualitative interviews allowed many to further elaborate on the role of protection.

The sense of supportive protection afforded by group involvement was a common thread across the majority of gang interviews (N = 28). Many generally expressed that their peers would “have their back” (see chapter 7). Nick recalled: “We had each other’s back and stuff. So it, if you have more...people [on] your side, you won’t have troubles in the streets. But if you don’t know people at all, you’re gonna have troubles in the streets.” Others provided more illustrative examples in which protection was actively demonstrated. Cesar explained how his gang friends demonstrated their willingness to protect him from rival gangs.

There was this one time where, where I was wanting to fight someone [but there were] like ten of them [along] with him – the guy that I was gonna fight. And so they were probably about to, like, all beat me up at once, but then my friends – they had just gotten out of basketball practice, and they came out and, like, pretty much were like there for me. And they were like, “What’s going on?”

Dalton also noted one instance in which a member of his protective group “gave me [a] gun” which he used to scare off another adolescent who had been verbally and physically harassing him.

Others recalled how their gang peers demonstrated their loyalty and willingness to protect each other by actively coming to their aid. Then a 17 year old Latina from Texas,

Mariah had expounded on the multitude of gendered risks of violence in her neighborhood – you “just can’t go out at night because it’s ghetto around here. And it’s not safe.” To safeguard against these risks, she would “always walk around with, like, [my] guy friends” in her affiliated gang group if she went out “at night.” Others expressed how their gang peers came to their aid in the midst of physical confrontations. Andrew – a 16 year old Latino from Texas – recalled “one time in my freshman year” where he “had to like fight back” against the harassment of other gang member. “I face[d] ‘em head on”, but then “two other [gang members]...like try to jump me. But then some of my friends they came in and they took off their shirts and they started jumpin’ [in too].” Hunter similarly described “some altercations where [the members of his gang] need me too.” When “they said, “Help him!” – I was to help him. It wouldn’t be just [someone in the gang] saying, “Alright, you help him.” and then just watching. It was, “We need help! Jump in!”” Finally, Tevin explained that when “the younger people had an altercation with another gang, then they would call the big [or older] people and [they would go] see what’s going on.”

The sense of protection commonly afforded by active gang involvement – whether directly demonstrated or believed to exist if ever there was a need – also influenced the way in which gang youth assessed disorder, conflict, and violence in their lives (see also Melde et al., 2009). Beginning at Wave 4 – or the 8th grade, G.R.E.A.T. Evaluation study participants were asked eight questions which quantitatively assessed their fear of crime (see chapter 4). Responses were scored on a 5-point likert scale with higher values signifying greater fear (e.g., “1. not at all afraid”, “3. somewhat afraid”, “5. very afraid”). Eighteen answered these questions the wave before as well as the wave of

first self-identified gang group involvement. On the whole, youth experienced notable reductions in their subjective levels of fear at the start of their gang involvement; prior to gang joining, the mean scale score for gang youth was 2.67 (SD = 1.06) while their fear levels dropped to a mean of 2.26 (SD = 1.15) during the first wave of gang membership. The majority (N = 10) indicated lower levels of fear at the first wave of gang group involvement; for these youth, gang status was associated with nearly a full Likert point reduction in reported fear (Mn change = -0.932; Range: -0.12 to -1.75). Six noted higher levels of fear of crime; comparatively, the associated increase was notably smaller (Mn change = 0.31; Range: 0.12 to 0.50). Only Aaron and Mary reported no change in their reported levels of fear before and at the first wave of gang group involvement. The quantitative findings further substantiate claims that protection – or the sense of “collective security” afforded by one’s peers (Omar) – remains one of the most important ways in which the role of violence is expressed during the period of gang involvement (see also Melde et al., 2009).

The Role of Inter-group Violence

Though protection was a central theme within the period of active gang involvement, the role of violence cannot be fully understood without also considering that which the youth most commonly sought protection from: inter-gang group violence. The effect of gang status on individual exposure to violence was first inspected quantitatively using prospective responses on the National Evaluation study surveys (see chapter 4). Individual victimization was measured, across all six waves, using 12 items which were individually summed and used to create a frequency score (range: 0 to 121). To assess the effect of gang group involvement on victimization, individual victimization

frequencies were needed at the wave before as well as the first wave of gang involvement. Because of this, eight of the 45 youth were excluded from analysis because they had self-nominated gang status at Wave 1. The overall findings initially appear to suggest that victimization slightly increases (Mn change = 1.62) upon first report of gang involvement (Before gang status: Mn = 15.84, SD = 21.66; First wave of gang status: Mn = 17.46, SD = 23.97). After controlling for one extreme outlier⁸⁵, however, a slight decrease in victimization (Mn change = -1.70) is witnessed across the remaining 36 individuals (Before gang status: Mn = 16.28, SD 21.80; First wave of gang status: Mn = 14.58, SD = 16.62). On the whole, at the first wave of gang involvement 17 indicated decreased (Mn change = 13.36; Range: 1 to 34), 14 increased (Mn change = -14.56; Range: -1 to -62), and five with no change in victimization. This finding is contrary to most research to date (see Melde et al., 2009; Peterson et al., 2004) and is likely an artifact of the low sample size.

Change in the perceptions of crime and violence were also examined quantitatively. Perceptions of victimization risk were measured through an 8 item scale, beginning at Wave 4, with higher values signifying greater risk. Just as with the measure of fear of crime, only 18 youth provided responses both at the wave before and the wave of first gang involvement. Overall, perceived risk of victimization increased slightly (Mn change = 0.22) after self-identified gang group involvement (Before gang status: Mn = 1.83, SD = 0.88; First wave of gang status: Mn = 2.05, SD = 0.82). The demonstrated change in perceptions of risk – following self-identified gang involvement – is consistent with prior research (see Melde et al., 2009). However, closer inspection provides mixed

⁸⁵ One respondent was excluded because of the discrepancy between reported delinquency at the wave before and the first wave of self-reported gang involved. At time 1, the youth reported zero delinquency activity. At time 2, the youth circled “more than 10” for all but one of the 14 delinquency questions.

results; in sum, eight of the youth expressed elevated risk of victimization (Mn change = 0.86; Range: 0.13 to 2), six reduced risk (Mn change = -0.86; Range: -0.25 to -2), and four no change in perceived risk.

During the period of active involvement, widespread prevalence of conflict and violence between their and other youth groups was recalled by 37 (or 82%) of the gang-involved youth interviewees (see Tables 33 and 35). Many (20 or 44%) expressed genuine concerns over perceived threats of violence from other gangs and gang-like groups. Few, however, provided much insight into whether or how abstract threats affected their own fear of violent victimization. Aaron – then a 17 year old Latino from Nashville – remains one notable demonstration of this possible effect. Recalling how his affiliated group was outnumbered by rivals at his new school, he explained that “back then...I was afraid...[that a] rival gang [would] jump me”. For most, any direct effects of general concerns over the threat of violence were temporary and largely conditioned by the sense of protection afforded by active involvement.

Often, the possible influence of perceived threats was overshadowed by the role of more objectively experienced instances of inter-group violence. Prospective accounts on the G.R.E.A.T. Evaluation surveys were one means of assessing the extent of between gang violence. Pooled quantitative responses demonstrated that 27 respondents indicated that members of their gang would “get in fights with other gangs” at some point across their gang tenure. Twenty-seven also indicated having been involved in at least one “gang fight” during self-identified waves of involvement.

The corresponding interviews similarly reveal that the majority of the gang-involved youth (30 or 67%) recalled notable issues between their and other youth groups.

What's more, two-thirds of those interviewees (N = 20) went on to describe instances of conflict and violence in which they had personally been involved.⁸⁶ For these youth, retrospective accounts of inter-gang group violence included individual participation in heated arguments, relatively minor physical fights, as well as larger and more violent "brawls" between their and other gangs and gang-like groups (see chapter 7).

Despite widespread exposure to and involvement in inter-gang conflicts, only a sizable minority of respondents demonstrated the lasting effect of such violence on their gang trajectory. The 14 conferred notable experiences with violent victimization whether personally (N = 6) and/or vicariously through a close friend or family member (N = 10).⁸⁷ These youth discussed salient victimization experiences as having been brought about by, or attributed to, their involvement with their gang.

Though varying in severity, each demonstrated both the salience of the victimization as well as its occurrence within the gang context. Each of these six youth discussed how gang affiliation or membership underlined their own victimization. Cesar explained that some rival "jump me" simply because he was claiming membership at the time. Asked if he had been physically hurt in the past year, Reuben – still affiliated with his gang at the time of his interview – replied "Yeah. I was just on the wrong side just at the wrong time...I was wearing the wrong color. Like on the wrong side." What had transpired was that he had been seen wearing his gang's colors around his neighborhood. This proved problematic as the area near his home was predominately composed of rival gang members. He further explained that rival members in his neighborhood would

⁸⁶ Three of the interviewees explicitly stated that there were no instances in which their gang group peers had fought others *without* their own involvement.

⁸⁷ Omar and Reuben of Texas described having experienced violent victimization – during the period of gang involvement – both directly and vicariously.

routinely “bang” “their set” if they saw you “wearing different colors” they would “G-check” you and “they gonna end up fightin’ [you].”

Amber: So is it just a coincidence that you’re wearing [the rival gang’s color] then today?

Reuben: Oh, yeah. I dunno – it’s just my own color.

Amber: [Chuckles] Just your own color. Just...

Reuben: Yeah, I like [the rival gang’s color] ‘cause I never be seen at night. Well it’s dark – ‘cause I like dark color. I just like [it].

Though Reuben flatly denied that he was wearing the color for anything other than personal preference, the totality of his narrative account suggests this may have been either a concerted or unconscious effort to not offend – or again be victimized by – those in the gang around his home.⁸⁸

A pair also expanded upon the significance of their own involvement in physical fights between their and others gangs. Reflecting more generally, Taylor expressed frustration that his gang associates were “always in a fight” and that “they’d get me into it too.” Though Taylor characterized himself as less willing participant, Tevin was more readily involved in violent inter-gang conflicts. If “there was an altercation with another gang”, “we’ll set up where we’re gonna have...[to] duel it out. ‘Cause we didn’t want the police to get involved. We just wanted to settle it.” These accounts clearly demonstrate the potential role of victimization within the context of gang involvement.

In addition to personal experiences, several (N = 10) recalled the salience of victimizations experienced by others in their gang. Reuben – a 17 year old Latino who was, at the time, an active gang affiliate – expounded on the important role that his twin

⁸⁸ Nick – a former gang member – had similarly asserted “colors is a main thing over here” for gangs. Though explaining that “he won’t rep for [his gang] no more,” during the interview conducted on his front porch he was dubiously wearing a t-shirt and athletic shorts in the color of his former gang. When asked about this, he explained that “[i]t’s not that I wanna go back in the gang” and “I wouldn’t rep for them no more” – instead he laughingly noted “I just like the color now.”

brother's chronic exposure to violence had on his own tenure of gang involvement. From the very onset of the interview, Reuben described his brother as a "bad influence on him" – explaining that "he's always trying to, like, start stuff", "starts fights", and "get[s] in trouble with the police." Expressing "I always had to be there to back him up", this want to "have his back" was redoubled after his sibling "got jumped in" and was drawn into ever increasing involvement in inter-gang conflicts. Because they are "identical" – it "happens a lot" that people confuse the two brothers, vicarious victimizations posed a rather unique risk to Reuben. He mused "I might as well get in trouble for something that I did" rather than be targeted because "we both look alike" and "my brother bangs." Others like Mitch recalled how one of the "two leaders" of his gang "got jumped right by my mom's apartment and, um, broke ribs and all that." Perpetrated by a nearby rival gang, the leader "got jumped very, very, very severely – And that just scared the living crap out of me." The influence of this and other victimizations of his fellows fueled his assertion that gangs were "[j]ust too much drama and too much pointless violence." These accounts demonstrate the potential succession quality of violence even when experienced vicariously (see Vigil, 1988).

Others focused on the role of specific instances of violent victimization that their friends had suffered. The role of vicariously experienced violence was most clearly indicated by the four who discussed the untimely loss of a friend. Omar explained that "a very close friend" – "were friends the most.... 'cause I was always there for" him – had been "shot and killed". "I done had a lot of friends die from it [gang involvement]", said Dalton, "[o]ne was, um, durin' the [past] school year. Then one was, like, say, say about a week ago." At this point he picked up a nearby Pee Wee football team photo, pointed to

one of the players, and said “It was him.” Earlier in the interview, he had gestured to the same teammate and said “this one *was* in” the gang.

It was within the context of armed gang conflicts that most were fatally wounded. Jamal described having recently “lost an associate” who was shot and killed in “a gang mistake” – where he believed that a rival gang was “aiming for someone [else] – it was just a stray bullet” that killed his friend. “Then the week of the funeral another” friend of his was “shot in the neck.” He held that this second friend “was shot because [the victim’s younger] brother was [believed to be] the one that drove and...shot” the first victim – “so they target his brother out of everybody first....There’s just been a feud ever since.” For Jamal, the role of vicarious victimization was most pronounced following the death of his gang-involved cousin. “[L]ike just ‘cause my cousin died – I carrying on a legacy too, I carrying on a legacy too...[W]hat legacy? The legacy of that set, a street name. – I just kept on carrying on, kept on carrying on that in my head.” Also, Ethan noted that “[s]ome dude I, I had just started chillin’ with” – “he was new to [our] clique. New to the, new to the group” – only just passed away. While the recent passing of a friend was notable, Ethan and others went on to demonstrate the devastating influence that the death of a close friend or family member.

Though roughly five years his junior, Ethan explained “I had a homeboy – one of my main friends. He was like an older brother.” When Ethan was “in the 7th grade,” his friend “[g]ot shot” “in North Dallas.” Asked if it was an accidental shooting, he replied “[n]ah, it was, it was just a shootin’ ...I know that [they] were aiming for him...I think they were tryin’ to kill him.”

Yeah, I mean it was – it sucked. I’ll tell you the truth. I was, I was [in a] bad [state]. He used to always take care of me. And, uh, he used to take

me to the Jack in the Box [restaurant]... [H]e used to take me there – and I didn't have no money – he used to always buy me food... And, uh, I remember he bought me a skateboard. I would have been way better if he didn't die. 'Cause I would have had somebody – look up to him. He was real good. He was showin' me everything. Almost all the tricks [I know] – I learned from him. Then after he passed away, I just [pause] got mad. And I threw my skateboard away....And then, after that [pause] I just stopped skateboarding....It just sucks I can't skate with [him] no more.

While the loss of a close friend at such a young age is understandably traumatic, the death proved particularly hard on Ethan as he described his friend, above all things, as having been “like [the] big brother I never had.” Though few discussed the untimely and often violent death of a friend, the salience and role of this most severe form vicarious victimization cannot be overstated for those affected youth.

Within the present sample, the vast majority of the youth (37 or 82%) reaffirmed the role of perceptions of and experiences with violence from outside the gang sources. Whether subjectively perceived or actively demonstrated, the findings demonstrate the role of protection during the period of active gang involvement for the majority of interviewees. Protection's salience was demonstrated by several who identified it as motivating factor for joining/affiliation – substantiated by findings from both the prospective and retrospective data – as well as the many who expressed it as a central and expressly necessary feature of their gang experience. Despite this, gang status alone is incapable of forestalling the demonstrated rise of subjective perceptions of risks as well as experiences with fights and other violence. While members generally tolerated or were otherwise unaffected by this reality, a substantive minority (i.e., 14 youth) demonstrated that the accumulation of notable experiences with inter-gang violence – whether experienced personally or vicariously – influenced their impressions of their fellows as well as their status in the gang.

The Role of Intra-group Violence

Just as the period of involvement included a substantive amount of exposure to inter-group violence, active gang status often fails to fully insulate those involved from violence from within the gang as well. As presented earlier, intra-gang violence can include direct, vicarious, or mythic accounts of actively joining a gang through violent initiation rites. Gangs may establish rules, codes, or general expectations governing dress, behavior, and interpersonal interactions. Once involved, gangs may enforce members' and affiliates' adherence through established penalties for violations of rules or norms. Additionally, intra-gang problems may also manifest through interpersonal conflicts and harassment between members. This section demonstrates the role of intra-gang violence through a presentation of the extent of established rules and penalties as well as notable instances of conflict between gang peers – first presented in chapter 7.

On the whole, many of the youth indicated that their gang had some recognized rules or norms. The most commonly identified centered on certain expectations of dress for those involved. On the National Evaluation, 29 noted that their gang had “symbols or colors” at one or more waves during their period of involvement. What’s more, a substantive minority of interviewees (19 or 42%) further elaborated on the expected norms and importance of their gang’s color(s), style of dress, and symbols.

Most of these youth discussed how their gang/cliq ue represented or associated with one or more specific colors. Recalling what set members of her Eurogang apart from others in their high school, Mary stated “we were all wearing black. Just we looked scarier. We had piercings, things that were not as, um, normal or accepted.” Others, like Shaquille, explained that those involved with gangs would “wear [the] certain colors”

associated with their group. Omar noted that he and his fellows “wore colors and everything” and Cesar said “we would, like, dress...with, like, certain colors – mainly” one color.

For others, discussions of colors were comingled with group norms and expectations of dress. Some described how those involved would change their style of dress to mirror that of their gang peers. More generally, Hunter explained that “we kept [a] dress code” in the gang. After becoming part of their respective gangs, Aaron reflected “the next thing I know I’m, like, dressing...all baggy and stuff” and Yesenia too started wearing “baggy Dickies” pants and drew “on my eyebrows”. Asked how she and others asserted or “claimed” gang status in Nashville, both Anna and Yesenia referenced the importance of colored belts; Yesenia noted “I just wore the belt like [the other gang members] did” and Anna and her peers “would wear our little belts”. In the Texas site, Omar recalled that his gang all wore “the [same] color of shoes” and Raul also indicated how “all the new kids” in his gang “they’re just tryin’ to match up with the Nike *Cortez*” style shoes. A few (N = 4) also described how some of their peers had the gang’s name or symbol(s) tattooed on their person. Raul explained that it was becoming increasingly common for newer members of his gang to get the gang’s initials “tattoo[ed] right here on their neck.” Albeit temporary, Rick specified how he and others “repp[ed]” their middle school gang by “writ[ing] [our clique name] on our arms”.

In addition to the established norms of individual dress, 23 indicated that their gang had “specific rules or codes” on the G.R.E.A.T. Evaluation study surveys. However, no questions which directly assessed the existence of established rules and codes were included in the qualitative instrument; because of this, relatively few (N = 6) broached

the topic over the course their interview. While several discussed how their gang identified with specific colors, only a few suggested that compliance with these norms was compulsory. Shaquille expressed that his “crew” followed rules such as not being allowed to “wear certain colors” and Cesar explained that he and others in the gang “would not like, like a certain color or [a] certain [rival] gang”. The clearest demonstration of this was in the case of Alexis from Texas. Then a 17 year old Latina, she described how her compliance with her affiliates’ rules on dress was compelled: “I remember a lot of my friends, they would all wear blue. And if you wore red, then [they’d] be like, “No, get out of here. You can’t hang out with us.” “Well, I mean you always wanted to fit in. Well *I* did. *I* always wanted to fit in. So I would...wear the color.”

A few discussed a variety of other enforceable rules in their gang. Those involved in Shaquille’s “crew” “couldn’t associate with certain people” in rival gangs. You also “couldn’t say certain ‘dis words’”; for example, “you can’t say, like, “slob”...to a Blood” or ““crab” to a Crip.” Additionally, Tevin discussed several rules that if broken amounted to “a violation.”

Tevin: If, if I stopped going to school then the whole group would get on me. That’s, that’s, that’s like a violation.

Mike: So they wanted you in school?

Tevin: They wanted me in school. That was like a violation. If you didn’t get your education, that was a violation. Um... If I didn’t go to school, they’ll get on me....If you get caught. If you get – let’s say if I got caught spray painting somebody’s wall or... And the police caught me. You’ll get in trouble for that.

Mike: Okay so it’s a “V” because you got caught?

Tevin: Yeah, um. They’ll be one of your violations. And if they think you said something to the police about, you know, the specific clique....[T]alking about the group, giving names.

Because his gang was more heavily involved in the illicit substances market, Nick described how his gang had within group rules governing sales. “They [the gang] give

you a certain amount of weed,” and “if you don’t give them what’s necessary for [it], of money, then” it was a “violation.”

Once a rule violation occurred, a variety of consequences could befall the member in question. Nick recalled how he personally “used to...collect the money from everybody else” and “if they didn’t pay up with the cash that we needed” for the drugs they were supplied, then “they’ll give [that member] a job, or something bad [laughs] or something.” Laughing, Nick explained that often this “something bad” meant that “[w]e used to take care of it – [we’d] have to beat ‘em up.” Reuben stated that his gang would engage in “quarter-checking” – whereby members would “jump [a fellow clique member] if they do something wrong.” Asked what happens if a gang member violated any of these rules, Shaquille replied “the whole gang would jump” that person. Tevin shared this assertion, “You know something gonna happen to you” and that it was common that “[y]ou get beat up. You get beat up by the whole, the whole crew.” While illustrative of intra-gang enforcement of rules and norms, these accounts were seemingly unique in that violence was discussed as a formal means of obtaining compliance.

In addition to established rules and norms, chapter 7 demonstrated that a range of interpersonal issues and conflicts occurred between many of the interviewees (37 or 82%) and members of their gang group (i.e., Nashville: 12, Texas: 25). Just under half of the interviewees (N = 21) described how they and others in their gang group would get into arguments with or seemingly harass each other (Nashville: 5; Texas: 16). These arguments were typically over relatively pedestrian adolescent concerns or “drama” (i.e., who to hang out with, what to do when hanging out, as well as picking on/playing with each other) and rarely spurred violence or produced prolonged strife between members.

While disagreements between members of the same gang were mostly resolved amicably, two thirds of those youth (N = 14) also discussed how some were settled through physical fights (i.e., Nashville: 2; Texas: 12). For most of these youth, physical fights between gang friends were manifested out of romantic entanglements. Mary expressed how “[sexual] intimacy...was the biggest problem” and source of conflict within her Eurogang. Andrew recalled how the girls in his gang would “get jealous” of the attention some received from attractive boys – “they see a guy and they’re like, ‘Ah, he’s all tatted up and [has a] six-pack’”. Asked what happened next, he chuckled: “They get into fights. Right there, just pulling their hair. And then all the guys would took out their phones and [just start] recording.” Katelyn similarly expressed how the females in the gang would “physically fight...one another” typically “if they’re trying to talk to the guy they wanted to talk to”. Both reiterated that these fights largely would not have lasting group status implications; Andrew noted “the next day they [would] make up.” Katelyn too explained usually “[t]hey would eventually make up”; however, she continued “if not, then they would [either] leave the group” or “would get kicked out of the group” and “no one would associate with them.”

Others described how fights emerged quickly because of “drama” within the gang; Taylor indicated how a friend would walk up to another and declare “I heard you talkin’ trash [about] me.” “So yeah,...and then they’ll start fightin’.” Katelyn said that “sometimes’ the boys in the gang would “fight over” “someone talking stuff about another”. Having already indicated how the girls in his affiliate gang would fight each other, Andrew further noted how the male affiliates would argue, “sometimes they start pushing each other”, and would even “fight each other”. Unlike the girls in his gang, he

expressed that the boys predominately fought over drama spurred by drugs; “once they take [drugs] – they then all crazy” and “sometimes they might even get in, in a fight with you.” This proved particularly concerning for Andrew because “one of ‘em” recently “got caught – selling drugs – with a gun on the street.” He ruminated that if his friend “could pull a gun on a stranger” while under the effects of drugs, just “imagine...if *I* get him mad....I was like “Damn.””

For just a few others, physical fights between fellow gang members were less common in occurrence but were more instrumental in their nature. Having disparaged the question of whether females were treated with less respect than their male counterparts in his gang, Shaquille asserted that, if anything, girls were treated with “[m]ore respect.” “[I]f one dude say one, one harsher word or just, just came at her wrong” they would be violently penalized – “the whole gang would jump him.” Tevin similarly detailed how protracted conflicts and arguments between two gang peers were routinely handled:

Well...some of us had our falls out, you know. Some of us might, might heard something else about that specific person that was in the group. And our overseer – we call him “Boss.” Our overseer would call a meeting – we call it a “deuce” – and we all talk about it. And if they still got beef at the end of the meeting, they strap it out. They fight it out.

Initially stating “[w]e would never fight our own gang”, Nick later explained that fights between gang members would “sometimes happen – like [if] you messed with the wrong person or you did something bad that [that member] didn’t like.” Like Tevin, he further qualified this assertion by stating that if two gang members wanted to fight then they “gotta get permission from the big, big dude – [the] big throwback” or head leader of their gang. While illustrative of intra-gang enforcement of rules and norms found in

earlier ethnographic research, these accounts remain atypical in that violence was used as a more formal instrument of obtaining compliance.

The role of intra-gang group conflict and violence, however, was most strongly demonstrated through an individual's subjective interpretation of their own lived experiences. For some, witnessing or experiencing violence within their own gang led to no discussion of meaningfully adverse effects on their outlook or involvement. Jarvis reflected "we ridicule, we might joke around, we might fight, we might toss around a little bit" with each other, but "then everything's fine the next" day – we're "[l]ike brothers." Others witnessed or were involved in violence, sanctioned by their gang, against their fellow peers. Raul and two other "OG's – original gangster[s]" went "there and we were like, "Oh, we're, we're gonna watch this kid get initiated." [And] I'm like, "Well, like, what [is] he going to do? Walk across nails or something?" After witnessing "the first punch get thrown [and] then I saw a bunch of kicks. I was like, "Alright this is boring. I'm going home. You guys coming?" – We thought that it was stupid." As the only youth to have been actively jumped in from either of the two emergent gang cities, Andrew explained that the experience was "kinda exhilarating actually." "Right [after] I was jumped in – they hugged me and said, 'You're my brother now.' Like, 'We're family.'"

For others, experiences with the very same intra-gang violence were expressed as having dramatically influenced individual perceptions of and involvement in the gang. Taylor described how there were innumerable instances of "drama – people fighting each other" within his former gang. This omnipresent conflict and fighting adversely affected his outlook on gang involvement because his fellows would "ask me for advice"; more

specifically, “they call me and be like,...“Just squash [the fight]” – “when they get into fights I have to break ‘em up” – or come pick them up so they won’t fight”. What underlined his becoming “kinda get tired of everybody callin’, ax me for advice” was that “they kept putting me in the middle” of the fights. “Cause if I’m in the middle”, he reflected, if the “police get involved they gonna see who’s the, the person that’s in the middle of it and then *I* get in trouble. *They* won’t get in trouble.” Also, Manuel articulated having never advanced beyond ‘affiliate’ status in his Texas gang because of repeatedly witnessing others get initiated in the area just behind his home.

Amber: What was it like, um, seeing somebody get jumped in?...

Manuel: It was pretty bad. Like I felt bad for the person who end up having [a] black eye, or busted lip, or bleedin’ from their nose. Be nasty.

Amber: Did that kind of prevent you from – not wanting to...?

Manuel: Yeah, probably. Just seeing somebody getting’ jumped in, like I don’t, I don’t want that happen to me. – I stayed, like, my distance from ‘em.

Amber: Okay. And why do you think you did that?

Manuel: Safety and stay out of problems.

Though he “only did it a few times, three times”, Nick expressed that “[t]he only thing” he genuinely dislike during his tenure in the gang was “I didn’t like beating up [or jumping in] little kids” that “wanted to be in the group.”

Given the insular nature of gangs, it is more understandable why many expressed relative ambivalence towards less severe experiences with conflict, harassment, and violence – particularly at the hands of their fellow members. It appears, however, that in the instances in which an involved youth attains a greater understanding of how uniquely exaggerated violence is within the gang (i.e., the preponderance of conflict resolution through physical fighting) – compared to other non-gang peer groups, that initial tolerance can wane (see Vigil, 1988). Most illustrative of the within individual shift in

interpreting intra-gang group violence was a 17 year old white female from Nashville. Over the course of her interview, Mary detailed how the boys in her former Eurogang were sexually opportunistic and exploitive of her and the other girls in the group (i.e., “getting picked up [and “throwing [the girls] over their shoulders”], being slapped on the butt,” as well as pressing them to “go into another room [to] have sex” or “hookup” – see also chapter 7). Though she sensed then that much of this hyper-sexualized intra-group behavior was inappropriate, in early high school:

I didn't have anything to compare it to, so I wasn't sure that it was so bad. I thought that this was stereotypical high school behavior. But then I realized: “Whoa, hold on! Not everyone's having sex with each [other]. Not everyone is doing drugs.”...I thought I was just “a prude.” Turns out I'm just like a lot of the other[s in the] student body.

Armed with a newfound understanding of how other students in her high school interacted with and treated one another, Mary arrived at the realization that her Eurogang was “definitely not where I belong”. Whether abruptly through specific salient experiences or more gradually through a succession quality of events, the role of intra-gang group conflict and violence was central to many describing a substantive shift in their associations and interactions with the gang.

Violence during the Period of Gang Disassociation

Relative to gang joining as well as the facilitation and enhancement effects of membership on antisocial attitudes and behavior, comparatively less attention has been afforded to pathways out of gang-life. Despite this, research has demonstrated that violence can be central to all aspects of leaving (i.e., motivations for, methods of, and consequences of gang leaving). As desistance is more of a process than an event (Laub & Sampson, 2003; Giordano, Cernkovich, & Rudolph, 2002; Warr, 1993), leaving is best

understood as including de-identification and disengagement from the gang.⁸⁹ Because of this, experiences from the period of active involvement are a necessary component of the role of violence in the process of gang disassociation. This section demonstrates the particular role of violence in motivating attenuation of gang ties as well as de-identification. The section closes with a presentation of violence in the act or process of leaving and as a consequence of de-affiliation (see also Carson et al., 2013).

Table 43: Demographics of Active and Formerly Gang-Involved Youth

	Total	Sex		Race/Ethnicity				Gang Status			
		M	F	W	B	H	ME	GM	A	PG	EG
	45	31	14	10	8	25	2	11	21	7	6
<i>Active</i>	9	9	-	2	2	4	1	2	3	3	1
<i>Inactive</i>	36	22	14	8	6	21	1	9	18	4	5

For the dissertation, gang status (i.e., active involvement or inactive/former involvement) was determined through the individual’s prospective and retrospective accounts. The vast majority of the retrospectively classified gang-involved youth were no longer actively involved with their former gang (i.e., Nashville: 14; Texas: 22).⁹⁰ Table 43 presents the demographics of the restricted sample of 45 youth by current and former gang status. Twenty-five of the former gang youth had self-identified ex-member status at one or more surveys on the G.R.E.A.T. Evaluation. The remaining 11 had prospectively self-reported active involvement through Wave 6 of the quantitative study (i.e., the 2010 – 2011 school year), but each discussed inactive standing with their gang group in their summer of 2012 interview. Of the 36 formerly gang-involved interviewees,

⁸⁹ “Desistance by default” suggests that the process of gang leaving should be unconsciously fostered by structured turning points within the life-course (i.e., marriage, parenthood, and meaningful employment) (see Laub & Sampson, 2003). Still others emphasize that cognitive transformations, or shifts in thought or individual identity, are necessary to disengage from gang groups (Giordano et al., 2002; Maruna, 2001; Warr, 1993).

⁹⁰ At the time of the Gang Desistance study, nine interviewees (i.e., Nashville: 4; Texas: 5) were classified actively involved with the same peer group which they had, at some point, self-identified as a gang or Eurogang on the National Evaluation study surveys.

over two thirds (26 or 72%) demonstrated the substantive influence of violence at some point in their leaving process through their prospective survey responses or retrospective narrative account (i.e., Nashville: 11; Texas: 15).

Motivations for Leaving

To demonstrate the role of violence in motivating departure from gang-life, the dissertation draws on both sources of youth data. Given the dearth of understanding surrounding pathways out of gang-life, the G.R.E.A.T. Evaluation study began asking all former gang youth “why did you leave the gang?” at Wave 3. Youth were presented with a close-ended list of possible motivations and told to circle all that apply. To demonstrate the motivating role of violence, the responses to the five violence and disillusionment-oriented statements are reported; motivations were also subsequently classified as individually or vicariously experienced. All told, eight of the respondents indicated at least one such motivation at some point following their de-identification in the quantitative study.⁹¹ These youth were balanced in terms of their interview site, but were mostly male (5 or 63%) and – using the retrospective classifications from the Desistance Study – included slightly more former members (5 or 46%) relative to affiliates or protective group members (3 or 27%, each).

Five of the youth designated just one of the motivations and another three selected between two and four motivations. Half were motivated, in part, by having gotten in “trouble with the police.” Three held that their leaving was spurred, at least partially, because “I was hurt.” Of the eight formerly gang-involved youth, only Savannah

⁹¹ Responses to G.R.E.A.T. Evaluation study survey questions on the motivations, means, and consequences of leaving were included only for the 25 respondents who satisfied the dissertation’s requirement for former gang involvement. Responses for the remaining 20 were excluded due to prospective involvement at the time on the study.

indicated that she was motivated to leave her gang, in part, by a sense of disillusionment – “it wasn’t what I thought it was going to be” (see also Carson et al., 2013).

Furthermore, six demonstrated the important role of vicarious victimization in their own disengagement. Of these youth, four were motivated to leave, in part, because “a friend was hurt or killed” and a pair because this had happened to “a family member”.

These prospective responses are invaluable to advancing understanding of the motivating factors associated with gang desistance. As surveys were administered annually, responses were obtained shortly after gang leaving – often less than one year. Because of the temporal proximity of surveying and expressed de-identification, responses are less sensitive to issues of memory decay and retrospective interpretation. Youth were also allowed to indicate as many close-ended motivations as applied to their experience. Unfortunately, the survey instrument did not prompt ex-members to assign any rank ordering of importance if multiple motivations were indicated. The quantitative responses are further limited in that they did not afford respondents the opportunity to elaborate on each of the violence-oriented motivations; for example, it is impossible to know if leaving was motivated by a single violent event or a series of victimizations when the youth circled “I was hurt.” Despite being retrospective in nature – and therefore more sensitive to issues of memory decay and cognitive bias, the Desistance Study interviews afforded youth the opportunity to provide richer and more nuanced insight into the role of violence in their lived process of disengagement.

Narrative analysis of the 36 formerly gang-involved youth indicated that the majority (22 or 61%) expressed the importance of violence in the path to disengagement. The motivating role of violence experienced during the period of active involvement was

discussed both in terms of a gradual fatiguing effect as well as notable turning point experiences. All told, 21 discussed how their desire to leave was motivated by an accumulation of violence and a mounting sense of individual fatigue. Though varied across interviewees (i.e., the number, type, and severity of violence), the youth uniformly expressed their accumulation of violence as having been fostered, either entirely or in large part, by their involvement with their gang.

Some youth emphasized the fatiguing effect of perceptions of and experiences with inter-gang violence as central to their desire to exit the gang (N = 7). “I used to be affiliated [but] I’m not anymore”, recalled Mitch, it got to be “[j]ust too much drama and too much pointless violence.” Because of the risks inherent in inter-gang conflicts, he explained “I got out pretty fast – I just didn’t want anything to do with it anymore.” Asked what he disliked about being a member, Tevin bemoaned how the “young cats” would “start stuff with” or have “altercation[s] with another gang” then call the older members to come and sort it out. The “duel[s]” between rival gangs – or “the violent part” – “got old. It, it was no point really, [no] point of it.”

For others de-identification was influenced both by past experiences with and perceived risks of future violent conflicts between rival groups. Cesar “was only” a member of his gang “for like a few months during 6th grade.” Because “most of [his gang fellows] were in the 8th grade”, he explained how the coming end of that school year compelled him to reconsider his gang status.

Amber: How did you feel to be a part of this group?...

Cesar: I would say it made me feel tough. I guess just because I was part of something.

Amber: Okay. Did that feeling change over time?

Cesar: Uh, yeahs. Because during the end of the [school] year, I was like, ‘Everybody was going to...move on to high school. And then I’m going to be the only one [left] and [so] it’s probably just best if I stop.’

Amber:So you felt like....leaving, that would have left you, left, made you a little more vulnerable?

Cesar: Yeah.

This growing sense of disillusionment and vulnerability was also expressed by Haley: “I realized...some of them, like, they won’t ever be there for you. Like, they won’t ever, like help you out if you need help.”

Andrew: I started, like, separating myself from them, ‘cause each and every day they be like, they be getting into fights and everything. And then “One of those days”, they told me...“like if you hang out with [us then] you’re gonna get jumped too.” So I just separated myself from them.

Taylor similarly noted that he “had people tryin’ to, like, fight me ‘cause I hung with” his affiliated gang friends in Texas. He would attempt to defuse these inter-group conflicts by trying to explain “I’m not in no gang. You just, y’all fightin’ the people that I’m close to”. Despite his efforts, however, he bitterly recalled how rivals would “still come [at] me and they’d be like, “Uh, you wanna fight too?” – [I]t just make my head go crazy.” “That’s why I had to stop hangin’ around them.”

More commonly, the interviewees expressed that they grew “bored” with and “tired” of their fellow member’s behavior (N = 18). Thirteen more generally discussed mounting disdain for their peers’ disruptive and illegal behavior (e.g., disrupting or skipping school classes, “being bad”, and participating in illicit substance use). Sean explained that gang peers “they would just get in trouble at school...like a lot” – “for talking’ or just disrupting the class” as well as “fight[ing] during school [and] having weed and all that.” Recalling how her gang would constantly skip class to “go [hang out in] the restroom” together, Erica found that she was “getting tired of it.” Shaquille noted

that he disliked being part of his gang “when they just started trouble in that, um, in school.” This trouble (i.e., “argument”, “fights”, and “sellin’ drugs”) was particularly problematic because his “teachers” “they questioned me – axing me ‘Am I with them? Did I really start it? Was I in the [gang]?’” In light of this, Shaquille found that he increasing didn’t “wanna be a part of them.” Anna succinctly reflected “I just got tired of being bad. I just got tired of doing all that. Like I wanted to do good. – I just didn’t want to get in trouble anymore.”

For others, their peers’ involvement in illicit substance use became a gradual point of contention. Mary emphatically stated that the members of her Eurogang “did drugs a lot – *a lot, a lot!* They would come to school high and drunk and that’s not just something that I was interested in.” She continued:

Throughout that year I had realized that people, probably, really looked down upon [us]. They thought that, that all the girls in there were ‘sluts’. And [were] all, um, people who ‘weren’t gonna get anywhere in life’. – [Other students] wouldn’t really accept me because I’ve already been labeled – Everyone had their own little sticker,...little pin bar [or barcode that dictated where] they belonged.

Reflecting on how all-consuming their interest in getting drunk and high became, Hector found himself feeling that his Eurogang peers were simply becoming “too annoying, too boring.” Andrew remarked how it made him feel “mad [and] sad” was when “the drugs came out” because his gang friends would “turn all crazy and...might even get in a fight with you.” Katelyn similarly explained that as her affiliates’ behavior changed, so too did her desire to sustain her associations with them: “Just the fact that they were getting too, too crazy. They were getting in a lot of trouble. – They started doing drugs, alcohol, partying and that’s just, that was for me – I didn’t want to be a part of that. – So I decided to not talk to them like that anymore.”

Seven youth also discussed how the conflicts and drama between themselves and other members of their gang group became increasingly insufferable. Shaquille explained that “everybody had the days come...[when] someone try you...[to] see if you’re gonna do something – fight them back – or see if you a push-over.” Evan conceded that “the whole, uh, random holler your name and you’re attacked [by other members of the Eurogang] – that gets annoying after a while” and Rick too noted that the boys in his clique would “play around” and “someone would [inevitably] go too far [and] make me mad”. “I mean, once I saw....them starting to fight each other” as well as expelled and sent to the local alternative school, Andrew continued “I just started not hanging out with them.” Describing how “annoying” it was to have witnessed his affiliated gang harass rival gang members “they don’t like”, Manuel made a concerted effort to keep “my distance from ‘em” for his own “safety and [to] stay out of problems.”

Additionally, a number further demonstrated how specific violent events or experiences had markedly affected their willingness to sustain their gang group involvement (N = 7). Three of the Texas interviewees described how a violent event – involving one or more of their fellows – substantially affected their outlook and involvement in their gang. After finding out that “one of ‘em...got caught – selling drugs – with a gun in the street”, Andrew found that this caused him to ruminate that if “he could pull a gun on a stranger – imagine if *I* get him mad.”

Steph: Was there any event, in particular, that happened that made you stop hanging out with them?

Taylor: They had a big ‘ol riot...One boy was fightin’...and then [that] boy started losin’. So everybody else jumped in. It was a big ‘ol riot. And then other people jumped in and they all started fightin’ each other.

Steph:So that was, like, the event that made you stop wanting to hang out with that group?

Taylor: Mmhmm.

Like Taylor, Mitch also recalled the importance of a vicarious victimization on his own gang involvement. “My friend actually got, uh, got jumped right by my mom’s apartment – he got jumped, very, very, very severely....and, um, broke ribs and all that.” When asked, he agreed that the event had been a “wakeup call” for him about his continued involvement.

For a few others (N = 4), direct experiences were paramount in the disengagement process. Yesenia – a 17 year old Latina from Nashville – explained how getting suspended from high school was a turning point in her life.

[It was] before the period was, like beginning – during transition time – [members of her gang and a rival gang], like, started arguing and everything. And I just saw this one dude in the office [following that hallway conflict] and he saw my [gang colored] belt. And he was just like, “Oh, fuck [your gang]!” And I’m like, “Fuck [your gang]!” And...that’s when the...assistant principal heard me.

“After, like, I got suspended”, her parents initially “wanted to send me to an alternative school.” Though she never changed schools, she “just, like, slowly didn’t talk to them [and] focus[ed] more on school”.

Several years earlier, Omar and his six older brothers “were all, like, represent[ing] the same gang from where we grew up”. Though he explained having valued the sense of “collective security” afforded by being part of “a pretty big gang” from their former neighborhood, there was one important instance where their gang failed to have their backs. Omar recalled how a disagreement between his brother and “this guy [who] offered to do, like, his whole back tattoo” quickly escalated into a notably violent encounter. My brother “just hit the guy in the face and, like, [the other guy] came back there [with] like 30 people. You know, I had to fight them. We called people [in our

gang], but nobody showed up. So it was just us.” Following that violent encounter, he and his brothers “we distant ourselves more” from the larger gang. Hector similarly described how his Eurogang peers had failed to expeditiously come to his aid one time when “there were, like, three people beating me up.” Though they eventually “step[ed] in” and “took ‘em out”, he then “started noticing things like ‘they didn’t have my back.’”

Aaron – a 17 year old Latino from Nashville – also described the salience of a particular interaction between him and his gang peers his freshman year.

Aaron: [T]hey did jokes on me, like pranks that I didn’t really like...[L]ike they call-pranked me one time – be like, “Hey, we gonna do a drive-by [of] yo’ house.” And I was like, “Whoa, whoa!”...I hadn’t done anything.

Amber: Why would they do that?

Aaron: ‘Cause, like, it was a joke for them. ‘Cause they think it was funny. But it wasn’t for me. And that’s when I started noticing that they weren’t really the friends I was looking for.

Later the interviewer asked if anything directly led to his leaving his gang, he continued: “Um, like I said, the stuff they did, you know, prank call me – so I was like, you know, gotta stop.” In these instances, violence – when believed to have been fostered by gang involvement – served as a turning point through which these youth were able to contemplate whether it was advantageous to sustain gang ties and self-identification.

Despite the demonstrated effect of direct experiences with violence in the disengagement process, one deviant case emerged from the Nashville site. At the time of the interview, Tevin was a 17 year old black male and former gang member. While involved with his gang, he explained how he became a victim of gang-perpetrated gun violence.

[W]e had an altercation with some [rival gang] people at Walmart. Walking in the store, we see...‘em in the truck... We know, we know who they are....And they pop off – Pow! Pow! Pow! I got shot in my arm.

[Tevin pulls up his t-shirt sleeve to reveal a bullet wound scar on his lower front bicep] They call it...“a war wound”. At the time, they was planning on taking me to the hospital and stuff. [But] I say, “Nah, I’m straight.” And....just [used] some peroxide-alcohol and badge it up. But at the same time, you know, they say they gonna have to take [the bullet] out. So [later on I] went to the doctor [and] got it taken out.

When asked whether this experience influenced his later decision to leave, he rebutted “No, it wasn’t a reason for me to leave. – It was just [an unfortunate] part” of the gang experience.⁹² Paradoxically, it was having been repeatedly involved in “duel[s]” and “altercation[s] with other gang[s]” that “got old” because there “was not point [to] it really”. In addition to the fatiguing effect of inter-gang violent conflicts, Tevin also explained that “once I started getting closer to God, [I] kinda distanced myself away from the gang relation. – Basically, God distracted me away from it.”⁹³ This conflicting case further demonstrates the complex role of violence within the tenure of gang membership, especially for those who had experienced violence in several domains of their lives by early adolescence.

These findings demonstrate the substantive effect of violence in motivating movement towards the disengagement process. The majority (26 or 72%) of the present sample of 36 former gang youth indicated that their de-identification was motivated, at least in part, by issues related to conflicts and violence noted on the National Evaluation study surveys and/or within the Gang Desistance study interviews. Youth most often discussed the role of violence both in terms of slow, fatigue-inducing, accumulation of direct and vicarious victimization experiences as well as expressly momentous turning

⁹² Though not a victim himself, Nick expressed similar fatalistic views of gang-perpetrated gun violence.

Mike: If you get shot or something like that... You know, if it’s, if it’s a bad wound and you’re tired at that point. You know, you just got shot, do they let you out then? Or is it, or are they like, ‘No man, it’s, it’s, move on. It’s the next day’?

Nick: Nah, yeah. You gotta keep on. Yeah.

⁹³ While other experiences influenced he and his six older brothers’ de-identification, Omar similarly expressed that “my church probably” partially influenced his leaving.

point events. Though Tevin stands as an important deviant case, just under half of the retrospectively classified de-affiliated interviewees discussed the role of violence – whether experienced objectively/subjectively or at the inter-/intra-group level – as having contributed, entirely or in part, to their diminished willingness to remain active in their gang group.

Methods of Leaving

Having demonstrated the central role of violence in motivating the desire to de-identify, the section now presents the prevalence of violence in the process of disengagement. Similar to joining, violence – whether experienced, witnessed, or mythic – can be part of the process of gang leaving. Beginning at Wave 3, the G.R.E.A.T. Evaluation study asked all former gang youth “how did you leave the gang?” and presented five response categories. Responses were only included from the waves after the youth no longer self-reported current gang membership. Because of this restrictive approach, eligible responses were available for only eight of the youth. Five noted leaving through passive means (i.e., “I just left” and “I moved away”) and three through more active or violent methods. Each of the three active leavers were from the Texas site, Erica was the only female, and two were former members and one a former affiliate. Notably, none of the respondents indicated having “had to commit a crime” to leave. “I was allowed out by the gang leaders” was elected by both Ian and Omar. Only Erica identified “I had to fight other members of the gang (“jumped out or beaten out”).” Though the findings are illuminating, quantitative inspection of this area is limited given the restrictions placed on the data. Because of this, the corresponding qualitative

narratives – though more retrospective in design – provide the ideal means to demonstrate the role of violence in pathways to gang desistance.

Analysis of the ex-members' narrative accounts revealed that nearly all (33 or 92%) discussed having personally left their gang through a passive and non-confrontational manner. For these youth, disengagement from their gang group was sometimes fostered by the transition from middle to high school as well as other residential moves and changes in school enrollment. Sergio and his gang affiliates “just got separated – some people went to different schools and [some] went to different, um, cities.” Victoria similarly explained the dissolution of her gang group: “Well they moved. And everybody just went to different schools – We just stopped talking with each other and just we didn't plan things – like to go out [together].”

Because these transitions often limited interactions with the former group while simultaneously extending new opportunities for other friendships, the youth often found that their disengagement occurred gradually and unconsciously. “High school happened”, explained Anna, “everyone got suspended”, “expelled”, or “they went to another school or they moved – so, you know, we just didn't talk no more.” Harry demonstrated this unconscious effect of transitioning to different high schools than most of his middle school protective group. “Ninth grade [is] when we separated. Little by little we just stopped hanging out. We got to high school [and] we hang out with different people now.” At their new high schools they “made new friends” and though they would initially “call each other up to say, “Hey, let's go meet up somewhere.” and “Let's hang out for a little bit.”, he explained how it “slowly, little by little, during [the] year – it just kind of faded and stopped.”

Others discussed having left their gang by making a concerted effort to spend their time with other non-gang friends. Often the conscious decision to interact and associate with different non-gang peers was associated with school transitions or other educational milestones. It look Katelyn “about the whole [of the] 8th grade and summer to realize – those [weren’t] the kids that [I] want to be around.” After getting to high school she “just eventually started hanging out with other kids....so as that went on they just kinda pulled me away from it.” Though she had expressed having “started to [slowly] detach myself from” her Eurogang “probably mid-sophomore year”, Mary used her breakup with her boyfriend (during that year’s “Christmas break”) to “abruptly stop” involvement with her group. During the holiday break she “was able to go in a different direction” and “just went and immediately spent all my time with my new group of friends.” Starting then, she “didn’t hang out with them anymore. I wouldn’t do, I wouldn’t converse with [them] [any]more”. “It was just a new thing. Just, “*New Year, new Mary.*””

While passive disengagement was most commonly experienced within the two sites, several of youth (8 or 22%) discussed a more active process of exiting the gang. These interviewees included five former gang members and three former affiliates, only two of which were female. Whether mythic (N = 5), witnessed indirectly (N = 4), or personally experienced (N = 3), each discussed a variety of more active means through which members left their gang (e.g., asking gang leaders for permission, jumping and sexing out rites, and monetarily buying out of membership).

Five interviewees communicated their belief that mythic violence was at the core of the disengagement process. At the point of wanting to de-affiliate from his Nashville

gang, Tevin expressed genuine fear – “I thought I was gonna have to shoot somebody or kill somebody – Most gangs, they have to do, do something to get out. Like go rob somebody. Some, some gangs even shoot, shoot a family member.” Despite the fact that he had stopped hanging out with his gang and “they just left me alone,” Aaron also posited “basically if you’re in that gang [and] you wanna get out – they’ll kill you. I know they’ll kill you. For a fact.”

Amber: How do you know this for a fact?

Aaron: ... ‘Cause my friend – the one that I said that had...his parent, his dad was a gang member, but then he want to stop that and then he had to change his name. He moved to a different country because he knew that he was gonna get killed.

Describing the norms of a nearby rival gang, Nick confidently asserted that if a member of that gang were to “mess up – they’ll kill you right there.” And if they don’t kill you for your transgression, “they’ll kill some part of your family. – They’ll try to mess with your family.” Speaking to his own gang, he further explained that you had to ask the gang’s leader – “the big, big dude”, the “big throwback” – to leave and “if he says the word “No”, then he can tell anybody to kill [you] and they have to do it. If [the person told to kill the fellow member] don’t do it, then we...gotta kill him *and* the person that [was] trying to get [out].” “If you’re in it there’s several ways you can get out”, Yesenia then alluded to the practice whereby girls in the group might undergo a sexing out process of “roll[ing] the dice”.

Others moved beyond mythic accounts and recalled instances where they had directly witnessed others undergoing an active process of de-affiliation. For Katelyn, it was most common that peers were forcibly removed from the middle school gang. “[I]f nobody like them – they got kicked out” or if they didn’t “make up” after disagreement

between affiliates “then they would leave the group....they would get kicked out of the group...[and] no one would associate with them.” Nick also noted only after de-affiliation was approved by the gang’s leader could you “pay [your] way out.”

Nick: Yeah, you can buy out. But it’s, it costs a little bit of money.

Mike:Okay. would you mind me asking when ‘you could buy your way out’ – I mean, what are we talking about here?

Nick: Probably like fifteen.

Mike: Fifteen. That’s a...

Nick: \$15,000.

Mike: \$15,000! Not \$1,500?

Nick: Yeah, yeah – nah. \$1,500 – nah way. That’s a little bit. \$15,000 cash. Yeah, you gotta.

While his account would appear strongly influenced by mythic gang rhetoric, he described other friends who were also no longer active in their former gang. “The other dudes”, “they just told me” that “they just had to pay back. They just had to pay out [the] \$15,000.” Asked how people normally stopped hanging out or left the gang, Omar noted:

They would, uh, jump ‘em out. – I saw stuff like that, yeah. – When I saw it, it was three people [who] fought one guy. He couldn’t move and he couldn’t flinch. So for like three minutes...And if, if he flinches or defense, like, 30 seconds start over.

Despite that he had witnessed exiting ceremonies, Omar held that neither he nor any of his six older brothers left through a violent leaving rite because “we were really [uniquely] respected – I don’t know why, we just were.”

Finally, just three of the interviewees described having personally gone through an active, and more formalized, leaving process. Each had first approached their gang’s leader(s) and expressed their intent to leave the gang-life. As both Tevin and Nick had notably bonded with their gang’s leader, it appears that this influenced their method of de-identification. Tevin got the phone number of his gang’s “older Boss” – who had

recently “moved to Texas” – and, despite being “kinda scared to call him”, reached out and explained wanting to “distance myself away from the gang relation.”

He was like, “I’m surprised, but I’m not surprised.” And I asked and said, “Man, I want out.” – He was like, um, “Man, it’s up to you.” He said, he was like, “It’s up to me, Tevin-man. I can’t do nothing about [it]. I ain’t gonna force you into it, man.” He said he’d be forced into it, and [didn’t force] it into me in the beginning. So why would he force it now? I was like, “I appreciate that respect.” And he was like, um, “Just because you’re not in the gang, that don’t means you can’t call me and stuff like [that].” And I was like, “It’s cool. We straight. It’s cool.” – [H]e just tell me, you know, “It up to you Just look me up whenever you need, you know, need anything.”

Tevin then remarked: “And, you know, I still talk to him...I’ve been telling him, you know, “I’ve been going to church again [and] been doing right.” He, he said he ‘proud of me.’” Nick also approached his gang’s leader and “I told ‘em – “I ain’t trying to be in the game no more...If I need to pay [\$15,000], it’s alright.” But he told me ‘not to [pay].’” Instead, “the big, big dude” told him to “visit him now and then.” Similar to Tevin, Nick appeared to have developed a more meaningful friendship with his gang’s leader over his tenure of involvement; “I see him as an uncle to me, ‘cause he’s real cool.”

Mitch, perhaps, most epitomized the role of violence across the entirety of his tenure of gang membership. At the time, he was an 18 year old who had joined and left his local Texas gang in early high school. As was presented earlier, after befriending the gang over a period of weeks he was invited to join, accepted, and was subsequently “jumped in” by the clique’s two leaders. Despite being “too scared to actually” participate in much of the more severe offending his gang did – “[I] just never had the heart to do that”, he often acted as “the little guinea pig” where “they’d give me a

backpack” full of drugs and “I’d walk to where I needed to drop it off” and collect the money to bring it back.⁹⁴ He also noted that “I got out pretty fast”;

I just didn’t want anything to do with it anymore. – [O]ver time, I mean secretly you know they, if you ever went to jail they, they wouldn’t bond [or bail] you out. They would. I just kinda realized that after a while...[If you got in trouble], they wouldn’t really do anything – just it’s your problem.

After coming to this realization, “I asked to leave, um, probably the beginning of my sophomore year.”

I just, uh, I told them exactly what I felt, like “It’s just this isn’t for me. I don’t have the same love for this as y’all do.” And, um, they said, “Alright.” and, I mean, “We’re always going to respect you. – If you don’t want to [be] in here, that’s fine. You just, uh, you just can’t leave though.” And I was like, “Alright. Well do what we have to do.” – I got jumped out.

Though he felt there wasn’t genuine resentment towards him – “I mean they understood.

They don’t want anybody in the gang who doesn’t love the gang”, he also noted that

“when you get jumped out, yeah, it’s usually a bit more...” violent than the jumping in process. Unlike his earlier initiation – where he had been hit only by the two leaders,

“this time it was, like, four” members who “hit me just for a minute and then I was out.”

He reasoned that this was “[j]ust to tell you ‘Don’t get in it if you’re gonna go out –

‘cause it’s gonna hurt a lot more if, when you get out.’” Asked to compare the two

violent rites, Mitch paused for a moment and said “[i]t kinda sucked – it hurt a lot more.”

On the whole, the prospective and retrospective accounts demonstrate that passive and non-violent methods of gang group leaving are the most common for adolescents.

⁹⁴ Mitch also noted that his gang “wouldn’t let him” engage in most criminal activity because he “was too you[ng], they didn’t want me getting caught up in [that]. ‘Cause this was like guns and shootings in Dallas and not good stuff.” “It’s surprising – when you think of a gang, you think ‘Ah, they just want anybody to come [and] do their stuff.’ But they, they actually...didn’t want me getting into that yet.” In addition to his age, a substantive impediment to Mitch being given opportunities to engage in more serious criminal acts was that “I told [the members of the gang] that a close family member “was an ex-cop” – which is true. Um, [this, he believed, made them] very wary about whenever I was with my family member – very, very cautious.”

However, a number (10 or 28%) did denote – on prospective survey(s) and/or the qualitative interview – the existence and practice of more active processes of de-identification. A few drew on mythic tales of violent leaving (e.g., jumping out, sexing out, as well as having to complete a mission or kill a rival/family member). Also, some accounts were informed through instances where the youth had witnessed a friend disengage through a more active process. Of the few who personally exited through slightly more active means, more did so through petitioning their gang’s leader(s). The popularized notion of leaving through a jumping or sexing out rite remained the most infrequently tethered to objectifiable experiences. Only Mitch detailed having personally experienced gang leaving through this uniquely violent method within his retrospective qualitative interview. In contrast to earlier ethnographic research where the mythos of violent leaving was widespread, the role of violence appears notably subdued in the actual process of disengagement for this sample of youth gang leavers.

Consequences of Leaving

In addition to other gang-related forms of violence (i.e., violence during membership as well as leaving through an active and violent process), de-identification can produce an array of consequences for the leaver as well as their friends and family. Beginning at Wave 3, the G.R.E.A.T. Evaluation study asked former gang members if there were “any consequences that resulted from you leaving the gang?” Those who selected “yes” were then presented with a list of seven possible direct and vicarious repercussions. Of the 25 eligible youth, seven selected at least one adverse consequence for their leaving.⁹⁵ These youth were equally balanced in terms of location and retrospectively classified gang status (i.e., gang member or affiliate), but Savannah and

⁹⁵ Of the eligible youth, 18 did not indicate any consequences of leaving their gang.

Anna of Nashville were the only females. Four indicated just one and three others selected two or more consequences.

Using post hoc categorizations, four formerly gang-involved respondents demonstrated that disengagement produced a range of personally experienced consequences. Savannah noted that leaving had cost her the friendships she had built with their former gang peers. A pair consequently selected “I was threatened”. At the most severe end of the spectrum, a few indicated having been physically attacked following de-identification. Of these three, two had been beaten up by members of their former gang. Though it is unknown if the perpetrator(s) knew these youth had divested their status with their former gang, a pair also noted “I was beaten up by members of another gang”.

Five youth also designated how their gang leaving had wrought violent consequences for others. Nick and Savannah noted “my friends or family were threatened.” Also, three affirmed that a consequence of the actions was that “a family member was hurt or killed” and three indicated the same had happened to “a friend”. These quantitative findings are illustrative of the varied consequences experienced by youth leaving the gang. The responses cannot, however, advance understanding as to the true extent of violent consequences of gang desistance – directed towards the youth and/or their close friends and family members.

In addition to expressly stated consequences, the quantitative data also afforded the opportunity to inspect other forms of within individual changes following self-identified gang leaving. Consequential effects of de-identification were explored through within individual changes in fear of crime as well as perceptions of risk. Because the

measures were introduced at Wave 4, only 12 of the youth responded to the two scale measures both at their first wave of gang group involvement as well as after leaving. On the whole, youth expressed slight reductions in their reported fear of crime and violence following their self-identified leaving (Active gang status: Mn = 2.25, SD = 0.93; First wave of gang desistance: Mn = 2.12, SD = 0.90). More specifically, seven reported lower fear (Mn change = -0.61; Range: -0.13 to -1.52), four reported elevated fear (Mn change = 0.67; Range: 0.43 to 0.88), and one reported no change in fear. Conversely, perceived risk of victimization slightly increased (Active gang status: Mn = 1.92, SD = 0.97; First wave of gang desistance: Mn = 2.23, SD = 0.98). The majority of these youth (N = 7) indicated elevated risk after leaving; for these youth, de-identification was associated – on average – with close to a full Likert point change (Mn change = 0.84; Range: 0.13 to 2.88). Four indicated lower risk after leaving (Mn change = -0.65; Range: -0.33 to -1), but the effect was more muted. Finally, only Mitch from Texas indicated no change. The modest improvement in reported levels of fear of crime following leaving is consistent with other prior research (Melde et al., 2009). However, Melde and colleagues (2009) did not find that gang leaving was associated with worsening perceptions of victimization risk. Though informative, these quantitative findings are notably limited by their small sample size; it is therefore necessary to inspect change in subjective perceptions of and objective experiences with violence through the corresponding narrative accounts.

In light of the restricted number of eligible cases in the quantitative data, narrative accounts are paramount to a more nuanced understanding of the consequences of de-affiliation and the process of disengagement. During their qualitative interview, the vast majority (N = 26) indicated that there were no meaningfully adverse ramifications of

their de-affiliation and disengagement from their former peer group. Asked whether there were any consequences for distancing himself from his fellows, Shaquille emphatically responded “No!”

That’s the whole thing about, that’s the whole thing about my, my [affiliate] position. It just, I wasn’t, I’m not in the gang. I’m not with them, but I’m, like, technically... I was friends with....That was basically, I just chose my friends and they was just friends.

Shaquille further asserted that it was because he was only ever an “affiliate” of his gang – as opposed to being an initiated member – that it was inconsequential when he started to distance himself and “just [say] ‘Hi’ and ‘Bye’” to his former friends. Also explaining how members of his Eurogang were getting increasingly “annoying”, Hector sighed “[s]o I was like, ‘I need to start meeting new people.’ And that’s when I stopped....But they were cool with me doing that. It was cool.”

A substantive minority of interviewees did, however, discuss some direct consequences of their disengagement. The ten youth included five former gang members and former affiliates and were roughly balanced in terms of site (i.e., Nashville: 4; Texas: 6) and gender (i.e., Male: 6; Female: 4). While each denoted “consequences” of leaving, the repercussions raised were markedly less severe or violent than the closed-ended options presented on the G.R.E.A.T. Evaluation study surveys. Most indicated that their peers, at some point, became aware of their decrease in the amount of time they were spending with the gang. While this was not a consequence in and of itself, being challenged with this reality was expressed as a “bad thing” inherent in the pathway out of gang-life. During the time when Mariah was becoming increasingly dissatisfied with her former gang affiliate friends, she ended up meeting her new “homegirls” while participating in a dance performance at local “Quinceañera”. As she spent an increasing

amount of time with her new group of friends, she explained that her gang friends “felt bad ‘cause I changed friends”. She also affirmed that those in her gang got angry and “they said, ‘I forgot about them.’” As Taylor similarly distanced himself, his friends initially called him continuously to “always ask ‘Where I’m at’” and even posted “Where’s Taylor at?” on his Facebook page. Because of how badly he wanted to avoid the “drama” his “gangbanging” friends were causing, Taylor “[c]hanged my number – so they can’t, won’t call me....Like I’m out the picture – and left. – I didn’t tell them, I just left.”

A number indicated how their peers confronted them about disengaging from the gang group, but others more tactfully deflected these challenges. Kristen demonstrated this while explaining that she slowly distanced herself from her affiliates in the 9th grade.

Mike: And did they notice that you were spending less time with them?

Kristen: Yeah, ‘cause when I see them, ‘em in the bathroom – they’ll be like, be like, “Hey.” And I kinda had to say, “Hey.” They’re like, “How come you don’t talk to me no more?” And it’s like, “Oh...” You know? It’s just [try to] laugh about it. That type of thing.

Mike: So you would find a way to try to laugh it off?

Kristen: Yeah.

Mike: Did they continue to give you a hard time about it?

Kristen: No, they accepted it. Guess, I guess, um, they didn’t think of me doing [it] purposive, purposively – to not stop talking to them.

A few were able to justify their increasing lack of interactions with their gang group by referencing time spent with their significant other.

Amber: Did they ever....say, ‘Hey, why’d you stop hanging out with us?’

Manuel: Yeah. They’ll say that and be like, “What happened?” – They’ll be like, “What happened, Manuel?” [I’d say] like, “Nothin’. I just been with my girlfriend that’s all.” And they’ll be like, “Oh, that’s what’s up.”

Amber: Did they mind, do you think? They were just, like, never upset or anything?

Manuel: [No] Like they would tell me like, “You should [come] back over there – we be chillin’ a lot.” But like, “Nah, I’m good. I’m gonna stay with my girlfriend – stay at the house, [not] go out.”

Asked how her former gang friends felt when she “wasn’t even talking to them no more”, Erica explained that one “girl asked me [about it]. She like, “Did I do something to you?” I’m like, “No, I just wanna be with my boyfriend more.” And then she’s like, “Oh, okay. I understand.””

Other expressed consequences included intentionally ignoring or otherwise making interactions uncomfortable for the interviewee. Kristen clarified “when I see ‘em in the [school] hallways...they would not say ‘Hi’ to me anymore. [T]hey would just ignore me – go the other way” and Rick too noted his former “clique” members would simply “act [like] [I’m] not there.” Omar described that when he and his six older brothers would “go back” to their former gang’s neighborhood, “people were [always] just staring at us. ‘Cause....[people] recognized us. So it just shows, I guess, they take their stuff seriously.” Though he deflected most awkward questions by claiming to have been spending time with his girlfriend, Manuel ruminated “I don’t even feel comfortable goin’ back over there – ‘Cause, like, I haven’t [seen] ‘em in such a long time, I think they’ll think of me differently.”

Only two former gang members from Nashville recalled more serious and confrontational consequences of their gang desistance. As presented earlier, Aaron asserted that his de-identification was spurred, largely, by an instance in which his fellow “soldier[s]” prank called him and said “Hey, we gonna do a drive-by [of] yo’ house.” After spending increasingly greater amounts of time with others outside of his gang, members of his gang confronted him – “Aw, you a traitor.” Because some of his new

friends “were in [and “affiliated” with] rival gangs”, his former fellows were “like, “You hangin’ out with them? – Aw, now you a [rival now].” Meant to “diss the [rival] gang” as well as Aaron, they even began to call him a “[the rival gang’s name] pussy”.

In order to “distance myself away from the gang relation”, Tevin noted how he had called his gang’s “older Boss” to explain his circumstances. While the “Boss-Boss” said “I ain’t gonna force you into it, man”, this was not universally accepted by his local gang fellows. The gang’s new “Boss” – “some Asian person” – “didn’t approve of, you know, the big Boss just to let me go like that.” In fact, “[i]t was an altercation”; the Boss and others in the gang simply “didn’t approve of it.”

They was like, a couple, a couple boys was like, “Man, we put all this work in and he [the older Boss] just gonna let you out like that? Man, he can’t do that.” I was like, “That’s work y’all put in. I didn’t have nothing to do what that.” – I mean, yeah, ‘cause everybody was like, “It too, it’s too late. It’s too late for you to decide [to leave the gang].”

Despite the confrontations and the violent rhetoric, Tevin still held that “[t]here was no, like [violent] exit for me – I just left that behind, man.”

These findings demonstrate that, on the whole, the majority of the 36 formerly gang-involved youth – prospectively and retrospectively – expressed no notable consequences following their leaving. For a sizable minority (14 or 38%), however, de-affiliation and desistance was associated with some expressed consequences. Largely reflective of the close-ended approach of the G.R.E.A.T. Evaluation surveys, the consequences identified prospectively were notably more severe and violent in nature (i.e., a number indicated threats or acts of violence directed at close friends and/or family members and a few affirmed that they were personally “threatened” and/or “beaten up”). Only in two interviews were more serious and confrontational consequences of exiting

discussed; Aaron was later called “a traitor” and a “pussy” by his former gang and when Tevin stating his intent to leave it proved to be “an altercation” between him, the new leader, and others in his gang. In contrast, youth narrative accounts demonstrated that leaving more commonly wrought adverse social consequences which were non-violent, but still expressed as meaningful in the lives of the adolescent (i.e., socially pressuring the gradually desisting individual to remain active in the gang as well as socially ostracizing or intentionally ignoring the leaver when later seen in public). At least within the present sample of former youth gang members and affiliates, the role of violence as a consequence of de-identification and desistance is more commonly experienced socially than physically.

Conclusions

Building on the preceding chapters’ findings on domain-specific violence, the present chapter demonstrated both the extent and effect of violence within each of the stages of gang involvement. Many of the youth expressed how *changes* in conflict, crime, and victimization were often central to each stage of the life-cycle of gang membership. Just as the role of violence was validated by changes in subjective perceptions of risk as well as tangible experiences with violence (i.e., personal and/or vicarious victimization), so too was the discussed role of protection from violence. In this sense, the youth demonstrated the role of violence across their tenure of involvement dualistically and adaptively. The final chapter summarizes the key findings of the dissertation in order to succinctly demonstrate the role of violence in the lives of gang-involved youth.

CHAPTER NINE: DISCUSSION OF THE ROLE OF VIOLENCE

Though gang affiliation is largely a “fleeting, transient adolescent dalliance” (Thornberry et al., 2003), the relationship between gang membership and violence and victimization is demonstrated even for those with only temporary affiliation (Thornberry et al., 2004). Whether actual or anticipated, violence has been well documented in the lives of current and formerly gang-involved juveniles. Although a fragmented understanding of the extent and effect of violence has emerged within each of the stages of membership (i.e., gang joining, active membership, and leaving), comparatively less is understood about violence’s role within the lives of adolescents and across the whole of their gang tenure. In light of this, the purpose of the dissertation is to contribute to the literature by providing detailed analysis of violence in the lives of youth gang members and affiliates. The three primary research objectives were to: 1) examine the prevalence and context of violence experienced by self-identified gang youth, 2) situate and examine changes in perceptions of insecurity and experiences with violence *around* the stages of membership, and 3) examine the role of violence over time and throughout the life-cycle of gang involvement.

Employing a mixed methods approach, the dissertation examined the extent and role of violence within and across the lives of a multi-site sample of self-identified gang youth. Chapter 4 detailed the methodologies of the G.R.E.A.T. Evaluation and Gang Desistance studies as well as the characteristics of two emergent gang cities from which youth were included. In-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with a total of 66 participants of the earlier longitudinal study, each of whom had self-nominated gang or Eurogang involvement on one or more of the quantitative surveys. Recognizing that

experiences and impressions can meaningfully vary across individuals as well as over time, “violence” was conceptualized and coded broadly to allow for inductive emergence of all instances of disorder, conflict and violence, as well as safety and insecurity. Next, the overall prevalence and major thematic domains of violence (i.e., the neighborhood, school, and peer domains) were reported. Finally, analysis of deviant cases was presented for the six subjects who discussed no experiences with violence throughout the course of their retrospective interview.

Summary of Findings

In order to address the first objective, chapters 5, 6, and 7 examined and exhaustively explored violence as well as addressed several secondary aims within each of the three emergent domains. First, each chapter inductively identified and reported contextual subthemes of violence and insecurity. These included: violence in nearby neighborhood parks, violence during the middle and high school tenures, as well as interpersonal violence at the inter- and intra-group levels. Next, the prevalence and effect of violence was examined across objectively (i.e., direct and vicarious exposure) and subjectively experienced means (i.e., perceived insecurity and fear). Within the emergent domains, each chapter demonstrated – across the two sites – that objective experiences were more commonly discussed than were expressed concerns over conflict, violence, and insecurity. Every youth who indicated violence or disorder within the neighborhood (N = 48) and school domains (N = 59) discussed at least one objectifiable experience (i.e., exposure to gangs and gang-like groups, harassment, fights, and other crime, as well as direct and vicarious victimization); comparatively fewer conveyed fear or perceived risk over insecurity within the neighborhood (40 or 83%) and school domains (30 or

51%). Though not dramatically disparate, slightly more recalled lived experiences with interpersonal conflict and violence than described more subjectively perceived forms of violence at the peer level (i.e., Objective: 43; Subjective: 42). The findings demonstrate that this sample of adolescents was exposed to violence through a range of experiences and perceptions within and across multiple domains (see also Esbensen et al., 2010).

While it is important to reiterate that every Gang Desistance study interviewee had self-nominated involvement in a gang-defined group, the first three findings chapters also examined differences in discussed violence between those youth who were classified as ‘gang-involved’ (N = 45) or ‘conflicting retrospective status’ (N = 15) based on their reflective narrative accounts (see chapter 4). The findings demonstrate that, at times, gang-involved youth (i.e., gang members and affiliates as well as protective group and Eurogang members) discussed more experiences with and concerns over violence. Relative to their proportion of the two site sample (i.e., 75%), issues of crime and insecurity in nearby neighborhood parks were disproportionately recalled by gang youth (17 or 85%) (see chapter 5). Also, a greater number of gang-involved adolescents expressed concerns over school safety as well as described instances in which they had actively sought to avoid people, places, and situations deemed “risky” in both middle and high school (26 or 87%) (see chapter 6).

Findings from chapter 7 further established that the vast majority of those who discussed conflict and violence within the peer domain were current or former gang members (42 or 89%). Gang youth disproportionately accounted for violence in both emergent subthemes: within peer group or at the intra-group level (37 or 90%) as well as between peer groups or at the inter-group level (37 or 92%). This disproportionality was

most clearly demonstrated in more subjective assessments (39 or 93%). In particular, gang-involved interviewees accounted for 95 percent (N = 20) of those who expressed concerns (i.e., perceived risk and fear) over threats from other youth groups, within group pressure to conform to group norms of delinquency, and feeling that within group play or banter, at times, went “too far”. While expressed by 60 subjects within the more recent qualitative interview, the findings demonstrate that discussed conflict and violence was strongly associated with a youth’s retrospectively classified gang involvement. Consistent with the literature (Decker, 1996; Decker & Curry, 2002; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Melde et al., 2009; Peterson et al., 2004; Taylor, 2008; Taylor et al., 2007; 2008), gang-involved adolescents experienced greater direct and vicarious exposure to violence as well as expressed greater awareness and concern over safety risks – particularly school-based interpersonal conflicts.

The Role of Violence within the Gang Tenure

Building on the domain-specific findings, chapter 8 addressed the dissertation’s second objective by situating and examining change in perceptions of insecurity and experiences with violence *around* the periods of gang involvement. This was accomplished by restricting the sample to the 45 retrospectively classified gang youth. Many of these youth (20 or 44%) demonstrated the importance of violence in the period around initial formation of gang ties and associations. Largely coinciding with major school transitions (i.e., around the start of middle or high school), subjects expressed notable changes in their recognition of and exposure to gangs, school conflicts and fights, and victimization as well as generally expressed a greater range of threats against and concerns over their own personal safety (Taylor, 2008). In particular, a number (11 or

24%) conveyed the sense that they and their peers were faced with an ominously simple decision: avoid or join their future gang.

Supportive of juvenile gang scholarship (Spergel, 1995; Lauger, 2012; J. Miller, 2001; Monti, 1994), the dissertation confirmed that the overwhelming majority (40 or 89%) personally joined or affiliated with their gang through a passive and non-violent process (i.e., gradually spending more time with gang peers) while only a few entered through more active means (i.e., being hazed, blessed, or jumped in). Despite the predominance of passive joining, however, inductive analysis revealed that a large proportion of the youth (32 or 71%) also indicated their conviction that others had joined their gang through an active or violent process (i.e., “doing work” for the gang, completing a deed/mission, as well as some other initiation rite). Given the discontinuity between lived experiences (i.e., passive entry) and popularized beliefs and myths surrounding expectations of joining (i.e., active or violent entry), interviewees drew on two frames in order to make sense of their own accounts (see Miller, 1996; 2001; Miller & Glassner, 2011). Several conveyed the belief that “*real* membership” could only be attained through a violent initiation rite (9 or 20%); when the lived experience of entry was nonviolent, a number framed their prospectively self-identified “membership” as lesser affiliation or involvement and others went so far as to retrospectively recast their gang as a “non-gang” youth group. Those who had witnessed, but not personally experienced, an active joining process (7 or 16%), framed themselves – and their gang experience – as “unique” in light of their “exceptional” standing amongst their gang peers (Miller, 1996; 2001).

For the overwhelming majority (42 or 93%), the period of active involvement was associated with changes in perceptions of risk as well as experiences with conflict and violence. Central to the dissertation's contribution to the literature, analysis of gang-related accounts demonstrated that gang-related violence was discussed in a dualistic manner. During active involvement, youth described the salient effect and role of 1) protection from and 2) experiences with conflict and violence from a variety of inter- and intra-gang sources. Across both sources of data, the vast majority (39 or 87%) indicated that their gang afforded members a sense of supportive protection. Raised in the majority of qualitative accounts (28 or 62%), interviewees stressed the particular importance of protection believed to be afforded by the gang – whether that protection had been demonstrated or was simply assumed to exist if ever it was needed. The sense of protection was further substantiated by corresponding responses on the G.R.E.A.T. Evaluation surveys; with over half of respondents demonstrating an overall decrease in reported levels of fear of crime at the first wave of involvement as well as having indicated that protection was a “good thing” associated with membership and something their gang did for its members. Also, respondents prospectively identified protection as the third most common motivation for their gang joining. In all, perceptions of and experiences with protection were consistent with the literature (Decker, 1996; Melde et al., 2009; Peterson et al., 2004) and a well demonstrated component in understanding the role and effect of violence within the tenure of membership.

Accentuating the concept of gang protection, the period of involvement was associated with greater recognition of reduced personal safety as well as mounting experiences with interpersonal violence (see Decker, 1996; Decker & Curry, 2002;

Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Melde et al., 2009; Peterson et al., 2004; Taylor, 2008; Taylor et al., 2007; 2008). Not only did prospectively recorded levels of perceived risk of victimization generally worsen at the first wave of involvement, but several years later many (20 or 44%) continued to expound upon their personal sense of risk and insecurity during their time in the gang – chiefly discussing the importance of threats and other risks presented by rival gangs and gang-like groups. These expressed concerns were not without merit given the extent and variety of issues (i.e., heated arguments, minor fights, and larger “brawls”) between their and other youth groups raised by the vast majority of interviewees (37 or 82%). In addition to interpersonal violence between gangs (see Decker, 1996; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Sanders, 1994), the findings demonstrated a range of issues from within their gang as well (Taylor, 2008). Across both sources of data, the large majority (36 or 80%) indicated the existence of some established rules and norms governing members’ behavior (see Decker & Curry, 2002; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Vigil, 1988). Prospective gang descriptions – from the G.R.E.A.T. Evaluation – demonstrated that more than half indicated that their gang had colors or symbols as well as specific rules or codes. In contrast, less than half described the importance of colors, symbols, or style of dress during their more recent interview and only a few noted established rules and associated penalties for infractions or violations. In particular, the dissertation advances understanding of other sources of strife within juvenile gangs; at least in retrospect, the large majority (37 or 82%) discussed intra-gang violence in terms of a range of interpersonal adolescent issues and conflicts (i.e., pressure and disagreements over who to hang out with, what to do when hanging out, within group play/banter, and romantic entanglements). While most were resolved amicably, many (14

or 31%) recalled instances where conflicts devolved into or were settled through physical fights.

Chapter 8 closed with a presentation of violence in the period of gang desistance. All told, 36 of the 45 gang-involved interviewees were classified as formerly involved at the time of the Gang Desistance study. Of this restricted sample, the large majority (26 or 72%) demonstrated the prevalence and role of violence in one or more aspects of the leaving process (i.e., motivations, means, and consequences). Each of these adolescents invoked experiences with violence and disillusionment as motivating, at least in part, the desire to disengage from their gang. Nearly all (33 or 92%) described the process of gang leaving as passive and non-confrontational (i.e., having “just left” by way of normal school transitions, residential moves, as well as acting on other opportunities for change in peer interactions and associations). Just three disengaged through more active means; each formally asked their gang’s leader(s) for permission to leave and only Mitch was then made to undergo a jumping out ceremony. Though the dearth of active leaving is consistent with the literature (Carson et al., 2013; Decker & Pyrooz, 2011; Peterson, 2012; Pyrooz & Decker, 2011), the fact that only a few adolescents (N = 5) perpetuated the myth of ceremonial leaving violence being normative (i.e., having to move away, having to shoot or kill somebody as well as jumping and sexing out rites) is at odds with earlier ethnographic research (Decker & Lauritsen, 2002; Quicker, 1983; 1999). While most (22 or 61%) expressed no consequences, a number demonstrated a range of adverse experiences as a result of their disengagement. Also, it is important to note that the consequences prospectively indicated by seven subjects were notably more severe and violent in nature (i.e., threats or acts of violence against the leaver as well as directed at

close friends or family members) than the most confrontational ramifications discussed by a pair of interviewees; in their own words, Aaron was called “a traitor” and a “pussy” for his desistance and Tevin’s leaving led to “an altercation” between him, the gang’s new leader, and his former associates. Rather, the dissertation found that disengagement more commonly wrought adverse social – as opposed to physical – consequences. While these experiences were non-violent, they were still interpreted and expressed as meaningful to the youth (i.e., social pressure to remain active in the gang as well as social ostracism and exclusion of the leaver in social settings). The findings demonstrate a more subdued role of violence in the actual process of disengagement for adolescents as well as more expressly social consequences as a result of de-identification (see Carson et al., 2013; Decker & Lauritsen, 2002; Decker & Pyrooz, 2011; Pyrooz & Decker, 2011; Peterson, 2012; Taylor, 2008).

The Role of Violence across the Gang Tenure

Thus far, the dissertation has addressed its first two research objectives; establishing the prevalence and context of violence as well as situating and examining changes in violence and insecurity proximal to the stages of involvement. The remaining objective is to advance understanding of the role of violence *across* the whole of the life-cycle of adolescent gang participation. To demonstrate violence’s role throughout the gang tenure, findings are presented within the social learning framework (Akers, 1998/2009; Akers & Jensen, 2008). As youth discussed their experiences with violence in the gang context dualistically, its role can be understood in terms of the concept of differential reinforcement – the balance of experienced and anticipated rewards (i.e., protection) and punishments (i.e., inter- and intra-gang conflict and violence) associated

with membership. Focusing on the 36 formerly gang-involved interviewees, the dissertation demonstrates how changes in experiences with and anticipated risks of violence interact with the perceived protective capacity of the gang over the tenure of involvement.

Gang protection – including perceptions of and lived experiences with – was a demonstrated component in understanding the effect of violence throughout membership. The vast majority of desisted interviewees (31 or 86%) indicated, at some point, that the supportive sense of protection had been a particularly rewarding benefit of involvement. For some, the gang’s support and protection was more abstractly expressed and valued; for example, Mary described how members of her Eurogang-defined group would “help [one another] with the pain of life.” For others, the protection of the gang was conveyed as an absolute necessity at the time. This was particularly the case for the number of youth (13 or 36%) who had indicated notable changes in their experiences with gangs and gang-like groups, interpersonal conflicts and fights, and other forms of violence just before associating with their gang. “[I]n middle school [gangs are] more of a *need* [as opposed to “a *want*”]”, explained Jarvis, “[n]ot everybody gets along – [so k]ids need friends – a group of friends that will have your back.” Others expressed similar remarks after realizing the totality of risks to personal safety in high school; Andrew held that “you need friends in school to survive”. These findings contribute to the gang literature by demonstrating that *changes* in experiences with violence and assessments of insecurity – particularly around major school transitions – may be an important component in the understanding attractions to as well as the formation of interactions and friendships with gang peers (see also Taylor, 2008).

Underscoring the salience of protection as a reinforcing reward of membership, the period of involvement was associated with greater recognition of diminished personal safety as well as mounting experiences with interpersonal, school-based violence. In concordance with the literature (Decker, 1996; Decker & Curry, 2002; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Melde et al., 2009; Peterson et al., 2004; Taylor, 2008; Taylor et al., 2007; 2008), youth indicated widespread risk and prevalence of verbal and physical altercations between gangs (29 or 81%). Also, the vast majority (31 or 86%) described a range of problems and conflicts between members of their own gang (e.g., arguments, conflicts, and fights, play and banter, as well as pressure to conform to norms of delinquency). These more pedestrian interpersonal issues (i.e., heated arguments as well as near fights and minor scuffles) have been discounted in the gang literature – instead emphasizing experiences with severe violent victimization in the inter-gang context (see Decker, 1996; Decker & Curry, 2002; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Decker & Lauritsen, 2002; Taylor et al., 2008). The extent of the present findings, however, substantiates the importance of less severe forms of conflict and violence in the lives of gang-involved adolescents.

Within the social learning approach, experienced and anticipated interpersonal violence – both from inter- and intra-gang sources – should have a demonstrated role across the tenure of membership (see also Decker & Van Winkle, 1996). When there is an excess of *direct* (i.e., painful or unpleasant consequences) and *indirect* (i.e., removal of or insufficient rewards) adverse reinforcements associated with behavior or peer associations, the likelihood of continuation is diminished (Akers, 1998/2009; Warr, 2002). In this sense, interpersonal violence is principally framed in terms of a *direct* reinforcing consequence of gang involvement. Moreover, each experienced or anticipated

concern over gang-related violence – whether innocuous adolescent issues or more serious violent victimization – is also tantamount to a failure of the gang’s protective function and capacity. Because of this, violence in the gang context can also be framed as an *indirect* (i.e., the insufficiently experienced or anticipated reward of protection) reinforcement associated with membership. The effect and role of violence is therefore demonstrated in terms of change, over time, in a member’s experienced violence and perceived susceptibility to risk in relation to impressions of the protective capacity of their gang.

The dissertation found that youth routinely discussed single, less severe experiences with inter- and intra-gang conflicts, harassment, and physical violence with relative ambivalence. At least initially, these incidents lacked consequence because they failed to present a meaningful challenge to the concept of gang protection. When inspected over the larger period of active membership, however, the changing influence and role of gang-related violence develops. The importance of violence was demonstrated by those who expressed a shift in the way in which they subjectively interpreted their own and others’ behavior, risks of victimization, as well as experiences with interpersonal violence. Throughout the period of active involvement, two-thirds of the 36 gang leavers (24 or 67%) expressed that, at times, playful harassment between associates as well as pressure to conform to norms of delinquency would be “too much” or go “too far”. Several also demonstrated shifts in their willingness to tolerate physical violence as a means of dispute resolution between themselves and others in their gang. These shifts in individual interpretations of their own and their peers’ behavior and lived gang

experiences – while not immediately apparent to the interviewee – informed violence’s role across their life-cycle of involvement.

The reflective narrative accounts demonstrate that the majority of leavers (22 or 61%) experienced violence and disillusionment across the gang tenure and contributed to their disengagement (see also Decker & Lauritsen, 2002; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996). In keeping with the differential reinforcement framework, youth discussed violence’s motivating role in terms of a disadvantageous shift in experienced and anticipated rewards and consequences associated with sustaining gang involvement. For a third of the leavers (13 or 36%), de-identification was gradually motivated by recognized change in the extent and severity of substance use and delinquency in the gang. Framed as a *direct* (i.e., painful or unpleasant) reinforcing consequence of involvement, these youth expressed a gradually mounting sense of fatigue and disdain for their gang associates’ disruptive and delinquent behavior (Vigil, 1988; 2002). “[T]hey did drugs a lot. *A lot, a lot!* They would come to school high and drunk”, said Mary, “and that’s [just] not something I was interested in.” Typifying this shift, Yesenia explained:

I started to realize they are, like, a bad influence – I kinda started knowing like, ‘Oh, if you do this [stay in the gang] you gonna end up with, like... You’re gonna be nothing in your life. You’re just gonna be, like, this pothead and just smoke and just, like, shoot people for no reason.’

This was particularly the case for those who expressed how their gang’s behavior led to – and increased the anticipated likelihood of – their getting in trouble with the police or school administrators (Carson et al., 2013; Monti, 1994; Pyrooz & Decker, 2002; Vigil, 1988). Increasingly concerned about the consequences of being apprehended selling drugs for his gang – a “little baggie of ice [methamphetamine] or tars [heroin]” could get you “like 10 years” in prison, Nick recognized that he didn’t want to “be in the game no

more – [because] I’m tryin’ to do something with my life.” Shaquille also realized he didn’t “wanna be a part of them” after his teachers began to question him about his involvement in the gang and their fights with other groups. Anna similarly ruminated that she “just got tired of being bad – Like I wanted to do good” and “didn’t want to get in trouble [with them] anymore”.

Also, a third of the leavers (14 or 39%) demonstrated how interpersonal conflicts and violence were perceived as *direct* consequences of involvement and subsequently spurred de-affiliation. The motivating influence of interpersonal violence was most commonly found in terms of a fatiguing cumulative effect; “I didn’t like where we got into it with other gangs”, Tevin explained, “[i]t got old. It, it was no...point of it.” However, a few (N = 7) identified the role of a single, salient “turning point” of interpersonal violence (see also Jacques & Wright, 2008; Vecchio, 2013); with the exception of Aaron, the remaining six discussed notable events within the context of gradually amassed fatigue over active involvement. While these patterns are supportive of the literature (Decker & Lauritsen, 2002; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Vigil, 1988; 2002), the findings differ from extant research in regard to the source of meaningful interpersonal violent experiences.⁹⁶ For these youth, violence which motivated disengagement was equally likely to have been perpetrated by rival gang members (N = 9) as it was by members of the youth’s own gang (N = 8).

Few expressed violence as an unavoidable reality of their daily life (see also Decker & Van Winkle, 1996); notably, Shaquille fatalistically held that “everybody had

⁹⁶ For example, Decker and Van Winkle (1996: 270) – in their sample of 24 ex-gang members in St. Louis, Missouri – found:

In each case where the decision to leave the gang was motivated by violence, ex-gang members identified the source of violence as *external* to the gang. Violence that is *internal* to the gang....serves to intensify the bonds among members. [emphasis added]

the days come...[when] someone try to...[to] see if you a push-over.” Most commonly, youth were cognizant that adverse interpersonal experiences were strongly influenced by their gang involvement. Having witnessed violence between the gang associates that congregated behind his home, Manuel kept his “distance from ‘em” for his own “[s]afety and [to] stay out of problems.” Typical of the situational insight across the interviewees, Taylor recalled that the “bad part about” hanging out with his gang was that “everybody know[s] your name” at school. Because of this notoriety, “[i]t’s always somebody that wanna be, like, better than you” – “they gonna try to – make you feel down” – or would “come [at] me and they’d be like, ‘Uh, you wanna fight too?’”

Several of the youth expressed having been keenly aware, at the time, that maintaining gang status put them at continued risk for gang-related violence and threats (Decker & Van Winkle, 1996). Andrew demonstrated how his realization of the risks associated with involvement led to changes in his interactions and standing with his gang. Explaining that his gang peers would “get into arguments”, “turn all crazy”, fight each other and “sometimes they might even [try] to get in a fight with” me while under the influence, whenever the “drugs came out” he’d “be like, “Damn,...I guess this is where [the] conversation ends, ‘cause [I’m] gonna have to leave.’” Anticipating the risks of inter-gang violence between his and other groups, he continued:

I started...[pause] I started, like, separating myself from them, ‘cause each and every day they be like, they be getting into fights and everything. And then one of those days [my gang associates] told me, ‘If...you hang out with [us] you’re gonna get jumped too.’ So I just separated myself from them.

Recognizing the persistent “drama” between his gang associates, Taylor eventually found that he “didn’t wanna be a part of it. Got tired of it. Avoid it. Stayed away. Changed my

[cell phone] number.” One account, in particular, typified the rational assessment of experienced and anticipated rewards and consequences of maintaining gang membership. Having already been assaulted by a rival gang of 6th graders earlier in the school year, Cesar explained how at “the end of the [6th grade] year” he decided that it was “probably just best if I stop” representing because everyone in his gang was going to “move on to high school and then I’m going to be the only one [left].” For these youth, the likelihood of maintaining gang involvement was principally affected by cognitive assessments of anticipated risks and threats (Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Jacques & Wright, 2008; Vecchio, 2013).

As has been demonstrated, direct and vicarious experiences with interpersonal violence was principally framed as a *direct* reinforcing consequence of gang membership by the sample of gang leavers. However, the extent and risk of gang-related violence – at both the inter- or intra-gang levels – remains paradoxically at odds with widespread discussions of the gang’s protection of its members (Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Melde et al. 2009; Peterson et al., 2004). Even absent structured questions on this established inconsistency, several of the interviewees’ discussed their how changes in experienced and anticipated violence meaningfully affected their impression of their gang’s ability and willingness to protect them. In these instances, the role of violence was also demonstrated as *indirect* (i.e., the insufficiently experienced or anticipated reward of protection) reinforcement which importantly fostered a desire to de-identify and divest gang ties (Akers, 1998/2009).

Despite perceiving that his gang “friends in 8th [grade]” were willing to protect him from rival gang threats, Cesar concluded that “they couldn’t, like, help me out [most

of the time] ‘cause it was only, like, 6th graders” in a rival gang that would try, and had once before succeeded, in assaulting him. Reflecting on his tenure in the gang, Mitch explained that he “got out pretty fast” after one of his gang’s leader “got jumped very, very, very severely” by a rival gang. Not only did he generally state that being involved with gangs fostered “too much drama and too much pointless violence”, he also became more critical of the sincerity of fellow member’s assertions of “brotherhood”.

Mitch: [B]ut over time... I mean, secretly you know [my gang associates], if you ever went to jail they, they wouldn’t bond [or bail] you out. They wouldn’t. I just kinda realized that after a while.

Amber: If you got into trouble they...

Mitch: They wouldn’t really do anything. Just, “It’s your problem.”

Similarly, Haley “realized – like some of them, like, they won’t ever be there for you.

Like, they won’t ever, like, help you out if you need help.”

For three respondents, notable instances with gang-related violence demonstrated their gang’s unwillingness to “have their back”. Hector and Omar both demonstrated notable changes in the way in which they viewed their gang peers following a physical altercation with another gang-like group.

Hector: I thought we were friends, but then, uh, like I started noticing things – like they didn’t have my back....[O]ne time I got into a fight, um, there were like three people beating me up. – [When members of the gang first] saw me...they were like just staring at me. [Eventually] they went in [and] they took ‘em out. – [But] if they were my friends they should have come in, come [and] help me out [immediately]. I mean, like if I actually care about them – I wouldn’t let them get hurt....[A]fter [that] I was like, ‘They don’t have my back.’

Omar: Well my brother, he, uh...[pause] This guy offered him to do, like, his whole back tattoo – and he just hit this guy in the face....and, like, [the other guy] came back there with like 30 people. And, you know, I had to fight them. We called people [in our gang], but nobody showed up. So it was just us....[After that fight], we [Omar and his six older brothers] distant ourselves more [from the gang].

After some members of his gang thought it would be funny to call and say “We gonna do a drive-by [of] yo’ house”, Aaron’s outlook on his gang changed dramatically. “[T]hat’s when I started noticing that they weren’t really the friends I was looking for. – [S]o I was like, you know, ‘[I] gotta stop.’” For these youth, direct and vicarious victimization was interpreted as a demonstrated consequence – and foreseen future risk – of involvement as well as a failure of the gang to adequately protect its members from violence. Having recognized the gang’s inability or unwillingness to provide them with protection, these youth demonstrated how the experience(s) adversely affected the anticipated rewards and consequences associated with sustaining their gang involvement.

Summary of Contribution

Overall, the dissertation has accomplished its objectives and has advanced understanding of the prevalence and effect of violence within and across the lives of adolescents from two emergent gang cities. Consistent with the social learning approach, the role of violence is understood in terms of its effect on the reinforcing balance of experienced and anticipated rewards and consequences associated with initiating, maintaining, and attenuating gang involvement. In the present sample, violence’s role in fostering and solidifying gang ties was demonstrated through the expressed importance of self-protection believed to be afforded by the gang. This was particularly the case for the number of interviewees who experienced notable change in their perceptions of and exposure to disorder and conflict just before gang joining.

During the period of active involvement, experienced and anticipated protection was discussed by the vast majority of youth as a highly desired reward of their involved status. While the concept of protection reinforced continuation of involvement,

participation was also associated with notable increases in the risk and prevalence of gang-related violence. Principally the interviewees framed interpersonal violence – perpetrated both by rival as well as fellow gang peers – as adverse reinforcing consequences of involvement. While less severe experiences with conflicts, harassment, and violence were initially interpreted and expressed as inconsequential, the role of violence – over the gang tenure – was demonstrated when the majority of youth expressed a shift in their subjective interpretation of their own and their peers’ lived and anticipated experiences with inter- and intra-gang violence.

Illustrating the role of violence at the end of the gang tenure, the majority of leavers demonstrated how a disadvantageous imbalance in the experienced and expected rewards and punishments of involvement informed their eventual de-identification and desistance. Discussed in terms of a *direct* reinforcing consequence of gang status, a number expressed a fatiguing accumulation of disdain for as well as aversion to the risks associated with (i.e., getting in trouble at school or with the police) their gang peers’ increasingly disruptive and delinquent behavior. A number also indicated how lived and anticipated experiences with interpersonal violence adversely affected their outlook on whether or not to sustain gang involvement; in particular, the findings demonstrate that the motivating accumulations of risk and prevalence of violence were just as likely to be perpetrated by fellow gang associates as they were by rivals.

The role of violence across the entire gang tenure was most clearly demonstrated by several of the interviewees who discussed how exposure to violence adversely affected the perceived reward of gang protection. In these instances, violence served as both a *direct* and an *indirect* (i.e., the insufficiently experienced or anticipated reward of

protection) reinforcing consequence which was acknowledged as having motivated the desire to leave the gang. Fostered by single notable “turning points” and gradual accumulations of undesired experiences, respondents discussed how their experience(s) adversely affected their outlook on their gang’s ability or willingness to “have their back”. These accounts demonstrate violence’s dynamic and interactive role across the whole of the gang trajectory; in this sense, gang-involved youth continually assess their willingness to remain active or desist in terms of the experienced and anticipated costs of violence and rewards of protection fostered by involvement.

Policy Implications

The dissertation demonstrated that self-identified gang youth discussed exposure to a range of potential risks and violent experiences across multiple domains (i.e., the neighborhood, school, and peer domains). Many joined their gang during periods of notable change in exposure to – or newfound recognition of – gangs and gang-like groups, interpersonal conflicts, as well as worsening assessments of disorder and personal safety. What’s more, nearly all emphasized the reinforcing reward of protection as focal to their desire to initiate as well as maintain gang involvement. The findings, therefore, are generally supportive of program and policy initiatives which aim to reduce early adolescent exposure to disorder and victimization as well as targeted intervention approaches (see Taylor, 2008).

Primary Prevention

Schools hold particular potential for youth violence prevention programming (Gottfredson, 1997; 2001), not least because attendance is compulsory, nationally, until at

least 16 years of age⁹⁷ and because schools remain the principal setting for adolescent social interaction. Consistent with a risk factor approach, research has demonstrated the deleterious effect of cumulative risk – the adverse effect of exposure to greater numbers of risk factors over multiple domains of risk – on the self-reported antisocial attitudes and behavior of juveniles (Esbensen et al., 2010; Hill et al., 1999; Thornberry et al., 2003). Effective school-based prevention programming should, therefore, address risk factors across multiple domains (e.g., school, peer, and individual) in early adolescence, before problematic behaviors (i.e., delinquency, victimization, and gang involvement) manifest (Esbensen et al., 2013). With gang involvement peaking around late middle school/early high school (Esbensen, & Huizinga, 1993; Hill et al., 1999; Thornberry et al., 2003), situating prevention programming around the transition from elementary to middle school (e.g., between the age of 11 to 13) is paramount (see Esbensen et al., 2013).

Findings from the dissertation reaffirm the importance of the middle school tenure, demonstrating widespread concerns and exposure to a number of risk factors associated with the likelihood of gang joining. These included: direct forms of bullying (Carbone-Lopez, Esbensen, & Brick, 2010), impressions of negative school environment and climate (Esbensen et al., 2010; Gottfredson, 2001; Gottfredson, Gottfredson, Payne, & Gottfredson, 2005; Welsh, 2000), exposure to and association with delinquent peers and gangs (Battin-Pearson et al., 1998; Esbensen et al., 2010; Thornberry et al., 2004), and direct and vicarious victimization (Miller, 1996; 2001; Peterson, 2012; Taylor, 2008). Based on these findings, implementation of school-based programs which have

⁹⁷ While the age range of compulsory school attendance varies across American states and territories, each mandated attendance until a minimum of 16 years of age as of 2010 (Synder & Dillow, 2013).

demonstrated and replicated programmatic effects is recommended (Sherman, Gottfredson, MacKenzie, Eck, Reuter, & Bushway, 1997).

Middle schools and their students would likely benefit from multi-year prevention efforts (Sherman et al., 1997) which seek to reduce delinquency and victimization through enhancing the school environment (Esbensen et al., 2010; Gottfredson, 2001; Gottfredson et al., 2005). For example, the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program has produced significant reductions in student bullying, fighting, and victimization through improvements to school climate (Olweus, Limber, & Mihalic, 1999). Research suggests programs which improve overall school climate and reduce interpersonal violence, such as the Olweus program, should also have a meaningful effect on rates of gang participation (Carbone-Lopez et al., 2010; Esbensen et al., 2010; Taylor, 2008). Implementation of school-based skills building programs – such as the G.R.E.A.T. program – to all first year middle school students is also recommended. In their recent evaluation of the G.R.E.A.T. program, Esbensen and colleagues (2013) demonstrated that the program reduced the odds of gang membership by 39 percent one year later and 24 percent four years after early middle school administration. Evidence-based prevention programs, such as those noted, have been able to meaningfully affect adolescent rates of membership by affecting individual attitudes (i.e., more positive attitudes towards the police and more negative attitudes towards gangs) as well as by reducing the need or want for gang protection (i.e., improved school climate, as well as management of interpersonal conflicts, fear, and victimization risk).

Social Intervention

Typified by the dissertation's sources of data, even "promising" prevention programs – with high fidelity and demonstrated short- and long-term program effects – are incapable of universally eradicating youth gang membership (Esbensen et al., 2013).⁹⁸ Next to preventing membership entirely, hastening desistance – so as to minimize the amount of time an individual is gang-involved – shows promise in reducing exposure to violence as well as mitigating some of the adverse developmental effects of gang status (i.e., dropping out of school, teenage parenthood, and unstable employment) (Peterson, 2012; Thornberry et al., 2003). Decker (2008) suggests that intervention is most appropriate for members who are at: 1) the fringes of involvement, 2) early stages of participation, or 3) at a point where they can be pushed or pulled from the gang. This may be accomplished through intervening at certain opportune points where individuals may be willing to divest gang ties and involvement.

With roughly two-thirds of leavers having demonstrated the role of violence in motivating their gang leaving, the dissertation advances violence's potential in attenuating ties to the gang. Violence does appear to have an "upper limit" (Decker & Van Winkle, 1996) or a "succession quality" effect on members (Vigil, 1988; 2002), suggesting that accumulations of adverse violent experiences may make those involved more amenable to de-identification (Carson & Vecchio, Forthcoming; Decker & Lauritsen, 2002; Decker, Pyrooz, & Moule, 2014; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Peterson, 2012; Vigil, 1988; 2002). Bonds to the gang appear notably weakened in the immediate wake of severe or unexpected violence (Carson et al., 2013; Carson & Vecchio,

⁹⁸ In the present sample of 45 prospectively and retrospectively gang-involved interviewees, 16 (or 36%) had received the G.R.E.A.T. program in the 6th grade (i.e., 29 or 64% were in the control group).

Forthcoming; Decker & Lauritsen, 2002; Decker et al., 2014; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Peterson, 2012; Pyrooz & Decker, 2011). Whether perpetrated by rival or fellow gang associates, violence has the clearest potential as a point at which a member can be pushed or pulled from the gang when acknowledged as a consequence of individual behavior or associations (see also Jacques & Wright, 2008; Vecchio, 2013).

For violence to serve as a “turning point” in the gang trajectory, intervention approaches must be situated as temporally close as possible to the violent event (Decker & Van Winkle, 1996). Recognizing this, intervention approaches which target victims and associates in hospital emergency rooms and trauma units in St. Louis, Missouri (Decker, 2007; 2008; Decker, Curry, Catalano, Watkins, & Green, 2005) and Chicago, Illinois (Skogan, Hartnett, Bump, & Dubois, 2009) have produced promising results. Using violence interrupters at two Chicago hospitals, Cure Violence – originally named CeaseFire, Inc. – has found some success using severe violent victimization as a point to disrupt retaliatory patterns of gang/gun-violence as well as facilitate gang leaving. Of the 94 clients who requested and received help “leaving the gang” from the program, 28 (or 30%) subsequently left their gang by the time of their study interview (Skogan, Hartnett, Bump, & Dubois, 2009). Intervention approaches appear particularly appropriate for providing social support and guidance to gang members during a period of notable vulnerability brought on by violence. Programs and policies which aim to spur de-identification while also addressing the member’s delinquent lifestyle and experienced violence are the most strongly recommended (Osgood & Anderson, 2004; Taylor, 2008; Taylor et al., 2007; 2008). In light of these recommendations, the YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago recently overhauled their longstanding Youth Safety and Violence Prevention

program – which includes primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention/intervention – to better emphasize and address the role of traumatic stress caused by chronic exposure to violence across adolescence (YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago, 2014).

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The dissertation was able to demonstrate the prevalence, effect, and role of violence within and across the lives of gang youth, but it is not without limitations. The dissertation drew on a sample of youth from two emergent gang cities in the American south. Though the National Evaluation study purposively selected schools to produce a sample which closely resembled the student composition of the each city's school district (Esbensen, 2013; Esbensen et al., 2011; 2013), findings from the dissertation (using the G.R.E.A.T. Evaluation and Gang Desistance studies) may not be generalizable beyond Nashville and the Dallas-Fort Worth area community. Though efforts were also made to triangulate experiences – through the use of the corresponding longitudinal self-report survey data (Jupp, 2001; Noaks & Wincup, 2004; Silverman, 2006), the narratives are not infallible records of 'true experiences' and are susceptible to issues of internal validity (i.e., telescoping, memory decay, and reflective reinterpretation). While the accounts are inherently subjective in nature, they do, however, reflect the lived experiences of each of the interviewees (Agnew, 2006; Miller, 2011). Despite the limitations of the data and the modified grounded theory approach, the demonstrated role of violence meaningfully advances our understanding of the life-cycle of gang involvement.

In spite of the limitations, several important avenues of future research have emerged. While many factors and experiences can motivate initiating and sustaining gang involvement, the literature would benefit from more nuanced understanding of their

temporal importance. Though often cost prohibitive, administering longitudinal surveys or conducting multiple interviews over shorter intervals (e.g., every 3 to 6 months) would allow for better understanding of finer, short-lived phenomena and events (see Cairns & Cairns, 1994; Warr, 2002). These would also allow youth to demonstrate which benefits and consequences of involvement – and a possible rank ordering of both – are important at multiple time points as well as allow for inspection of change over the tenure of participation.

The dissertation was able to demonstrate the recursive nature of violence and protection in motivating gang de-identification and disengagement. These findings, however, bring into question the concept of “disillusionment” with gang-life. Future research would greatly benefit from attempts to further unpack disillusionment-centered motivations for leaving (i.e., “I just felt like it”, “It wasn’t what I thought it was going to be” (see Carson et al., 2013; Peterson, 2012), and “I got tired of the gang lifestyle” (see Pyrooz & Decker, 2011)). As a method, in-depth, qualitative interviewing affords greater opportunity to identify the factors which underlie these more general remarks. At this point it is far from clear whether those motivated by a sense of disillusionment experienced too many adverse consequences and too few desired rewards of involvement or whether more rewarding opportunities appeared outside of the gang (see Warr, 2002).

Finally, the dissertation’s findings were limited to two emergent gang cities. Though violence was more widespread in the Texas site, the effect and role of violence was consistent across both sites. Future work should, however, explore whether the prevalence, extent, and role of violence differ across involved youth from emergent and chronic gang cities. Inspection of differences in the centrality of violence in the gang

tenure would be recommended across the demographics (i.e., gender, race/ethnicity, and age) and experiences of members (i.e., length of membership as well as recent/distance and core/peripheral gang involvement) as well as gang characteristics (i.e., gang typology as well as gender and racial/ethnic composition).

In conclusion, the dissertation was able to advance understanding of the prevalence and effect of violence within and across the lives of juveniles, provide recommendations for policy, and identify avenues for future research. Overall, the work demonstrated the changing and reciprocal role of violence – which emerged both through experienced and anticipated gang-related violence as well as protection – across the life-cycle of youth gang involvement. The findings reaffirmed the importance of major school transitions; having indicated these as times when many were notably susceptible to the lure of gang protection from newly experienced or realized threats to personal safety. While the gang's expected protection was an important component in maintaining active status, changes in experienced and anticipated gang-related violence affected outlook on gang involvement. As Warr (2002: 73) posits, “delinquent groups [and gangs]...rarely last very long, which suggests that the benefits of the group do not outweigh its risks in the long run.” In sum, the work demonstrates that participation will only be sustained as long as an individual believes that active gang status is more advantageous than is non-member status.

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APPENDIX A

STUDY OF YOUTH PEER GROUPS YOUTH INTERVIEW GUIDE

When you were at [ORIGINAL SURVEY SCHOOL] you were one of almost 4,000 students from across the country who participated in an evaluation of the Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.) program. The program was taught in school and was intended to improve relations with the police and to help keep youth out of gangs. Some students in the study took part in the G.R.E.A.T. program while others did not receive the program. For five years you answered a number of questions for us as part of that evaluation.

Now we're interviewing a small group of young people who took part in the evaluation to learn more about their perceptions of gang activity in their schools and neighborhoods. Unlike before when you chose answers from a list, this time I'd like it to be more like a conversation. As I mentioned earlier, all of your answers will be confidential. We will record this interview to insure that we accurately record your answers, but no one outside of the research team will have access to your comments. We'll start with some basic questions about you and your interests. Do you have any questions before we start?

SECTION A: BACKGROUND QUESTIONS

1. How old are you?
2. How would you describe your race/ethnicity?
3. Can you tell me about your living situation (e.g., who are you living with)?
 - a. How long have you been there?
4. Could you tell me a little bit about the people who are most important to you (e.g., friends, family, girlfriend/boyfriend, or children)?
 - a. If I were to talk to them, how would they describe you?
5. Can you tell me about the neighborhood where you're living?
 - a. What do you like about it? Dislike about it?
 - b. How long have you lived in this neighborhood?
 - c. Who do you hang out with from the neighborhood?
 - d. How safe is it in your neighborhood?
 - e. Are there guns around? Do you ever hear gun shots?
6. Are you currently going to school? How's it going (e.g., grades, activities)?
 - a. If I were to talk to your teachers, how would they describe you?
7. Are you working? What do you do?

8. What do you do in your free time? Can you describe a typical day for me?
9. How about Friday or Saturday night--could you describe a typical one for me?
10. In two or three years from now, what do you see yourself doing (e.g., working, college)?

SECTION B: GANG ACTIVITY IN NEIGHBORHOOD AND SCHOOLS

As I mentioned before we began, we want to learn more about the gang situation in your city and how young people deal with gangs in your school and community. We're hoping that since you've lived in [CITY] for a while you can help us understand these things better.

1. Do you think that gangs are a problem in [CITY]? Why/why not?
 - a. What are the gangs like (e.g., where in the city are they, what do they do, gang rivalries)?
2. How about in your neighborhood - are there gangs around?
 - a. [If yes: What are they like?]
 - b. How do they affect day to day life in the neighborhood?
 - c. How do other people in the neighborhood deal with gangs and gang activity?
 - d. [If no: Why do you think that is?]
3. What about at your high school? Are there gangs there? What are they like?
 - a. How do they affect day to day life at the school?
 - b. How do other students deal with gangs and gang activity at school?
 - c. How do teachers/administrators deal with gangs and gang activity at school?
4. Now think back when you were at [SURVEY SCHOOL]? Were there gangs at that school? What were they like?
 - a. How did they affect day to day life at the school?
 - b. How did other students deal with gangs and gang activity at school?
 - c. How did teachers/administrators deal with gangs and gang activity at school?
5. Since you are thinking back to middle school I'd like to ask you a few questions about the G.R.E.A.T. program. Do you remember if you had the G.R.E.A.T. program?
 - a. [If no: what, if anything, do you know about the program?]
 - b. [If yes: what do you remember about the program? What did you think of it? What if anything did you get out of the program?]

SECTION C: PRIOR EXPERIENCES

Now I'd like to talk to you about your own experiences with gangs and gang-like groups. Please think about when you were in _____ grade and think about the group of friends you were hanging out with at that time, which was the ____ to ____ school year. During this year you were attending _____. This is also the year that [NAME A FEW ITEMS FROM THE EVENT LIST]. I'd like you to think back to that time. Looking back, do you think that this group was similar to a gang (e.g., dress, behavior, reputation)?

1. Could you tell me a little bit more about the group (e.g., where did the group hang out, size, race composition, sex composition, age composition)?
 - a. How did different members of the group get along (e.g., how did the girls treat the boys? How did boys treat girls? How did members of same sex treat each other?)?
2. Thinking about the kinds of things that the group did together can you describe a typical "day in the life"?
 - a. What part did you play in these activities?
 - b. What about Fridays and Saturdays?
3. I'd like to hear a little about when you started hanging out with this group. Can you tell me what sorts of things were going on at your life at the time (e.g., in school, in your family, in your neighborhood, with your friends)?
4. And how did you start hanging out with this group? Can you tell me how you got to know them (e.g., where, when, why)?
 - a. At what point did you know you were a part of the group? Was there anything you had to do to join or become a part of the group?
 - b. How would your friends in this group describe you at the time? That is, if I asked them about you at that time, how would they have described you?
5. Looking at this target, if the bullseye is the center of the group, where would you put yourself at that point in time? What does it mean to be there? What is the difference between being there or being in the middle/end? Did your position change over time?
6. Were there things you liked about being a part of this group? Like what?
7. Were there times you didn't like being a part of the group? Did the things you liked and disliked change over time? How so?
8. How did you feel about being a part of the group (e.g., proud, tough, fearful)? Did it change over time? How so?

9. How about your parents or other adults? Did they identify you as being part of the group? How did they feel about it?
10. Would you consider this group to be a gang? Why or why not?
11. Are you still hanging out with this group?

[IF YES, PROCEED TO SECTION E]

[IF NO, PROCEED TO SECTION D]

SECTION D: PEER GROUP TRANSITION

1. What led you to no longer hang out with this group (e.g., particular event, something that occurred over time, people who influenced you)?
 - a. What else was going on in your life around that time (e.g., with family, in school, in neighborhood, with friends in gang and outside of gang)?
2. How did you stop hanging out with them?
 - a. Was this the usual way people would get out of this group? Why/why not?
 - b. Was how you left different from how the other members said you would have to leave?
 - c. Did anyone help or influence you to stop hanging out with the group? Who?
 - d. Before that time, did you ever try to leave the group unsuccessfully? What happened?
3. You said that you are no longer hanging out with this group, but do you still consider yourself to be a part of this group?
 - a. [If yes: how so?]
 - b. [If no: when did you know you were no longer a part of this group? Did you have to do anything special? Could you describe it?]
4. What happened when you quit hanging out with the group (e.g., good and bad)?
5. How have you changed since you stopped hanging out with this group?
 - a. Do others still think of you as a member of this group? Why/why not?
 - b. Do you still do things with this group? Why/why not?
6. Have you thought about hanging out with this group again?
 - a. What kinds of things make you want to/not want to spend time with them again?

7. Is there a particular person or people in the group that you still hang out with?
Why/why not?
 - a. Is there a particular person or people in the group that you would consider spending time with again? Why/why not?
 - b. If a member of the group needed your help, would you feel obligated to help them given your past relationship?

SECTION E: PEER GROUP STABILITY

1. You said that you are still hanging out with this group, do you still consider yourself to be a member of this group?
 - a. [If yes: how so?]
 - b. [If no: why do you consider yourself no longer a member of this group?]
2. How would your friends in this group describe you now? That is, if I asked them about you, how would they describe you?
3. How has the amount of time you spend with the group changed over the years?
4. Has the group changed over the past few years, in terms of people and the things that you do? How so?
 - a. How did the new kids start hanging out?
 - b. How did people stop hanging out? Why?
5. Could you describe what a typical day is like with this group now?
 - a. What part do you play in these activities?
 - b. In what ways has this changed over time?
6. Looking at this target again, where would you put yourself now? What does it mean to be there? How does this compare to where you were before?
7. How long do you think you'll remain part of the group?
 - a. What (if anything) could cause you to not want to hang out with them?

SECTION F: OTHER PEER GROUPS

1: Now I'd like you to think about the group you were spending time with when you were in ____ grade, which was the ____ to ____ school year. Was this the same group that you just described above?

[IF NO, REPEAT SECTION C]

[IF YES, were there any other groups that you were involved with since 6th grade?]

[IF YES, REPEACT SECTION C]

[IF NO, PROCEED TO SECTION G]

2: Were you involved with any other groups since the 6th grade other than the one mentioned above?

[IF YES, REPEACT SECTION C]

[IF NO, PROCEED TO SECTION G]

SECTION G: CURRENT EXPERIENCES WITH DELINQUENCY AND CRIME

Now I'd like to ask you some questions about the behaviors you are currently involved in.

1. In the past year, have you been involved in anything that was against the law?
 - a. First, think about things such as breaking into homes or buildings, shoplifting, or vandalism such as graffiti?
 - i. If yes: now think about the most serious incident you were involved in, could you describe that situation?
 - b. Now, think about things such as beating up someone, shooting at someone, using force to take something from somebody?
 - i. If yes: now think about the most serious incident you were involved in, could you describe that situation?
 - c. Now, think about using substances such as marijuana, prescription drugs (for which you don't have a prescription), or other illegal drugs?
 - i. IF YES, now think about the one you use most, can you tell me about how much and how often?
 - d. Now, I'd like to ask if you have been involved in any illegal sales such as guns or drugs.
 - i. If yes: could you describe your involvement in these activities?

Now I'd like to ask you about your experiences with crime.

2. In the past year, have you been physically hurt by someone else?
 - a. If yes: now think about the most serious, could you describe that situation?
3. In the past year, have you ever had anything stolen from you or damaged in some way?
 - a. If yes: now think about the most serious, could you describe that situation?

SECTION H: FINAL QUESTIONS

Finally, I would like to get your opinion on a few different issues.

1. Given what we've discussed today, is there anything else you would like to add about the G.R.E.A.T. program?
2. What, if anything, do you think can or should be done about gangs?
3. Given the topics discussed today, is there anything else that you feel like we should know? Anything we neglected to ask?

APPENDIX B

National Evaluation of the G.R.E.A.T. Program
Youth Survey Questionnaire
Relevant Questions

Involvement in Gang Fights [Waves 1 through 6]

K. Studies have found that everyone breaks the rules and laws some times. Please circle the category that best indicates how many times in the past 6 months you have done each thing.

How many times in the last 6 months have you...

13. Been involved in gang fights? 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 more than 10

Fear of Crime [Waves 4, 5, and 6]

B. Much of our time is spent in schools and neighborhoods and these places affect how we feel about a lot of other things. Thinking about your school and neighborhood, please indicate how much of a problem each of the following is in your school and neighborhood. That is, are these things not a problem, somewhat of a problem, or a big problem?

These next few questions are about how afraid you are of certain situations. Please indicate how afraid you are of the following things happening to you.

13. Having someone break into your house while you are there
1. Not at all afraid 2. A little afraid 3. Somewhat afraid 4. Afraid 5. Very afraid
14. Having someone break into your house while you are away
1. Not at all afraid 2. A little afraid 3. Somewhat afraid 4. Afraid 5. Very afraid
15. Having your property damaged by someone
1. Not at all afraid 2. A little afraid 3. Somewhat afraid 4. Afraid 5. Very afraid
16. Being robbed or mugged
1. Not at all afraid 2. A little afraid 3. Somewhat afraid 4. Afraid 5. Very afraid
17. Being attacked by someone with a weapon
1. Not at all afraid 2. A little afraid 3. Somewhat afraid 4. Afraid 5. Very afraid
18. Being attacked or threatened on your way to or from school
1. Not at all afraid 2. A little afraid 3. Somewhat afraid 4. Afraid 5. Very afraid
19. Having your things stolen from you at school
1. Not at all afraid 2. A little afraid 3. Somewhat afraid 4. Afraid 5. Very afraid

20. Being attacked or threatened at school
 1. Not at all afraid 2. A little afraid 3. Somewhat afraid 4. Afraid 5. Very afraid

Perceived Risk of Victimization [Waves 4, 5, and 6]

G. Every now and then we get upset with other people. During the past year when you've gotten upset with someone, how often have you done the following?

Every now and then things happen to us. How likely do you think it is that the following things will happen to you?

15. Having someone break into your house while you are there
 1. Not at all likely 2. A little likely 3. Somewhat likely 4. Likely 5. Very likely
16. Having someone break into your house while you are away
 1. Not at all likely 2. A little likely 3. Somewhat likely 4. Likely 5. Very likely
17. Having your property damaged by someone
 1. Not at all likely 2. A little likely 3. Somewhat likely 4. Likely 5. Very likely
18. Being robbed or mugged
 1. Not at all likely 2. A little likely 3. Somewhat likely 4. Likely 5. Very likely
19. Being attacked by someone with a weapon
 1. Not at all likely 2. A little likely 3. Somewhat likely 4. Likely 5. Very likely
20. Being attacked or threatened on your way to or from school
 1. Not at all likely 2. A little likely 3. Somewhat likely 4. Likely 5. Very likely
21. Having your things stolen from you at school
 1. Not at all likely 2. A little likely 3. Somewhat likely 4. Likely 5. Very likely
22. Being attacked or threatened at school
 1. Not at all likely 2. A little likely 3. Somewhat likely 4. Likely 5. Very likely

Victimization [Waves 1 through 6]

M. How many times have the following things happened to you in the past 6 months?

1. Been attacked or threatened on your way to or from school? 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 more than 10
2. Had your things stolen from you at school? 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 more than 10

3. Been attacked or threatened at school? 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 more than 10
4. Had mean rumors or lies spread about you at school? 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 more than 10
5. Had sexual jokes, comments, or gestures made to you at school? 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 more than 10
6. Been made fun of at school because of your looks or the way you talk? 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 more than 10
7. Been bullied at school? 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 more than 10

Other than the events you have just reported happening at school, have the following things happened to you outside of school? How many times in the last 6 months have you...

8. Been hit by someone trying to hurt you? 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 more than 10
9. Had someone use a weapon or force to get money or things from you? 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 more than 10
10. Been attacked by someone with a weapon or by someone trying to seriously hurt or kill you? 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 more than 10
11. Had some of your things stolen from you? 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 more than 10
12. Had any mean, threatening, or embarrassing things said about you or to you through text messages, phone calls, email, or websites? 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 more than 10

Good Things About Gangs [Waves 1 through 6]

N. The following questions ask about your attitudes about gangs and things that gangs do.

1. Whether or not you are a member of a gang, what **GOOD** things do you think would happen to you as a gang member? (**CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY**)
1. I would be part of a family.
 2. I would fit into a group better.
 3. I would have excitement.
 4. I would be “cool.”
 5. I would be protected.
 6. I would feel successful.
 7. I would get money.
 8. There are no good things.
 9. Other (SPECIFY) _____

Motivations for Gang Joining [Waves 3, 4, 5, and 6]

8. Why did you join the gang? (**CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY**)
- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| 0. Not in gang | 5. I was forced to join |
| 1. For fun | 6. To get respect |
| 2. For protection | 7. For money |
| 3. A friend was in the gang | 8. To fit in better |
| 4. A brother or sister was in the gang | 9. Other (SPECIFY) _____ |

Gang Descriptions [Waves 1 through 6]

6. Do the following describe your gang?
- | | | | |
|--|-------|--------|----------------|
| b. There are initiation rites. | 1. No | 2. Yes | 0. Not in gang |
| e. The gang has specific rules or codes. | 1. No | 2. Yes | 0. Not in gang |
| h. The gang has symbols or colors. | 1. No | 2. Yes | 0. Not in gang |
9. Do members of your gang do these things together?
- | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|-------|--------|----------------|
| a. Help out in the community | 1. No | 2. Yes | 0. Not in gang |
| b. Get in fights with other gangs | 1. No | 2. Yes | 0. Not in gang |

c. Provide protection for each other	1. No	2. Yes	0. Not in gang
d. Steal things	1. No	2. Yes	0. Not in gang
e. Rob other people	1. No	2. Yes	0. Not in gang
f. Steal cars	1. No	2. Yes	0. Not in gang
g. Sell marijuana	1. No	2. Yes	0. Not in gang
h. Sell other illegal drugs	1. No	2. Yes	0. Not in gang
i. Damage or destroy property	1. No	2. Yes	0. Not in gang

Motivations for Gang Leaving [Waves 3, 4, 5, and 6]

10. If you were a gang member at some point in your life, but you are not now a gang member, why did you leave the gang? (**CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY**)
0. Never in a gang.
 1. Now in a gang.
 2. A friend was hurt or killed.
 3. A family member was hurt or killed.
 4. I was hurt.
 5. I got in trouble with the police.
 6. An adult encouraged me to get out.
 7. I made new friends.
 8. I just felt like it.
 9. I moved to a new home or school.
 10. My parents made me leave the gang.
 11. It wasn't what I thought it was going to be.
 12. Other _____

Process of Gang Leaving [Waves 3, 4, 5, and 6]

11. If you were a gang member at some point in your life, but you are not now a gang member, how did you leave the gang? (**CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY**)
0. Never in a gang.
 1. Now in a gang.
 2. I just left.
 3. I moved away.
 4. I had to fight other members of the gang (“jumped out or beaten out”).
 5. I had to commit a crime.
 6. I was allowed out by gang leaders.
 7. Other _____

Consequences of Gang Leaving [Waves 3, 4, 5, and 6]

12. If you were a gang member at some point in your life, but you are not now a gang member, were there any consequences that resulted from you leaving the gang?
0. Never in a gang
 1. Now in a gang
 2. No
 3. Yes
- 12a. **IF YES**, what were those consequences? (**CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY**)
1. I was beaten up by members of my former gang.
 2. I was beaten up by members of another gang.
 3. A family member was hurt or killed.
 4. A friend was hurt or killed.
 5. I was threatened.
 6. My friends or family were threatened.
 7. I lost my gang friends.
 8. Other _____