Examining gang violence through the lives and eyes of young male gang members: implications for educational leaders

Jamal S. Edwards
Clark Atlanta University

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.auctr.edu/dissertations
Part of the Education Commons

Recommended Citation
ABSTRACT

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

EDWARDS, JAMAL S.
B.A. GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY, 1998
M.A. CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY, 2003

EXAMINING GANG VIOLENCE THROUGH THE LIVES AND EYES OF YOUNG MALE GANG MEMBERS: IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERS

Committee Chair: Dr. Sheila Gregory

Dissertation dated July 2011

This study examined gang violence through the lives and eyes of young male gang members. Throughout the conduction of this study; surveys were given and interviews were conducted to explore the phenomenon of gang violence as well as its implications for educational leaders. Variables were discussed in order to discover their influence on gang participation, activity, and violence. The variables ranged from lack of fathers, lack of religious belief, lack of positive role models, and the addiction to the gangster lifestyle, just to name a few. Of all the variables explored, the one that was unanimously the strongest was a lack of fathers. This prevailed throughout my research. Every gang member stated that a father or strong parental support/parental supervision, could have ultimately changed the outcome of their lives, most importantly leading them towards a life that did not involve the streets. Data showed that our educational system is failing our youth who are coming from urban environments and being educated in urban

1
schools. My interviews showed that these young men feel that either teachers do not know, do not show, or simply just do not care about what goes on in the lives of these students outside the classroom. This dissertation gives an open, honest, and rarely seen picture of actual gang life along with the social and psychological effects it renders on its victims. For the first time, gang members spoke about their wants, loves, fears, and aspirations. This dissertation gave them a platform to be heard as individuals with real life problems that need attention and not “just another gang member.” Look then, if you will, at life from their perspective in an attempt to gain solutions through insight that can be applied in the classroom to achieve scholastic success. In ending, my hope is that the dissertation can be used by educational leaders to change the norm of urban schools in order to produce an environment that allows all students to succeed.
EXAMINING GANG VIOLENCE THROUGH THE LIVES AND EYES OF YOUNG MALE GANG MEMBERS: IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERS

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

BY

JAMAL S. EDWARDS

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

ATLANTA, GEORGIA

JULY 2011
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

_Dedicated to those who have lost someone to gang violence._

First, I would like to thank the God. It is through Him that all things are possible. He is my protector and the only reason that I am free and alive today. I would like to thank my mother Frances Edwards, who has stood by my side through everything. She is my guardian angel and I owe her my life. To my father Harold Edwards, thank you for my spiritual foundation and the insight to understand that there is more to life than what my neighborhood had to offer. An extra special thanks goes to Ms. Betty Cooke! I love you with all my heart! Without you I would not be graduating and your help will forever be remembered. Dr. Sheila Gregory, you are the best. You are truly one in a million! You believed in me, when I didn’t! Dr. Moses Norman, thank you for your inspiration and allowing me to express myself outside of the box. You are a true educator! To Dr. Leslie T. Fenwick, thank you for EVERYTHING! You are a great inspiration for future black leaders. I would like to thank Dr. Darrell Groves for his knowledge and wisdom. This would not be possible without your help. Dr. Ganga Persaud, I would like to thank you for your kindness and support. You are a great professor. Dr. Trevor Turner, thank you for everything. I would like to thank all the gang members, counselors, and administrators for helping make this project possible. Last but not least, I would like to thank my community, my homeboys and all my loved ones. I will forever remain reputable, and represent my people to the best of my abilities.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</th>
<th>ii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTER

### I. INTRODUCTION

- Statement of the Problem ........................................... 2
- Purpose of the Study ............................................. 5
- Research Questions ............................................... 7
- Significance of the Study ........................................ 8
- Summary ............................................................. 10

### II. LITERATURE REVIEW

- Dependent Variables ............................................. 13
- Independent Variables ........................................... 15
- Summary ............................................................. 26

### III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

- Definition of Variables and Other Terms ....................... 32
- Limitations of the Study ....................................... 35
- Summary ............................................................. 36

### IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

- Research Design .................................................. 38
- Description of the Setting/Location of Research ............. 41
- Participants and Sampling Procedures......................... 42
Table of Contents (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instrumentation</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection Procedures</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statistical Application</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations of the Study</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. FINDINGS, CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Findings and Implications from the Research</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epilogue</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

APPENDIX

A. Letter to Gang Members Requesting Participation ...............104
B. Letter to Counselors.............................................105
C. Letter to Administrators.........................................106
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>APPENDIX</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D. Human Subjects Agreement</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Gang Member Survey</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Demographic Questions</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. Interview Protocol</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. Gang Member Individual Interviews</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Focus Group Interviews</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. Focus Group Questions</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K. Principals/Assistant principals Interview</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Presence of Role Models</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Religious Beliefs</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Involvement of Fathers</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Drug and Alcohol Use</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Persona Leadership Attributes</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Self-Esteem</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Perception of Having a Future</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Addiction to the Gangster Lifestyle</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Gang Values and Role Models</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Gang Values and Religious Beliefs</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Gang Values and Involvement of Fathers</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Gang Values and Drug and Alcohol Use</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Gang Values and Individual Leadership Attributes</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Gang Values and Self-Esteem</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Gang Values and Perception of Having a Future</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Gang Values and the Addiction to the Gangster Lifestyle</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Picture this concrete jungle: Urban streets lined with custom cars and teenage men armed with pistol grip shotguns and 45 automatics. Helicopters float heavily above the treetops that speckle the urban battlefield. Random vibrations of gunfire ignite throughout the night, drowned out only by onlookers’ screams and police sirens. Neighbors sprint quickly in a hazardous attempt to get anywhere they deem safe.

Young black men are presently engaged in a war, a war without provisions, fought by any means necessary, with anything at their disposal. Although the location can be any city in America, the environment is as treacherous and mystifying as any jungle in the world. In this environment, there is no idea of peace and serenity. This is an environment filled with struggle, strife, and the certainty of violence. This environment is defined by economic impoverishment, domestic violence, gang wars and the constant threat of prison. Peace is a short-lived fantasy portrayed only on television, but out of reach in this harsh reality of the concrete jungle. In this dangerous subculture, staring someone down the wrong way is a challenge punishable by death, and rarely is this punishment an isolated incident. In ghettos and slums across America, gang members distort the principle of respect from a positive aspect of human relationships into a destructive force of fear and means of control.
In this subculture, the people considered worthy of respect are identified by street address and characterized by attractiveness and youth, fearlessness and aggression, attitude and swagger, the curled lip, annoyed sulk and flexed biceps. The reality of America's gang problem has been hidden from the world like an ugly scar across the neck of a stunning lady in an attempt to maintain America's image as the place where dreams come true. America has a hideous scar across her neck that has been repeatedly concealed and kept from the world. On more than a few occasions, she has almost been exposed and this unsightliness brought to light, for example the Los Angeles riots in 1992, but another garment would always be quickly placed over the gash, and the turbulence and hideousness would again be blanketed. In the 21st century, young black men find themselves in a world where male worth is measured by the Darwinian ideal of the survival of the fittest—the strong become men while the weak remain boys—but in this world, sometimes even the strong die young.

Statement of the Problem

Young black men in the 21st century have been systematically trapped by America's lethal conditions for minorities and its expansive and deadly model for failure for people born into the slums and ghettos around the country. From the country's inception, black people have been inundated with disparaging stereotypes that stealthily label them as criminals, inferior, illiterate, lazy, and promiscuous. As recipients of the legacy of more than 500 years of slavery, they have been left with only sprinkled remnants of a damaged culture where they are constantly exposed to a multitude of negative internal and external influences.
Many black men in their youth presently walk through life riddled by cultural neglect, confused and alienated from an affirmative sense of racial identity. Absent any constructive views on being black and lacking a positive understanding of their race, young black men take in negative stereotypes that frequently cause them to loathe their own blackness. They then adopt an identity that is molded by fraudulent and overwhelmingly harmful forces. Many, if not a majority, of young black men slide through life confused and uneducated, and consequently their options and opportunities for success become limited. In this light, the generational damage of "post traumatic slave syndrome" becomes apparent (see Other Terms).

Black males in America, especially in the inner city, are having difficulties assimilating. The obstacles they face are quite daunting. They must overcome not only external forces, like racism and discrimination; they must also learn to overcome inherent forces like self-hatred and dysfunctional ingrained cultural values. This stressful and often futile experience can lead to the subculture of gang violence evident in contemporary urban environments. In the gang subculture, committing acts of violence is the only way these young black males know to achieve the sense of belonging they so desperately crave. Conditioned and brainwashed to hate themselves and their own race, black men have started to prey on themselves. The violence inflicted on black gang members by other black gang members is an unconscious display of anger and frustration resulting from poverty, racism, police brutality and other systematic injustices.

Gang-related statistics are maintained sporadically across the nation, making an exact measurement of gang violence nearly impossible to obtain (National Alliance of Gang Investigators Associations, 2005). Because research has been limited and
researchers have not established a consensus on the definition of a gang or a gang incident, "the scope and seriousness of the youth gang problem are not reliably known" (Spurge, Curry, Chance, Kane, Ross, & Alexander, 1994, p. 1). The National Youth Gang Center estimated in its most recent study that the number of youth gangs in the United States is roughly 21,500 with 731,500 members (National Alliance of Gang Investigators Associations, 2005). Law enforcement and media reports indicate that criminal youth gang activity exists in nearly every state, including Alaska and Hawaii, and has even spread to Puerto Rico and other U. S. territories (Spurge et al., 1994, p. 1). Additionally, previous studies suggest that large, mid-size, and small communities as well as both urban and suburban areas are affected by youth gang activity.

The effect that these gangs have on their respective communities and on the individual members themselves is rarely if ever positive. Youth gang membership is associated with substantially higher levels of delinquency and crime. Gang members commit three times as many violence offenses as non-gang delinquents (Spurge et al., 1994, p. 1). Moreover, gangs are the primary distributors of drugs throughout the United States at both the wholesale and retail/street levels (National Alliance of Gang Investigators Associations, 2005, p. 13).

The negative consequences of gang activity are especially apparent in schools. The development and widespread effects of gangs and gang violence, particularly in public schools, has evolved into an issue of utmost importance and growing concern. Far from remaining neutral turf, schools not only suffer from gang related violence “spilling over” from the streets, but are themselves rapidly becoming centers of gang activities, functioning particularly as sites for recruitment and socializing (Arthur & Erikson, 1992.
Evengangmemberswhohavebeenuspended,expelled,orhavedroppedoutcan oftenbefoundhangingoutwiththeirassociates,effectivelyusingtheschoolasagang hangoutratherthanasaneducationalinstitution. Evenworse,whenagangmembergetsexpelled,heorshewillinevitablybringgangactivitytothenextschooltheyattend, causinganunintentionalspilloverofgangactivityintotheneWschooL. Asgangactivity spreadsfromaschoolthatalreadyhadgangpresencetoaschoolthatdidnot,thenetwork ofdrugtraffickingandviolenceexpands. Schools with gangs are significantly more likelytohave drugs available on campus than those without gangs (Bodinger-deUrinate, 1993). Moreover, students inschoolswithagangpresenceare“twiceaslikelytoreport thattheyfearbecomingvictims ofviolencethantheirpeersatschoolswithoutgangs” (Cureton, 2008, p. 10). In a Phi Delta Kappa study, 72% of people surveyed felt that the continuedgrowthofyouthgangsisaveryimportantfactorandcauseofviolenceinschools (Christian, 1990, p. 3). Crime and violence invariably disrupt teaching and learningenvironments, makingthereductionofgangmembershipacriticalgoalfor contemporaryeducators.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore and research the phenomenon ofgang violence. This will be accomplished through interviews, surveys and quantitative analysis. The presence of gangs on school grounds has led manyeducators to formulate policies aimed at reducing or eliminatinggang crime andviolence. Informulatingthesepolicies,educatorsandcommunityleadersaskseveralquestions: Why dokidsjoin gangs? What goes on in the life of a gang member? What is the impact of gangs on
schools? While some research has attempted to answer these questions, most researchers have avoided asking the only people who really know the answers—the gang members themselves. The reason for this avoidance could be fear or simply an inability to get gang members to talk to outsiders. Regardless, the lack of information from the actual source is devastating to any effort to combat the influence of gangs. This study illuminates the way gang members feel and why they act the way they do in their own words. Using the information they provide, educators and policy makers will be better equipped to find solutions to the growing threat of gang violence and put alternative plans in action that will reduce the allure of gang membership. The only certainty when dealing with the problem of gangs is that further avoidance and denial by educators and policymakers are the gangs’ greatest allies.

The researcher has personally spent nineteen years studying, researching, and writing about the gang epidemic in America. The researcher has read countless books, articles, and reports on gangs. All of the information gleaned from hours of study, however, pales in comparison to the insights gained through conversations with actual gang participants. Although the researcher is not currently directly involved in the gang culture, the researcher is indirectly related through peers. The researcher of this study has buried many loved ones to gang violence, and through these painful losses the researcher has developed personal relationships with many current gang members, permitting the researcher access to a group that is normally shrouded in secrecy. The researcher has known many of these gang members since they were young teens and has met many of their parents and older siblings and throughout the course of our interactions; the
researcher has earned their respect. Because of these relationships established over time, this study can reveal what really goes on in the minds of those holding the guns.

The decision to involve oneself in a gang is based on thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and values—it is culturally specific information. Face-to-face interaction is critical to accessing this deeper, personal perspective, and this is exactly where previous research has fallen short. This examination of gang violence and the various other afflictions caused by gang activity will help educators intervene early in the lives of these youth and help reduce, with the hope of eventually eliminating, the harm caused by gang presence in schools.

**Research Questions**

In regard to the declaration of the dilemma, and in accord with the rationale for this research, the following questions have been formulated to lend input to this study:

RQ1: Is there a significant relationship between gang values and the presence or absence of role models?

RQ2: Is there a significant relationship between gang values and religious beliefs?

RQ3: Is there a significant relationship between gang values and the presence or absence of a father figure?

RQ4: Is there a significant relationship between gang values and drug and alcohol use?

RQ5: Is there a significant relationship between gang values and personal leadership attributes?
RQ6: Is there a significant relationship between gang values and self-esteem?

RQ7: Is there a significant relationship between gang values and the perception of having a future?

RQ8: Is there a significant relationship between gang values and the addiction to the gangster lifestyle?

RQ9: How can schools help reduce gang violence?

RQ10: What classroom practices are needed to provide safer schools in a climate where all children can learn?

RQ11: What school policies are needed to make schools safer?

RQ12: What can be done to lessen the attraction to the gangster lifestyle?

RQ13: What can school administrators do to ensure that teachers are better prepared to teach students with gang backgrounds?

**Significance of the Study**

Researchers have discovered "little evidence that relying solely on suppression has reduced the gang problem in large cities" (Cureton, 2008, p. 6). Currently, most schools that have a gang problem have instituted policies banning gang activity on school grounds. While the status quo ban should definitely continue, this new research will suggest alternatives that will prevent youth from wanting to join a gang in the first place. The research aims to determine why young black men feel inclined to join a gang, what benefits they perceive having from their membership, and what role the gang plays in their lives. With this information, educators and policy makers can create programs that provide the same benefits for youth at high risk for gang membership.
Yusuf Jah suggests that schools should consider adding an African-American history class to the curriculum because 68% of blacks graduate from high school with no knowledge of Africa, other than where it is on the globe (Jah, Jah, & Keyah, 1995, p. 2). When blacks are kept ignorant about their history, they will not grow up having respect for it. Instead, schools should teach African-American youth about the positive things people of their race have achieved. This will provide the young people with a sense of belonging, a sense of self, and a hope that they, too, can achieve better things for themselves and their race in a larger context.

The study issues recommendations about the best way to implement these programs. If gang youth can find jobs to help support their families, they will not have to choose between school attendance and engaging in illegal activities to earn money. Moreover, the research reveals whether there is a high correlation between the absence of a father figure and gang membership. If a significant relationship exists, the study may recommend establishing a program pairing gang members with successful businessmen from high risk gang areas, who can provide support and guidance regarding employment as well as serving as a positive male role model to the gang member. If there is a significant relationship between a lack of structure and gang membership, the study may suggest putting after school programs in place to give gang youth a structured and safe environment to keep them off the streets after the bell rings.

Perhaps most importantly, the research aims to reveal the best way to get through to youth currently involved in gangs. The surveys and interviews will ask what interests gang members and what does not, who they respect and who they do not, what matters to them and what does not. With these answers, educators and policy makers can tailor
programs to meet these needs. For example, the research may suggest that the best way to reach gang youth is to employ former gang members to engage the youth in anti-gang education programs. The youth may respect someone who has stood in their shoes, and former gang members may have a greater ability to articulate effectively the costs of gang membership.

This study is not done for praise, but out of desperation for the survival of the children, parents, schools and communities that are directly and indirectly involved in and affected by gang activity. Analysis of the research will suggest systematic conclusions calculated to bring about a superior, more detailed understanding of this malady and to help reach workable solutions for all concerned. As gang membership grows, so do the perils of further avoiding this issue. Schools offer a unique environment to fight the gang epidemic because of the access to so many young people, vulnerable potential gang members all in one place. Discovering how to allocate resources properly in an educational environment could ultimately save countless lives.

Summary

The gang epidemic is of dire importance and must be addressed immediately. The information revealed in this study could ultimately help put programs in place that could save countless lives. Numerous children could potentially be raised with their fathers and countless families could remain intact as a result of a reduction in gang activity. Gang affiliation constitutes "part of an expected socialization process in certain communities where they are viewed as embodying such values as honor, loyalty, and fellowship" (Spurge et al., 1994, p. 3). Gang members are taught never to snitch on each
other—loyalty to the gang takes precedent over all other affiliations. Those members who perform their duties zealously and observe the gang code of silence are rewarded with recognition, status, and relative security in a world where they are otherwise completely ignored and placed in danger on a daily basis. The danger is especially great for youth raised under conditions of social deprivation. In these conditions, joining a gang may result from a process of “rational calculation in which the objectives are the achievement of security or gaining financial benefits” (Spurge et al., 1994, p. 3). It is in these areas of economic decline where efforts in schools are the most critical.

The role of schools cannot be underestimated in the fight against gang influence. A youth gang member is likely to be a child or teen who has done poorly in school and has “little identification with school staff” (Spurge et al., 1994, p. 4). These young people often use schools more for gang-related activities than academic or social learning purposes. Public schools, particularly middle schools, are a great potential community resource for the “prevention of and intervention into youth gang problems” (Spurge et al., 1994, p. 10). Previous research indicates that the peak recruitment period is between fifth and eighth grade. The most at-risk youth are those who are in danger of dropping out.

With the results of this study, educators have a better chance of getting to these high risk youth before they join a gang, thus breaking the cycle of violence and death.

As a former gang member, this topic is of vital importance to me. The researcher has buried over 30 loved ones and have witnessed over 40 get sent to prison, with 15 sentenced to 25 years to life. The researcher has participated in gang activity and has been the victim of several gang retaliations. As a result of these life experiences, the researcher jump whole heartily into this research trying to find a resolution to this
problem. This is for the children of the children whom the researcher interviewed and writes about in this study. If the researcher can prevent one future ghetto-star from participating in a drive-by then this was a success. If the researcher can convince one child not to join a gang, then the immeasurable hours dedicated to this project will have been justified. In a way, this is the researcher's redemption. The researcher can find comfort in the knowledge that perhaps as a result of this study, one child, and hopefully many more, can triumph over adversity and decline to become the next generation of gangsters.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

A common question asked is, “Why do young people join gangs?” Attraction to gangs is based on their ability to respond to needs not being met; they often provide youth with a sense of family and acceptance, otherwise non-existent in their lives. Gang involvement is a result of several variables. Consequently, young people participate in violent behavior and acts associated with the lifestyle. According to Bandura’s Social Learning Theory (1977), individuals acquire certain behavior and attitudes through a process of “social learning,” in this particular case, from gang members. The Social Learning Theory claims that if behavior is rewarded, it will be repeated, reinforced and continuous. Gang participants choose this type of association and behavior because of a lack of love, support, guidance and mentorship.

Dependent Variable

Gang Values

The foundation of this study is the gang members themselves. These are young men who love each other, care for each other, and are willing to kill and die for each other. This is the substructure to gangbanging. This is what gang membership is about, the “Do or Die” mentality. A gang member will support his gang to the death, he will defend his “hood” against all who contest it, and he will represent his neighborhood with pride. Big Girch, a gang member, reports, “If you ain’t from where I’m from, f**k you,
that’s just how it is where I come from, it’s kill or be killed” (Peralta & George [Motion Picture], 2008). Going to prison is seen as a badge of honor, and getting shot is the ultimate testament of a person’s commitment to the gang. Professor Kumasi, a teacher at Manual Arts High School, recalls one of his students saying,

My little brother was walking to school at six o’clock in the morning and some of my enemies shot at him on his way to school. This is six o’clock in the morning. That sh*t makes you think, what kind of sick ni**as be up that early in the morning trying to do some cruel sh*t like that? (Peralta & George [Motion Picture], 2008).

Gang members go to extremes to prove the commitment to their gang, as well as the pride they have for it. They must be willing to die for it. It is a way of life. These young men dedicate themselves to this way of life as if it was a religion. Instead of door-to-door teaching, there are drive-bys. The concept of death is welcomed and respected as long as it is for the gang. If one dies for his gang, he is held in the highest regard. Gang violence brings respect, a principle in urban communities that defines identity. Gray (1998) states:

When two totalitarian powers make war on each other, the anger and hatred that arises can be appeased only by the death of one or the other. More than this, such killing is profoundly satisfying. Anger and hatred are fulfilled in destruction insofar as such emotions know satiety. The more lives the solider succeeds in accounting for, the prouder he is likely to feel. To his people he is a genuine hero and to himself, as well. For him, war is in no sense a game or dirty mess. It is a mission, a holy cause, his chance to prove himself and gain a supreme purpose in
living. His hatred of the enemy makes this soldier feel supremely real, and in
combat his hatred finds only appropriate appeasement. (p. 1)

Gang violence is motivated by the belief in the elimination of individuals. The goal is the
destruction of as many adversaries as possible. This is murder in the first degree, most of
the time pre-mediated. It is a lifestyle based and built on death. The reason for this
approach when dealing with conflict is directly related to several variables. These
variables are the cause and gang violence is the effect.

**Independent Variables**

**Role Models**

Every community has role models, some good and some bad. In urban communities, role models play a very significant role in the lives of young people. Positive role models in urban communities are people like preachers, teachers, and community activists. Negative role models tend to be gangsters, pimps, and hustlers. Unfortunately, negative role models in gang infested communities tend to be viewed as preachers of moral religion, teachers of gangster etiquette, and activists who stand against forces trying to disrupt the norm. According to Paul Brown, director of the Prince’s Trust charity, “If young people do not have parents who are good role models and have no other adults in their life to look up to, gangs filled the vacuum” (Bennett, 2008, p. 1). Teens feeling ignored will seek out attention, positive or negative, and accept it from whoever is willing to spend the time with them. Brown also states:

Some of the young people in our program come from families where no one has ever worked. They think having a job with a steady income and a stable family
is not an achievable goal for them. Gangs are very attractive to young people if they have no sense of direction or motivation. (Bennett, 2008, p. 1)

These kids are lost, growing up in a society that does not care about them, looking for anyone to give them some guidance. In gang communities, vultures are looking, waiting, and preying on the vulnerable males looking for a way out of their dismal situation. To them, any attention is better than none, and what makes gangs even more attractive is that the individuals paying attention seem to actually have something going for them. An article for the BBC News states, “A survey published by the charity found that one in three young people in the UK say they do not think of their own parents as people they respect” (Lack of Role Models’ Fuels Gangs, 2008). Parents are competing against unwinnable odds, trying to defeat a gravitational pull of magnitude proportions. The BBC also claims, “More than half of the teenagers (55%) cited friends and peers as role models and almost a quarter (22%) said young people are looking for role models in gangs” (Bennet, 2008, p. 1). The influence of the streets and its gangster bravado has an attraction almost as strong as crack to a crack addict—some might say stronger. The influence of positive role models is important, especially in those urban communities where negative persuasion is on every corner. Positive influences are competing with drug dealers, gang members and hustlers who can offer immediate avenues to wealth, power and prestige. How does staying in school compare to money in your pocket? How does catching the bus to college compare to having your own car in high school? How does doing the “right thing” compare to overnight celebrity status? Positive forces are fighting a battle against a gravitational pull equivalent to that of a black hole and once the streets grab hold of the young men, they will not let go. We have to offer
the urban community and the gang culture something they can relate to. If we can not
paint a tangible picture of success for these youth we will continue to lose them to the
street.

Religious Beliefs

People often wonder if kids who are involved in gangs believe in God. How can
gang members kill and reconcile their religious beliefs? Hansel “Rat” Boyd, a former
gang member, explains:

Bloods and Crips are sworn enemies, yet both sides claim to believe in the Bible
or the Qur’an, therefore, both sides are members of the same religion. Religion is
a gang: In Ireland, Protestants and Catholics have been killing each other on a
regular basis for over thirty years, worse than any gang war in the gang capital by
far. (Boyd, 2004, p. 1)

The people who ask how gang members can reconcile killing and their religious beliefs
could ask the same question to religious extremists. History will show that many groups
have those extreme members who commit murder. There are further similarities between
gangs and extremist religious groups. Jose Luis Rocha states:

The similarities with a youth gang are obvious. The group attempts some
homogeneity of attire and postures. They are young. They portray violence to
send out a message. They are a show of strength—Catholic in this case. They
perform a transgression of the normal order that is tolerated by a certain group,
but not by others—Protestants, for example. And they are immersed in a practice
that brings their identity into play, announcing themselves as active Catholics.

(Rocha, 2008, p. 1)

Research shows that gang members are often very religious, but can those beliefs be used in a positive way to hinder their acts of violence? If you look at any gang member, you will almost always see a cross or praying hands tattooed on them. This has become so common that it is now considered identification of gang affiliation by most city police. When a deceased friend or colleague is mentioned, you will hear most members say, “rest in peace.” Since these young men live such a difficult and immoral life, they see death as being positive. Their faith in a higher power is the only solace they have to look forward to. Belief in something better than their current anguish provides optimism that the future will bring something worth living for.

**Involvement of Fathers**

Every day on the news there are countless reports on gang violence, and every so often, the reports present a summary of the shooter’s background. Time and time again, the shooter comes from an impoverished neighborhood and/or a broken home and somehow fell through the cracks in the system. Thus the next variable: involvement of fathers. How important is having a father in a young man’s life when it comes to his decision to join a gang? Father figures and/or positive male role-models appear to be:

Absent from the lives of a significant number of gang-involved youth; but a predilection toward gang involvement is also evident in young men whose fathers have been present but detrimental in their lives. Structured interviews were combined with process recordings and recollections of case studies to investigate
the premise that absent fathers contribute to a boy’s decision to join a gang.

(Bracki, 1997, p. 1)

In this study, individual interviews and group focus groups were combined with a survey to investigate the premise that absent fathers contribute to a boy’s decision to join a gang. Previous studies demonstrate the importance of a father’s guidance in a young man’s journey to find his way into manhood. Someone must instruct him on how to become a man, and absent a father figure, many young men turn to older gang members. A young man is like a sponge, floating aimlessly and soaking up all that he sees, hears, and experiences. Carlie (2002) suggests, “When nonresident fathers are involved in their adolescent children’s lives, the incidence of violence, crime, substance abuse and truancy decrease markedly” (p. 1). When a young man gets into trouble at school, nothing can compare to the horror of having to confront his father. The fear is bone-shaking and core-rattling, something so frightening that it is difficult to express in words. Bix Brazy, a gang member, stated in War Stories, “I didn’t fear my mama beating my a*s, but if my daddy had been there to beat my a*s I probably wouldn’t be here right now, I wouldn’t be bangin” (Wright [Motion Picture], 2000). With the absence of a father in the house, it is hard to set boundaries and guidelines for young men to follow. Fathers have an innately strong physical presence and fear-striking demeanor that is needed to keep young men on the right path. Young men need balance in their life and without a father figure balance cannot be sustained.
Drug and Alcohol Use

Drug and alcohol use is rampant in urban communities, but does it have any effect on violent behavior and the decision-making process of gang members? Drinking is an “integral and regular part of socializing within gang life...drinking works as a social lubricant, or social glue, to maintain not only the cohesion and social solidarity of the gang but also to affirm masculinity and male togetherness” (Hunt & Laidler, 2001, p. 66). Hunt suggests that drinking is a way of life in the gang; it is part of the everyday routine. Drinking is hard to escape and, in many ways, it is expected in order to “be down” with the gang. Researchers have noted that alcohol,

works to create a ritualized context for fighting and violent confrontations, whether physical or verbal, in which in-built tensions can be released or disputes settled within a contained arena, once resolved through alcohol-related violence, the group can maintain its cohesion and unity. (Hunt and Laidler, 2001. p. 66)

Once gang members get intoxicated, male bravado ascends and fist-to-cuffs matches ensue to prove who is “king of the hill.” These fights would more than likely not happen if the members were temperate. The initial fight may start in a backyard, but after a few more alcoholic beverages and puffs of marijuana, the violence can escalate to the streets, and a drive-by shooting on a rival is too often the outcome. While this is sometimes the outcome, this is not the main cause for gang violence. Drugs and alcohol become a coping mechanism to help members make peace with their deeds.
Leadership

The characteristic of leadership is typically associated with Chief Executive Officers (CEOs), principals, and military personnel, but everyone, including gang members, plays a leadership role at some point in their life. Street gangs are similar to the military in some ways. In South Central Los Angeles (LA), gangs recruit more members per year than all four branches of the U.S. armed services. Drug dealers in LA employ more people than Comcast, AT&T, and UPS combined (Dead Homiez, 1993). Mike Carlie, a professor of Sociology and Criminal Justice at Southwest Missouri State University, suggests that the leader of the gang determines "what level of criminal activity the gang will participate in. The characteristics of the leader are reflected in the day to day activities of the gang" (Carlie, 2002). If the gang is especially vicious, the leader of that gang will be feared and respected by rival gang members. If the gang is passive or considered weak, then in the streets their "original gangster" (OG’s), or leaders, will be considered weak. Stronger gangs prey on weaker gangs. Bhom (2001), author of *A Primer on Crime and Delinquency Theory*, states:

It was this day that began what would become a career for Big C: banging. Big C worked hard to secure a reputation for his name. He held loyal to his homeboys and began to build up the Crips. His potential for being in a leadership position became more and more evident as time went on. (p. 82)

The leadership role in a gang is earned through day-to-day activities. The harder one works and the higher one’s rank, the bigger one’s leadership role becomes. The individual who is the craziest, "downest"—the one who is willing to do whatever for his gang—is the one who is given the leadership role because they are loved, feared or
respected by all. Some gang members become egotistical with the power of leadership. It is almost like playing God, he decides if you live or you die. Most of the individuals who take on the leadership roles in gangs were at one time killers themselves. Gang violence is second nature to them, it is what they know; this is how they increase their ranking. Now, instead of actually pulling the trigger, they can sit back and decide who pulls the trigger and who receives the bullet.

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem can be linked to delinquency and violent behavior. Many studies have shown that teens with low self-esteem are more likely to become involved in criminal behavior. Experts say that students with low self-esteem who “experience repeated failures turn to criminal and violent behavior” (Carlie, 2002, p. 1). In other situations, gang members may commit violent acts to compensate for their feelings of insecurity and low self-esteem. One of the biggest appeals of gangs is that they give the gang member a feeling of belonging, acceptance, and importance while encouraging gang activity. Low self-esteem leads to bad decision making and poor judgment. Individuals with low self-esteem tend to associate with other individuals that have low self-esteem. This lack of self-worth leads to poor behavioral choices. Someone with little self-worth may act out violently or someone with little self-respect may not respect others. Both traits are seen as strengths in the gang community and if channeled correctly, that lack of self-respect and self-worth can be released into the community through gang violence. These individuals are looking to belong.
Youth join gangs for many reasons, but low self-esteem often is related. Those with low self-esteem seem to rely more on group or collective self-esteem than those with high personal self-esteem. Thus, some individuals seek gang membership to compensate for feelings of low self-esteem. (Reasoner, 2000, p. 1)

Gangs tend to accept people for who they are, not what they have to offer. If you are weak they will make you strong. Sheriff Block of Los Angeles County stated:

Children join gangs to fulfill the need to belong and the need to feel important. They want to be somebody, rather than be a nobody. We must focus on enhancing the self-worth and self-esteem of young people so that they do not need the gang to satisfy their most basic human needs. (Reasoner, 2000, p. 1)

These young men are hungry for acceptance. They are searching for needs that have not been met. Whoever meets their needs and offers them that attention they so desperately crave, will have a pupil that is willing to do whatever it takes to maintain that relationship. Whether it is killing, robbing or doing drugs, they will be determined to do whatever it takes to keep the bond together.

**Perception of Having a Future**

Thinking about the future is a luxury very few gang members are afforded. They are too busy worrying about the now because at any given moment one’s life can be extinguished. A gang member has to be constantly on the watch, on his toes, just trying to stay alive to live another day. The Orange County Sheriffs’ Department says:
Gang members cast a bleak future for themselves. Gang membership, although a temporary phase for some youths, severely harms their future. They socialize strictly with other gang members, reinforcing their limited view on life. Gang members frequently drop out of school. This severely limits their chances for a better life. Some gang members who make it to adulthood may develop patterns of alcohol and drug abuse. Often, the gang members acquire extensive police records, limiting their opportunity for employment, turning them to greater criminal enterprise. Ultimately, some gang members are seriously injured or killed. (Orange County Sheriff’s Advisory Council, 1999)

The gang lifestyle is not a lifestyle, it is a death style—gang members experience daily brushes with death, and if a gang member is lucky enough to avoid death, they often end up spending the rest of their lives in prison. Kimberley Wilson, a Seattle-Post Intelligencer reporter, claims in an interview with Seattle gang members, “Between the penitentiaries and the funerals, it gets lonely,” said one man, known as OG Special, “the smart ones and the blessed ones have outlived the lifestyle,” said the man, a 34-year-old father of three (Wilson, 2000, p. 1). Gang bangers do not have a future; all they have is the cards they are dealt due to the decisions they make once they join the gang life. For any serious gang member, a frequent reward of active participation is to be crippled in a wheelchair. The most common reward is life in prison, never coming home. The ultimate reward is death, from which there is no return.
Addiction to the Gangster Lifestyle

With all the negative implications that come with being a gang member, why would gang members bang (short for gangbang)? Why would they put themselves in harm’s way? Why would they risk their freedom? Why would they put their families through all that pain? The research suggests that they are addicted to the lifestyle, or the “death style.” The addiction is comparable to crack, meth or heroin. There is a rush, a sense of excitement, a thrill for the kill, an animation from being the hunted and actually surviving to kill another day. This is the same addiction war veterans suffer from when they return from battle and are unable to bond with anyone but their comrades from the field, the same addiction a wounded solider feels after recovering from his injuries and requesting return to active duty. It is the call of the wild, the warrior’s code—for a true worrier, having no war to fight is synonymous with death. Steven R. Cureton (2008), a Professor of Sociology at the University of North Carolina—Greensboro, states, “This is the first and the last time for a long time he [Ducc, a current gang member] listened to his conscience” (p. 12). Ducc realizes:

I’ve been fighting my whole life, I fought for a living. This didn’t just start today. When I look in the mirror, I see me, I see a man. And when men go out, they are attracted to their own kind. You know he’s not a punk; he’s open to a challenge. When he steps to the side walk, the first thing that steps and poses a threat, he must use his defenses, win or lose. It’s the pride you receive within yourself, your heart and mind, which is the two things connected to your soul. You feel good about yourself. (Cureton, 2008, p. 12)
This lifestyle becomes like a religion for members. They walk, talk, and sleep
gangsterism. It is a mentality of “Do or Die.” Gang members from previous research
over the last 15 years have all said the same thing: “I’d rather die like a solider then live
like a coward” (Cureton, 2008, p. 12). Ducc later states:

Unfortunately, gangsterism lives throughout and within me, mentally and
physically. I don’t regret doing anything I’ve done that caused harm to someone
because that’s added to my reputation of being a soldier. I never really had
problems and I can’t recall motherf***rs coming up to me and fu**in me up.
Hey, I’m a do or die motherf***r. And if you ain’t gonna kill me, don’t f**k
with me. (Cureton, 2008, p. 33)

This is an addiction to the celebrity status of being a bad-a*s, of being macho, that cat
that everybody wants to be. From junior high to high school, the cool guys run the yard,
and everybody looks up to him. In the “hood,” the cool guys kill, and everybody looks
up to them, too.

Summary

In summary, all of these variables have an effect on whether a teen will join a
gang and if they join a gang they will participate in gang violence. As agents of change,
we must ask ourselves why. What would make a young man kill another human being
over a color, street or address in which none of them actually own? What is the cause of
this behavior and what is the rationale behind it? That is a million dollar question with a
five dollar answer. Some people have accepted gang violence as the standard corollary
of our era and as a routine resolution to conflict in the black community. People should
recognize the importance of the different variables and the affect they have on these young men. We can no longer assume that they have the moral wherewithal to make the right decisions. Acknowledgement of individual moral responsibility is a necessary precondition to the resolution of this gang problem. We need to address this epidemic step-by-step, variable-by-variable implementing a social agenda preventing these young men from becoming gang members. These young men deserve an opportunity to live a civilized life. They should not have to leave city limits to bring peace and serenity to their lives.

Each variable, applicable to a particular individual’s life or not, has a major effect on his decision-making process. From role models to fatherless teens, from religion beliefs to drugs and alcohol, all of these factors affect what kind of decision a teen will make regarding gang membership. This study illustrates how these variables affect the decision-making process. This study has reexamined previous research, as well as conduct group and one-on-one interviews with actual gang members. There are no experts on this topic except for active participants. The only way to solve this epidemic is to go directly to the source—the gang members themselves.
CHAPTER III
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

For this study, the theoretical framework will consist of four major theories: Bandura’s Social-learning Theory (1977), Morten’s Strain Theory (1938), Edwin Sutherland’s Differential Association Theory (1939), and Social Disorganization Theory (1939). These theories have all been used in previous research on the topic of gangs. They have been used to identify, define and recommend various solutions to the problem, but this study will use them in a new and unique way by using them to examine the gang member’s actual words and experiences. Each theory will be used to analyze the results in the hopes of approaching a plausible solution to America’s gang problem.

The first theory is Bandura’s (1977) Social-Learning Theory. This theory states that people learn from one another through observations, imitation and modeling. This theory is relevant because young gang members model older gang members to gain acceptance. The reason they model these individuals is because of the lack of fathers in the home. They look to these men as father figures. They want to walk like, talk like and attain the same demeanor and “swagger” as these men. More than likely, older gang members will be the first adult male to give them a hug. These young men growing up without fathers will look these men as role models and they will serve as their definition of masculinity. They will observe the way the gangsters interact with women. They will
imitate the way they conduct themselves with other men. The will model the way they handle disrespect. These older gang members become their role models and they soak up their habits like sponges. They will learn everything they know from the streets and gang members who run them. They will make gestures like the “gangster-lean” or the “cholo-walk” to impress peers so that they may earn respect. They will learn what a man is and how to become one from their environment. What they learn through observations of older, respected individuals in their community will define them as individuals in the future. From a young age, many gang members learn to talk the talk and walk the walk by imitating those they admire in their community. Unfortunately for most urban communities, those considered worthy of admiration happen to be gangsters.

The second theory is Morten’s (1938) Strain Theory. Morten’s theory states that social structures within society may encourage individuals to commit crime. This has been a topic debated since the beginning of urban crime. Many previous studies have compared nature vs. nurture, urban vs. suburban, and innate vs. environmental. Imagine a situation where a young man’s father is absent and the mother works two jobs. She leaves home at six every morning and returns home at eleven each night. The young man is a junior in high school with a younger brother in middle school. Money is tight. Mom is tired and the young man and his brother have to trade cloths to keep from being made fun of at school. This scenario is a reality for a lot of young black males. These types of home conditions will make a young man feel as if he has to be the man of the house. These circumstances can cause a young man to feel trapped causing him to believe that he has to do something in order to supplement his family income, in order to make life a little easier. In a social setting such as this, resources are limited, jobs are scarce and
governmental funds are insufficient. The only perceived opportunity many young black males comprehend is to participate in criminal activities. This is the mindset for many growing up in underprivileged neighborhoods. Their outlook on life is bleak and minimum wage does not seem like enough to live a happy life. Desperation is a breeding ground for deviance. Gangs provide financial opportunity, protection and support for those looking to better their situation through drug sales. It is hard for a young man who feels it is his responsibility to provide for his younger siblings to choose a minimum wage job over drug trafficking because of a lack of moral responsibility. Social structures in urban communities offer limited opportunities for young men to obtain financial assistance to help better their home conditions. This lack of opportunity leads many to partake in illegal activities to achieve their goals and handle their responsibilities. The research suggests that environment plays a tremendous role in whether or not a child participates in gang activity and that social structures influence an individual’s outlook on crime. This theory supports the findings and shows how an individual’s environment affects his or her decisions in relation to gang activity.

The final two theories that were used in this study are by the same person, Edwin Sutherland. The first is Differential Association Theory and the second is Social Disorganization Theory (1939). The Differential Theory claims that individuals learn the values, attitudes, techniques, and motivation for criminal behavior through interactions with others. The Social Disorganization Theory states that high crime rates are directly linked to neighborhood ecological characteristics. Both of these theories show that crime is linked to community, community is linked to interaction with individuals, and from these interactions people learn values, attitudes and motivation for criminal behavior.
The Differential Theory relates directly to my variables for this study. The lack of role models and fathers in the urban community makes it easy for these young men to learn their values from their community. The virtues reflective of role models in the black community consist of fearlessness, courage and valor. All of these have been self-taught and at times distorted. Without a strong religious foundation and high self-confidence, young men look for something or someone to emulate. Gangs have their own values, norms and traditions which they live by. These things have to be taught because they are anomalies in mainstream society. Gang violence is not a natural activity that normal people participate in. This is a learned behavior taught to young men who are missing certain social needs. Without certain basic necessities such as a father or a belief in a higher power, these young men are susceptible to those who promote gangs as a model for life.

The second of his theories is Social Disorganization Theory. This theory states that high crime rates are directly linked to neighborhood ecological characteristics. As stated earlier, the gang culture is a subculture of a larger culture. This culture has its own laws, parliament and ethics. In this culture respect is a linchpin principle that is non-negotiable. This theory places residential location as the primary factor to shaping criminality. In destitute communities hope is meager, and the possibility of making it out of the hood is slim to none if you are not playing sports or rapping. The perception of having a future is not promising to most young men who concede to gang activity to attain their piece of the American dream. Urban communities are drug infested and preach that alcohol is the perfect coping mechanism to the stresses do day-to-day life. These communities over time have eliminated the building blocks necessary to produce
strong black men in mass numbers. Instead, we have replaced what is needed with what is convenient. We have replaced fathers with grandmothers, role models with gang members and churches with clubs. Our neighborhoods are teaching criminal behavior and gang activity, activities that are bred in urban communities and passed down from generation to generation.

Definitions of Variables and Other Terms

Dependent Variables

Gang values: Gang values are defined as the extremes that gang members go through to promote, defend, and represent their neighborhood. It is also called the "Do or Die" mentality or killing without remorse.

Independent Variables

Addiction to the gangster lifestyle: The addiction to the gangster lifestyle is defined as the compulsive behavior of gang members in retrospect to the going in and out of jail, the killing of rival gang members, the possibility of being killed, and the general addiction to the death-style of gang life.

Drug and alcohol use: Drug and alcohol use is defined as the effects of drugs and alcohol and the impact they have on the decision-making processes and behavior of gang members, particularly violent behavior.

Individual Leadership Attributes: Leadership is defined as the different responsibilities that individual gang members take on and display within the community, including the different management roles gang members take on within the gang community.
Involvement of fathers: The involvement of fathers is defined as the behavior, decision-making abilities and propensity for violence of gang members who have had a father in their lives and those who have not.

Perception of having a future: The perception of having a future is defined as the life that gang members expect for themselves and the life they do not.

Presence of role models: The presence of role models are defined as the positive and negative effects that role models have on individuals involved in gangs; both positive and negative role models in a gang youth’s community.

Religious beliefs: Religious beliefs are defined as the presence or absence of a conception of God in a gang member’s life and how this effects the decisions he makes.

Self-esteem: Self-esteem is defined the effect that self-esteem has on kids joining gangs.

Other Terms

Already dead: When used in reference to gang members, implies that he considers his life and your life to be disposable.

Cholo walk: A walk used by Mexican gang members to identify themselves as active gang members.

Cool Cat: Is an individual who is laid back, who grew up in the neighborhood, just one of those guys you love just because he’s around all the time.

Death style: The life style that gang members live, the idea of living to die.
Do or Die Mentality. This is the shoot first ask questions latter mentality. You either join a gang, or become a victim of your environment. This mentality is very prevalent among gang members.

Down for the Hood: Is a reference for a gang member who is fiercely loyal to his neighborhood.

Gang bangin: Participating in gang activity.

Gangster-lean: A gang member’s slanted stance that signifies he is part of the criminal world.

Kick it: Gang members hanging out, usually drinking, smoking, or just shooting the breeze.

Mean mug: The way a gang member looks at another gang member in order to challenge him.

Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (P.T.S.S.): a condition that exists as a consequence of multigenerational oppression of Africans and their descendants resulting from centuries of chattel slavery; a form of slavery which was predicated on the belief that African Americans were inherently/genetically inferior to whites; followed by institutionalized racism which continues to perpetuate injury (Lery, 2004, p. 14).

Riders: The elite of the elite of gang members, the ones who are the most respected; the killers.

Slangin or trapping: The selling of narcotics.

Street Soldier: A gang member in the combat division. This is the one who is relied upon to carry out retaliation.
**Thousand yard stare:** The way a gang member looks threateningly, what another person can see in his eyes that indicates he is the wrong person to mess with.

**Wanna be's:** Individuals who hang around gang members trying to find their way, usually younger guys.

**War-type atmosphere.** These are environments where war has become a way of life. Examples are Pakistan, Congo, Los Angeles, Chicago and Miami in the 1980s.

**Willie Lynch papers.** The William Lynch speech is an address purportedly delivered by William Lynch (or Willie Lynch) to an audience on the bank of the James River in Virginia in 1712 regarding control of slaves within the colony. The letter purports to be a verbatim account of a short speech given by a slave owner, in which he tells other slave masters that he has discovered the "secret" to controlling black slaves by setting them against one another (Hassen-El, 1999).

**Limitations of the Study**

The data collection procedure was done in Decatur, Georgia with gang members who belong to a program for youth involved in gang activity. Their views, therefore, do not necessarily represent the views of all gang members in all cities throughout the country. Their data were used to extrapolate conclusions that should be useful to any educator trying to deal with the burgeoning gang problem, but specifically for educators throughout Georgia. Perhaps the greatest limitation of the study is the fact that the researcher works with these gang members on a near daily basis and, therefore, very familiar with them. Despite this familiarity, however, the researcher remained neutral in the research and in the ensuing recommendations.
Summary

There are many hypotheses about why teens join gangs. Some posit that their acts of violence might be the only instrument they know of that can put them in touch with the larger world. Many teens feel like nobody cares about them, especially in the absence of a father figure, and they start to view their lives as disposable. Many seek to feel alive through drugs and alcohol. The social order has let them know how insignificant they are, destroying their self-esteem. They are often locked up in jail, thus reinforcing the idea their future is not important. Before they can express themselves as young men, they lose their fathers and other male roles models and replace them with drugs and alcohol, unemployment, jail and even death. These teens are not given a fair chance at life from the start. There are so many casualties of gang warfare, so many lives plummeting into the greedy sand of blind hatred. This study will ignite the spark in some administrator somewhere and get him or her thinking, "What can be done to change this in my school and community for future generations?"
CHAPTER IV
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is a quasi-experimental case study that follows a concurrent embedded strategy of the mixed method approach, primarily relying on the qualitative aspects of the study, specifically the interviews and focus groups. The goal of the study is to understand the problem of gangs from the people who are actually involved in them in the hopes that an improved understanding can aid in the formation of productive solutions. Human actions cannot be understood unless "the meaning that humans assign to them is understood" (Marshall & Rossman, 1998, p. 53). The decision to involve oneself in a gang is based on thoughts, feelings, beliefs and values—it is culturally specific information. Face-to-face interaction is thus critical to accessing this deeper, personal perspective, making a qualitative approach crucial to gaining a full understanding of the problem.

In an attempt to "code the social world according to operational variables," the objective scientist or researcher risks destroying valuable data by "imposing a limited worldview on subjects" (Marshall & Rossman, 1998, p. 54). This desire for an objective outcome is especially dangerous when the research group is already wary and suspicious of outsiders, as gang members are. Trying to reduce the affliction of gangs into quantifiable numbers and unbiased theories is inevitably a gamble based on the unfounded assumption that gang members will spill their souls and reveal potentially
incriminating information to a total stranger. All evidence seems to indicate that this assumption is faulty.

As a result, the consequence of a strict adherence to the quantitative method when researching a social issue such as gangs is the displacement of individual stories and the complex narratives of personal experience. It is precisely these stories that offer the greatest insight into the motivation and allure of gang membership. This study accessed these stories through in-depth individual interviews with seven gang members, a survey of 25 current gang members and a focus group with four current gang members. After gathering information from the gang members, the researcher began formulating solutions to the problem through a focus group with four counselors who work with these gang members at a youth center in DeKalb County and through individual interviews with four retired administrators from public schools in the greater Atlanta area. All qualitative instruments were developed by the researcher under the advisement of Dr. Sheila Gregory and the quantitative instrument was developed the researcher under the advisement of Dr. Trevor Turner and all were approved by the committee which included Dr. Moses Norman and the two previously stated faculty.

**Research Design**

For this study, research was conducted using three primary methods: individual interviews, focus groups and surveys. The study combines qualitative methods with the goal of using each method so that “it contributes something unique to the researcher’s understanding of the phenomenon under study” (Morgan, 1997, p. 3). In-depth interviewing is a qualitative research technique that involves “conducting intensive
individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program, or situation” (Boyce & Neale, 2006, p. 3). This type of research requires only a few participants, which is ideal considering the inaccessibility of gang members. In this study, seven of the most violent young males at a youth center for active gang members participated in individual interviews with the researcher. Four retired administrators from low income public schools in DeKalb County and other parts of south Atlanta will also participated in one-on-one interviews with the researcher. In-depth interviews have the additional advantage of providing more detailed information than what is available though other data collection means, such as correlation, inferential, experimental, or other quantitative techniques (Boyce & Neale, 2006, p. 3). The interview strategy allows the researcher to analyze and present the data in the language used by the participants. The use of open-ended questions encourages participants to elaborate more extensively on their individual experiences with gang life.

A survey was issued to 25 young men, including the seven who participated in the individual interviews. All the young men are involved in the youth center, a non-profit, church-sponsored program in DeKalb County. The survey allowed the researcher to present some quantifiable data and to gather the opinions of a larger pool of respondents. The questions on the survey are multiple choice and participants will rank their answers on a scale from one to three. The questions cover many aspects of gang life, including religious beliefs, leadership roles, the presence or absence of role models, family life, and much more.

While surveys are more appropriate for “obtaining quantitative information and explaining how many people hold a certain (pre-defined) opinion; focus groups are better
for exploring exactly how those opinions are constructed” (Kitzinger, 1995, p. 302).

Focus groups are a form of “group interview that capitalizes on communication between research participants in order to generate data” (Kitzinger, 1995, p. 299). The researcher’s interest provides the focus, whereas the data generates from the group interaction (Morgan, 1997, p. 6). Instead of the researcher asking each participant to respond to a question in turn, people are encouraged to talk to one another and compare experiences. The comparisons that participants make among each other’s experiences and opinions offer “a valuable source of insight into complex behaviors and motivations” (Morgan, 1997, p. 15). This study conducted two separate focus groups: one for four gang members and one for four counselors who work with these gang members on a daily basis. The goal is to facilitate the expression of the crisis and explore different types of solutions. The focus groups was particularly useful in explaining and exploring the survey results as well as providing follow up research to clarify the findings in the individual interviews. Interviews are great forums for tapping into individual biographies, but focus groups are more suitable for “examining how knowledge, and more importantly, ideas develop and operate within a given social context” (Kitzinger, 1995, p. 302). Since gangs only function within a social context, these focus groups will be invaluable to understanding the best way to fight the social structures that support gangs and then re-establish these same social structures in healthy and safe alternative programs.
Description of the Setting/Location of Research

The youth center is a non-profit, church-sponsored program located in Decatur, Georgia. This location in Decatur is a part of South DeKalb County, an area with high gang activity. The population is 90% black, 5% white, and 5% other, with an average family income of $45,000 annually (U. S. Census Bureau, 2010). The youth center consists of an old gymnasium, a fellowship hall, and offices for the four counselors who work with the youth. The individual interviews with the seven gang members took place in the gymnasium in a one-on-one setting. They were each be about an hour in length and were audio-recorded. The survey was administered in the Fellowship Hall where there are plenty of tables. The participants sat at the well-spaced tables and answer the questions on the survey—communication among them was highly discouraged in order to decrease one person’s ability to influence another one’s answers. The participants turned in the survey to the researcher upon completion. The focus groups took place in the gymnasium where the individual interviews were conducted. Chairs were set up in a circle to facilitate the discussion and create a relaxed atmosphere. The researcher guided the discussion with the focus group questions, but participants were encouraged to provide each other feedback and take the discussion where they want it to go, so that the researcher can observe the way the participants act in a social context.

The interviews with the four administrators took place at student tables in the Wesley Chapel-William C. Brown library in DeKalb County, in the same area where most of their respective schools are located. These interviews lasted about 30 minutes in length and were audio recorded. Although the four administrators are now retired, their school district is in the same part of South DeKalb as the center, so the gang problem is
particularly prevalent. All of their schools are very large public schools, and the demographics generally reflect the demographics of the larger population of the county. The students in this district are predominately black.

**Participants and Sampling Procedures**

The prevailing views of gang members are that there are no gang experts except for gang members themselves. Many active gang members claim that actual membership is the only way to gain true firsthand knowledge on a topic as mysterious as any undiscovered tribe in Africa. The researcher, although not currently directly involved in the gang culture, is still indirectly related through peers. Having buried many loved ones as a result of gang violence, the researcher has developed personal relationships with many current gang members. Though these painful losses as well as my work as a counselor at the youth center, the researcher has gained access to a group that is normally shrouded in secrecy. Most of the participants from the study—the gang youth and the counselors—are involved at the youth center. The only persons not directly involved with the center are the retired administrators.

All 22 of the participating gang members attend the youth center, a non-profit, church-sponsored program in Decatur, Georgia. They are black males between the ages of 16 and 20, and all have police records. Eighty percent of them are active gang members and 20% of them are gang associates. Three of the four gang members selected for the focus group were chosen for their high level of commitment to their respective gangs. One, however, was selected because he is more likely than the others to ultimately escape the gang culture, and the researcher wants to discover why this is the
case and what is he doing differently from the others. Gang member one has been active for four years. He is fiercely loyal to his gang and has a reputation of being a respected killer. Gang member two has been active in his gang for two years. He has a reputation of being a "cool cat." Gang member three has been active for five years. He was just released from a youth detention center (YDC) after serving two years for selling drugs. He is very reputable and highly respected by his fellow gang members. Gang member four has been active for six years. He has a reputation as a hustler, and while not necessarily violent, he is always "down for his hood [gang]." Gang member five has been active for four years. He also has a reputation for being a rider. Gang member six has been active for seven years. He is of the highest reputation in his gang and is America's nightmare—a total menace to society. Gang member seven has been active for eight years. He is also of the highest reputation and is currently out of jail on bond for attempted murder. He is much respected by his gang and by rival gangs. Gang member eight has been active for four years. He is honest, fair, fearless and respected by all. He is very likable but will not tolerate being disrespected. Gang member nine has been active for two years. He is the one with the most potential from the group to make it out. He is also very good in school. Gang member ten has been in trouble as long as memory serves and has been involved in gang activity since childhood. He is fiercely loyal to his gang, very active, and is considered a hardcore gangbanger. He is respected as a street soldier and his name stays on the wire. Out of these ten, seven gang members (one, three, five, six, seven, nine and ten) were chosen for individual interviews because they are the most active in their respective gangs.
All five of the counselors also work at the youth center. Counselor A is a black male, between 35 and 40 years old. He has an undergraduate degree in Education and a Masters degree in Counseling. He teaches high school and counsels on the weekends. Counselor B is a black male, between 35 and 40 years old, with a degree in Social Work. He worked for years in California's gang-infested schools as a mentor for kids involved in gangs before coming to the youth center in Georgia. Counselor C is a black male, between 30 and 35 years old. He is a former gang member and was active from the age of 14 until he was 25 years old. He served five years in prison. There he joined the Nation of Islam and changed his life. He is now an anti-gang activist and works at the center as a decision-making coach. Counselor D is a black male, between 35 and 40 years old. He is also a former gang member and was active from the age of 12 until he was 17 years old. He went to prison for 10 years when he was 18 years old, and he joined a prison gang there. While he was in prison, he lost his brother to gang violence, which changed his life forever. He became dedicated to learning the art of conflict resolution and perfected his skills while in the penitentiary. Since his release he has been dedicated to teaching conflict resolution to current gang members, hoping to help them turn their lives around. Counselor E is a black male, between the ages of 35 and 40 years old. He has worked with many youth programs and has a passion for working with at-risk kids in low-income communities. He coaches football and heads the weightlifting program at the center.

All of the administrators are principals at public schools. Principal one is a 65 year old black female. She has been a principal for eight years. His school is located in a low-income area with numerous gang-infested neighborhoods. Principal two is a 60 year
old black male. He has been a principal for thirty years. His school is in a low-income area in South DeKalb. This area, too, is also known for high gang activity. Principal three is a 57 year old black female. She has been a principal for twenty years, and her school is also located in South DeKalb, part of Decatur. Principal four is a 62 year old white female. She has been a principal for three years. Her school is located in Lithonia, in an area with high crime, drug trafficking, and gang activity.

**Instrumentation**

This study required working with human subjects, and all research was conducted so that no harm came to those involved. All potential participants received a letter consenting to their participation to ensure that it is strictly voluntary and generally outlined the confidentiality policy. The letter to the gang members requested their participation in the survey and, if selected, their participation in the individual interviews and the focus group (see Appendix A). The letter to the counselors requested their participation in a focus group (see Appendix B). The letter to the administrators requested their participation in individual interviews (see Appendix C). Participants in the study remained anonymous, and any information they revealed was strictly confidential. Once a subject signed the voluntary participation form, he/she received a Human Subjects Agreement before participating in the research (see Appendix D). This form outlined the confidentiality policy and stated that the identities of the participants would be concealed—no information directly linking the subject to the study appeared in any printed documents.
Each gang member who volunteered for the study was given a Gang Member Survey (see Appendix E). The survey inquired about the presence of role models, the subject's religious beliefs, the involvement of fathers, the subject's drug and alcohol use, leadership capabilities, self-esteem, and perception of the future, the addiction to the gangster lifestyle, and gang violence. These surveys were turned into the researcher upon completion, and the researcher entered the data into a spreadsheet so that it could be analyzed. The participants were also given a brief demographic questionnaire to be completed simultaneously with the survey (see Appendix F).

The researcher individually interviewed seven of the most violent gang members in a series of one hour sessions. For each interview, the researcher filled out an Interview Protocol form with basic information (see Appendix G). The form recorded the date of the interview, the name of the interviewee, the name of the interviewer, the duration of the interview, and a participant code. The interviews were structured around a predetermined set of questions covering all aspects of gang life (see Appendix H). The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim after the interview concluded.

A focus group was conducted with ten gang members and the researcher. The researcher led the discussion by following a list of predetermined questions (see Appendix I). The questions covered the reasons for joining a gang, various gang activities and gang violence, their perceptions about the educational system and how schools can help curb gang violence, and what could be done to prevent kids from joining gangs in the future. The focus group was audio recorded and transcribed verbatim after it concluded.
Another focus group was conducted with four counselors and the researcher. The researcher led the discussion by following a list of predetermined questions (see Appendix J). The questions inquired about the various reasons young males join gangs, gang violence, and what can be done to prevent young males from joining gangs and decrease gang violence. The focus group was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim after it concluded.

Finally, the researcher interviewed four administrators at an Atlanta area public school. For each interview, the researcher filled out an Interview Protocol form with basic information about the interview (see Appendix G). The form recorded the date of the interview, the name of the interviewee, the name of the interviewer, the duration of the interview, and a participant code. The questions covered perceptions about gang members in relation to the school environment, the ability of the administrators to relate to gang members in their schools, and what information the administrators feel they need to more adequately address the gang epidemic (see Appendix K). The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim after each interview concluded.

**Data Collection Procedures**

Before the data collection process began, each of the potential participants, including the gang members, the counselors, and the school administrators, received a letter requesting their participation. These letters were distributed personally to the counselors and the gang members by the researcher in the center, and the letters to the administrators were mailed. The letter to the gang members is included in Appendix A. The letter to the counselors is included in Appendix B. The letter to the school
administrators is included in Appendix C. After the participants read and signed their respective letters and returned them to the researcher, the data collection process began and took place in five phases.

First, the survey was distributed in the youth center in Decatur, part of South DeKalb. The 25 young male participants, all currently involved directly or indirectly in gang life, sat down in the fellowship hall of the center. This was an environment where they were familiar and comfortable, and the atmosphere for the completion of the survey resembled that of a classroom. The noise was kept to a minimum and talking between the participants was strongly discouraged in order to ensure that they did not influence each other's answers. The survey was cross-sectional, with all the data collected at one time. It was a self-administered questionnaire. The researcher gave the participants a brief introduction to the purpose of the study and explained again the confidentiality policy outlined in the letter requesting participation. All the participants were then given the Human Subjects Agreement form outlining the confidentiality policy in detail, and they were given time to read it over, sign it, and return it to the researcher. The surveys were then passed out along with a writing utensil and the demographic questionnaire. Participants filled out the survey over a period of about thirty minutes and turned them in upon completion. They were then free to leave the fellowship hall. They were not permitted to stay in the hall and loiter, nor discuss the questionnaire in order to prevent them from influencing their peers still taking the survey. After all the participants completed the survey, the twenty five surveys were recorded and prepared for data analysis.
The second data collection process took place with the individual interviews conducted with seven or eight gang members. These interviews were scheduled individually with the participant at a time convenient for both them and the researcher, and took place in the gym in the coach's office. The coach's office was empty except for the researcher and the participant while the interviews were taking place. When a participant arrived for an interview, the researcher again explained briefly the purpose of the study and went over with him the confidentiality policy he signed in the letter requesting his participation. The participant was then given the Human Subjects Agreement form outlining the confidentiality policy in detail, and he was given time to read it over, sign it, and return it to the researcher. Next, the researcher explained, following the interview protocol form, how the interview would proceed and reminded the participant that it would be tape-recorded. The participant and the researcher was seated facing each other and the interview began with the first question inquiring about what life was like when the participant first joined their gang. The interviewer followed a list of predetermined questions, but had the option to follow up and ask individuals to explain their ideas in more detail or to elaborate on what they said. During the interview, the researcher took notes on statements he found particularly interesting or topics he may have needed to follow up on. At the end of the interview, the researcher issued a thank-you statement to acknowledge the time the interviewee spent participating in the interview. The entire interview was audio recorded, and each individual interview was transcribed onto paper when the interview process was complete.

The third data collection process was the focus group with the gang members. Four gang members were selected to participate in the focus group, led by the researcher.
All the selected participants were notified ahead of time of the scheduled date and time at which the focus group occurred. At the scheduled time, all the participants gathered in the gym at the center. Seating was arranged in a circle to facilitate the flow of discussion. At the beginning of the focus group, the researcher briefly explained the purpose of the study and the confidentiality policy. He reiterated that the group would be audio recorded and asked if any of the participants objected. The participants were then given the Human Subjects Agreement form outlining the confidentiality policy in detail, and they were given time to read it over, sign it, and return it to the researcher. He then began the discussion by asking what makes gang life so appealing. The researcher guided the focus group using the list of predetermined questions, but will also allowed the participants to largely control the direction of the conversation. If the discussion started to stray off topic, the researcher would intervene and redirect the conversation, but for the most part, the group proceeded with a conversation among the participants. During the group, the researcher took notes on the group dynamic, particularly noting how the participants reacted to one another and how their comments were shaped by their interactions with their peers. The group lasted about an hour. At the end of the group, the researcher issued a thank you statement, thanking each of the participants for the time they devoted to the study. The entire group was audio recorded and was transcribed onto paper after its completion.

The fourth data collection process was a focus group with four counselors, two of whom are ex-gang members. This group was also be led by the researcher. All the selected participants were notified ahead of time of the scheduled date and time at which the focus group would occur. At the scheduled time, all the participants gathered in the
gym at the center. Seating was arranged in a circle to facilitate the flow of discussion. At the beginning of the group, the researcher briefly explained the purpose of the study and the confidentiality policy. He reiterated that the group would be audio recorded and asked if any of the participants objected. The participants were then given the Human Subjects Agreement form outlining the confidentiality policy in detail, and they were given time to read it over, sign it, and return it to the researcher. He then began the discussion by asking what the participants think can be done to prevent young people from joining gangs. The researcher guided the focus group using the list of predetermined questions. If the discussion started to stray off topic, the researcher would intervene and redirect the conversation, but for the most part, the group proceeded with a conversation among the participants. During the group, the researcher took notes on particularly interesting threads of conversation or ideas that may have needed more research or follow up. The group lasted about an hour. At the end of the group, the researcher issued a thank you statement, thanking each of the participants for the time they devoted to the study. The entire group was audio recorded and was transcribed onto paper after its completion.

The final data collection process took place with the individual interviews conducted with four retired school administrators. These interviews were scheduled individually with the participant at a time convenient for both them and the researcher and took place in the Wesley Chapel-William C. Brown library at the student tables. When a participant arrived for an interview, the researcher again explained briefly the purpose of the study and went over with them the confidentiality policy they signed in the letter requesting their participation. The participant was then be given the Human
Subjects Agreement form outlining the confidentiality policy in detail, and they were given time to read it over, sign it, and return it to the researcher. Next, the researcher explained, following the interview protocol form, how the interview would proceed and reminded the participant that it would be tape-recorded. The participant and the researcher were seated facing each other at the student tables and the interview began with the first question what is the first thing that comes to mind when hearing the word “gang member.” The interviewer followed a list of predetermined questions, but he followed up and asked individuals to explain their ideas in more detail or to elaborate on what they have said. During the interview, the researcher took notes on statements he found particularly interesting or topics he needed to follow up on. At the end of the interview, the researcher issued a thank-you statement to acknowledge the time the interviewee spent participating in the interview. The entire interview was audio recorded, and each individual interview was transcribed onto paper when the interview process was complete. All focus groups were overseen by counselor E who is an employee of the program and bound by the confidentiality of the program.

**Statistical Application**

The statistical tools used to analyze the data were the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and Phenomenology/Narrative. The researcher used SPSS for the survey due to its numerical data. For the interviews and focus groups the researcher took a Phenomenology/Narrative approach due to their personal perspectives and experiences. These three gave the researcher the best results from data collected.
Summary

All data were gathered and used to produce insightful information for educational leaders to help curb, if not end gang violence on school grounds. Through direct communication with gang members, counselors and administrators, giving their input on what is needed to eradicate gang violence, a plausible solution can concluded once all data was analyzed. The idea here was to go directly to the source to find out what is needed to end this epidemic.
The data collected for this study was gathered via surveys and interviews. The survey was completed by 22 active gang members and consisted of 42 questions. The researcher conducted two focus groups; one consisted of four counselors, all whom actively work with young men involved in gangs. The second consisted of four gang members, selected based on their level of gang activity and reputation within their individual gangs. Two sets of individual interviews were conducted with principals and assistant principals and gang members. Four retired principals that have worked in low-income public schools were interviewed. All of them, in one way or another, have been directly or indirectly affected by the gang epidemic in public schools. The second individual interviews consisted of seven, male gang members who were selected based on their understanding of the problem and willingness to speak openly and honestly with the hope that the information they provided would be used to promote change within the rising generation of young gangsters.

The gang epidemic has been active in America since the early 1800s. This is a dilemma where the anomalous mentality must be understood in order for the problem to be corrected; therefore, these abnormalities must be studied carefully so that a realistic understanding may be reached. Through focus groups and individual interviews, fears, goals, dreams, schooling and even death were discussed to give the reader an in-depth
look at the mentality of gang members. Some of the themes implicit in the information gathered were jail and serving time, violence, absence of fathers, unsafe neighborhoods, and the correlation between the gang members’ environment and their behavior. The information gathered from these interviews is valid and has been tested by the matrix of life. Every time one of these young men walks out their front door, he could be killed. This is a fact of life; this is their reality. The information presented in this study is based on personal experiences and accounts. This study is unique because the most accredited experts on this topic are the actual participants.

Normal citizens follow ideologies that co-exist with societal norms, such as, “thou shall not kill” and “thou shall not steal.” Every culture, however, has subcultures and within those subcultures, the norms and values are different. These norms and values are the themes that will be explored. Many of the gang members interviewed did not fear incarceration and acknowledged that their lifestyles were harmful to their family yet, they were willing to ignore the facts and continue with their lifestyle. This is an abnormal mentality. Questions calculated to gather information for this study were answered through extensive research, personal interviews, and quantitative results.

**Research Questions**

RQ1: Is there a significant relationship between gang values and the presence or absence of role models?

We are what we see. If we are surrounded by either negative behavior or positive behavior, we will adapt and adhere to one of the two behaviors. In many urban communities, young men tend to gravitate toward older men, whose persona is self-
manifested distinction and who have acquired respect from their community. One of the
gang members interviewed stated, “I think I had too much time to myself, because my
mom had to work all day long. So, I kinda had the freedom of running the streets. So, if
there had been another parent at home, or an uncle, or a cousin or somebody that was
there to give me some kind of structure, it would have kept me out of it cause I had no
structure.” The guidance and support that role models lend is of vital importance to
building a foundation for young men and enabling them to make good decisions, so that
they will not have to look for support from the negative influences within their
community. The responsibility of a positive role model is to model and demonstrate how
to be a positive and responsible human being. Without this influence, young men grow
up lost, gravitating toward anyone and anything that will show them attention, often
confusing attention with affection. Another gang member stated, “When I first joined the
gang, I didn’t have anybody in my life to show me any leadership, so when the gang
came along, I was just taken in by the, by the brotherhood and how they took me in.”
This “brotherhood” is filling a void, based on the need to be loved, appreciated and
attended to, all of which also could be fulfilled by a positive role model. When that void
is not filled, predators and vultures lurking on every corner in the urban jungle are
waiting for the next lost soul to walk by, so they can scoop him up and teach him how to
kill in the name of their neighborhood. Results from my survey concluded that 50% of
gang members who did not have a positive role model in their lives, looked to the gang
members as father figures. Every day we are losing one out of every two young men to
gangs, because a gap exists in the number of persons taking the initiative to become
positive role models (see Table 1).
Table 1

Presence of Role Models

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Presence of Role Models</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Number of Answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There were positive role models in my life between the ages of 5 and 10.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There were positive role models in my life between the ages of 10 and 15.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There were positive role models in my life between the ages of 15 and 20.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There were negative role models in my life.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative role models influenced my decision to join a gang.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RQ2: Is there a significant relationship between gang values and religious beliefs?

The common misperception by a significant number of white Americans is that all gang members are heartless killers, prowling the street looking for their next victim. This statement is only partly true since not all members may be categorized this way. In fact, most gang members have a very strong religious belief and a deep connection to
God. When the researcher asked a young gang member what crime he would not commit, he responded:

Rape. And that’s probably about it; you know what I’m sayin? That’s just probably where I just draw the line. Cuz you know muthaf**as is barbarians out there. But I wanna have some type of dignity and common sense about myself. I don’t wanna be you know just straight fuc**g you know warlock criminal, crazy sh*t. You know what I’m sayin? I wanna have some kind of peace of mind at the end of the day.

Although these young men believe in God, they have experienced so much hardship and pain that they have given up all together and, in most cases God is the only thing they do believe in. One gang member was asked, “When you die, what do you want your family and children to remember about you most?” He responded, “That I was a good-hearted, good-hearted spiritual person that cares a lot about his peers and everybody around him.” Although these young men know what they are doing is wrong, they still want to be remembered as a good person and as “a good-hearted, spiritual person.” Results from the survey show that 68% of the participants believe that God or a higher power has influence on their decision making. If we as a society were to reinforce this sentiment of supplicating to a “higher power,” this percentage could possibly be raised. In the focus group, one of the counselors stated:

God first. That’s the biggest component in my mind. Second is understanding that we are all created noble. Third is education. Without education, without God, without the understanding of our nobility and our sense of self-worth, what we have is a society without values and standards.
There is a growing awareness for the need to reverse the acceleration of moral breakdown in society. If we do not incorporate God into our lives, then we do not have a sense of higher purpose. If religious beliefs are viewed as a positive experience and taught in a non-condemning manner, people are less likely to dismiss the principles. We have to understand, and be able to educate our children on, various aspects of life, such as instant gratification. We need to inform our students that there are things worth waiting for, things worth fighting for, and things worth being patient for. If we do not have that, then we will continue to fail. We, as a community, have to invest in these young men and, their foundation must contain a strong religious focus (see Table 2).

Table 2

*Religious Beliefs*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religious Beliefs</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I believe in God or a higher power.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My belief in God or a higher power has influence on my decision-making process.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe in God or a higher power and kill.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe in God or a higher power and rob.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe in God or a higher power and rape.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religious Beliefs</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Number of Answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I believe in God or a higher power and justify my gang activity.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RQ3: Is there a significant relationship between gang values and the presence or absence of a father figure?

The absentee father has plagued the black community for years. Young men learning to be men from mothers, brothers, uncles, or other men in the community have been a topic of discussion by scholars for decades, trying to understand if this is the reason for the collapse of the young black male. There are a number of questions that arise if there is no father present in the home. One of those questions is, “Who is to teach these boys how to become honorable and positive men?” One of the counselors stated:

The household and home are an important factor in the raising of a child. It is crucial to have stability and structure, where you’re not going to bed different times of the night every night. You’re not seeing your mom date all these different dudes, just a stable sense of family and home. That’s a real big part of it. We got a lot of kids that join gangs that are in single parent homes. They don’t have a sense of family.

So many young men grow up not knowing what a man is, or how to be a man, so they latch onto the first male they see. Whether it is a coach, teacher, pastor, or gangster, they follow the first one to show them love. Another counselor from the focus group stated:
I want to touch back on what we talked about in the first question. The fact is that it starts in the home with your parents. A lot of the kids that are in gangs are in single parent homes. A lot of those single parent homes, the parent that is in that single parent home is probably not a stable parent, more than likely. So, I think that’s a very important piece as to what can keep them out.

We need stability, we also need security, and a father may bring security to his household. Without that safety, without that protection, manhood becomes skewed, so young men are forced to go to the street to find a father figure, one that exemplifies masculine qualities, one who is strong, fearless, confident—the qualities of a gangster.

When one of the gang members was asked what he would have needed in his life to help prevent him from joining a gang or gang banging, he replied, “a motherf***in father.”

The results from the survey showed that only 23% of the participants had fathers in their lives full time. That number has to change; we have to do something to save these young men from themselves. We need more fathers (see Table 3)

**Table 3**

**Involvement of Fathers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Involvement of Fathers</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Number of Answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My father was in my life.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I looked to gang members for</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a father figure.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gang members played a role of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of father figure in my life.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Involvement of Fathers</th>
<th>% Never</th>
<th>% Never</th>
<th>% Sometimes</th>
<th>% Sometimes</th>
<th>% Always</th>
<th>% Always</th>
<th>Number of Answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am more violent because I did not have a father.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am less violent than my peers because I did have a father.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RQ4: Is there a significant relationship between gang values and drug and alcohol use?

Based on the survey, there is not a significant relationship between gang violence and drug and alcohol use. Apparently, this is what gang members do. It is part of the lifestyle they live. Based on the survey, however, there is no correlation to violence. Just as for a business man who wakes up, has his coffee, reads his paper, and heads to work, these young men have their own day-to-day routine. One gang member stated in his interview, “A typical day, well uh, get up smoke some weed, sip on a 40, chill out with the homies, you know, set trip (confront rival gangs) if we need to, or feel like it, you know the fun sh*t.” Another gang member said:

I think I’ve been active in the gang all of 10 years, 10, 13 years and the average day life for me is probably uh weed, alcohol, hopefully a girl or two, um, hanging out really. I mean you can’t really define a day, you just take it as it comes. It’s all in a day’s work.

It is part of the life; they need it to numb themselves from the harsh realities of their day-to-day existence. The results of the survey surprisingly showed that 82% of gang
members who used drugs and alcohol did not think it affected their decision making. The use is disguised as a getaway. Very few of the members are satisfied or pleased with their lives, so, for a few hours, that joint or beer helps them escape their reality—that they are young men caught up in a lifestyle where they are both the predator and the prey (see Table 4).

Table 4

*Drug and Alcohol Use*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drug and Alcohol Use</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I use drugs and alcohol.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drugs and alcohol affect my decision-making process.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drugs and alcohol make me commit acts I would not commit sober.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drugs and alcohol make me more violent.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RQ5: Is there a significant relationship between gang values and personal leadership attributes?

Bandura’s Social Learning Theory (1977) emphasizes the importance of observing and modeling the behaviors, actions, and attitudes of others. Whether a person is a leader on the football field, in the work place, or in the classroom, people are automatically drawn to them. With gang members, it is the same. In every gang you
have leaders and followers. Leaders have a God-given talent to lead. They could be leaders in any magnitude, from a leader in the civil rights movement, a Fortune 500 company or a National Football League (NFL) football team, but, due to the influences around them, they chose the streets. They have an innate power and ability to be leaders, so they will lead, but, due to a dysfunctional environment, the only group they have to lead is the neighborhood gang. One gang member stated:

If I could live it all over again, if I could make a choice of course it would be different of course, but if I was to go through the same things to where I am today, then it would probably be the same. You know what I’m saying, cuz uh, things happened in my life that put me in certain positions that I don’t think, I think everything I went through made me who I am today and I think that made me a better person, so wouldn’t change nothing.

This young man has found strength and pride in his past actions; he sees them as a badge of honor. He considers himself a stand up man, because of what he has experienced and how he has dealt with life’s obstacles. One principal stated in his interview:

The view that administrators have about students needs to be changed and administrators need to understand the gang hierarchy or operation. I don’t know if the view on gangs will change, but I do think we need to change our view on students who participate in gangs.

This principal has acknowledged that gangs have a hierarchical system. There are those who are at the top, those trying to work their way to the top, and those who are just followers. The survey showed that 77% considered themselves leaders and 5% did not. Everybody has a position to play; someone has to give the orders. The saddest thing is,
everyday, we are losing many young men to these urban battlefields, young individuals who have the God given talent to be leaders among leaders, kings among kings, but instead they are wasting their talent and choosing to die over their gangs. So many prospective Dr. Kings’, Malcolm X’s, and President Obama’s have died in every city across this nation before the age of 21. This madness must meet its demise! (see Table 5)

Table 5

*Persona Leadership Attributes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Number of Answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I consider myself a leader.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What I say matters in the decision making of my gang’s violent activity.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a say whether a rival receives retaliation.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think the role I play in the gang is a prestigious one.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If a green light was given (order to kill), I think I could stop it.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RQ6: Is there a significant relationship between gang values and self-esteem?

Low self-esteem leads to drugs, suicide, and teen-age pregnancy. Why wouldn’t it lead to gang violence? When a young man does not like himself, he tends to act out and in many suburban neighborhoods, to experiment with drugs, sex, and gang violence.
When a young man with low self-esteem joins a gang, he is willing to do whatever it takes to impress his older peers or “homeboys,” including robbing, dealing drugs, and killing. Impressing the gang is his top priority and, if he has low self-esteem, he does not know how to say “no.” One of the counselors in the focus group recalled statements and sentiments from members stating:

In thinking about history, what have we been trained to do as African-American men? We’ve been trained to hate ourselves, hate our reflection, don’t even want to look in the mirror, don’t want nobody looking at you either. What’s the first question you ask when somebody is looking at you? What you looking at? The first question that comes out your mouth is ‘what you looking at.’ Why are we so scared of what somebody is looking at? Why can’t I be happy somebody’s looking at me? Looking at me and seeing something special in me. That ain’t what I’m looking at—that’s not what I’m thinking because that’s not the way I was trained. I was trained that I ain’t nothing, that I ain’t sh*t. So, I don’t deserve nobody looking at me unless they looking down on me or thinking bad things about me or not respecting me, so I gotta gain that respect. So, if I gotta put you out, if I gotta plug you, I got to plug you.

This low-self esteem has young men walking around bewildered, confused, baffled and insecure, looking for someone, anyone to tell them that it is ok, you are going to be ok. They are worth loving. They should love themselves. If it is not your child, then it is, not your problem. In fact, it is not your problem until that child grows into a young man and he is carjacking you at a red light. One of the gang members stated in his interview:
When I first joined the gang . . . uh, . . . I was young of course so to ask what my life was like, I wouldn’t necessarily know. But I think that’s probably one of the main reasons I joined a gang was to define myself and I was uh just lost floating around, didn’t have much guidance so I looked for it in that matter.

These young men are looking for something, anything. All their cries fall on deaf ears, because in the hood resources are limited, support is limited, love is limited. These young men have been disappointed by everybody, because we see them every day, and all we do is look, shake our heads and keep driving. This generation is lost. If we don’t save them, who will? (see Table 6)

Table 6

**Self-Esteem**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-Esteem</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Number of Answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I love myself</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I love life.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I care if I die.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RQ7: Is there a significant relationship between gang values and the perception of having a future?

There is a major significant correlation between these two variables. If a young man does not care about tomorrow, he does not care about today. If he does not care about his future, he does not care about your future. That is where the term the walking dead comes from. Thousands of young men are involved in gang activity, walking
aimlessly, not caring about their lives, my life, or your life. These men are extremely
treachery. They will kill at will; violence for the sake of violence. One gang member
stated in response to a question about his life expectancy, “To be honest...probably no
more the 25 years old because this lifestyle I’m living is pretty dangerous for a kid like
me.” Another said, “I look at it as a thing where I don’t look at it from, um a perspective
of trying to live a year or two. I just live day-by-day and whatever comes and that’s what
comes.” The despair in their words let you know they are just surviving, taking
whatever life throws at them. They have no sense of ambition, drive, or motivation.
Results from the survey show only 36% believe they will live past twenty-five. Life is
what it is for them—live hard, die young, and in between, enjoy what you can because
nothing is promised. When these young men get to this point, they will kill over
anything. We must get to them before they lose hope, because once it is gone, it is hard
to get back. Without hope for the future, what kind of future can one have? What is
there to dream about? What is there to strive for? One gang member stated:

I mean I don’t see death around the corner, you know, so my life expectancy will
be whatever God chooses it to be. I mean, I hope it would be a long one, you
know, I hope it will be a justified life. (See Table 7)

Table 7

Perception of Having a Future

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception of Having a Future</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Number of Answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I think I will live past 25.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception of Having a Future</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Number of Answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I think I will go to jail.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think I will serve at least 10 years in jail during my lifetime.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think I can avoid 25 to live in prison.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think in the future I will be successful.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RQ8: Is there a significant relationship between gang values and the addiction to the gangster lifestyle?

This question explores the pinnacle of what it means to be a gang member. The addiction to this lifestyle is hard to rationalize. Most people ask, “How can someone get addicted to death?” These young men are addicted to this lifestyle, like a drug addict is addicted to drugs. It draws them in and, once it has them, it will not let go until they are either dead or incarcerated. In response to a question about what aspects of the lifestyle he was drawn to, one gang member stated:

Money, bitc*es, clothes, all that sh*t is appealing. Money, scrapping, unexpectedness of the day. You never know what’s gonna happen. Yeah, but the money is the most. The main focus is money. That sh*t promises you, you know what I mean? More money than you would see working a fu**in’ 9-5.
They get a sense of self-worth from being reputable in the neighborhood. This gives them a sense of self-importance, self-respect, money and power, for which they are willing to die and go to jail. One gang member said, "It's fun to me... it's fun till you're a*sm ends up locked up. It's a cost though... a man gotta make a living." This is their celebrity-driven culture, their red carpet. When they get that flamboyant car with the big rims, as well as the diamond chain, they have made it. These young men are saying, look at me; I am somebody. That feeling is one we all want. Results from the survey show that 41% are addicted to dodging death, 32% are addicted to being a gang member, and 23% are addicted to the power of being a gang member or gangster. This addiction is real and gang violence is the outcome (see Table 8).

Table 8

*Addiction to the Gangster Lifestyle*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Addiction to the Gangster Lifestyle</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Number of Answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am addicted to dodging death.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am addicted to the cycle of going in and out of jail.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am addicted to killing.</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am addicted to the power</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of the gangster lifestyle.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am addicted to being a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gangster or gang member.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
RQ9: How can schools help reduce gang violence?

Schools can help reduce gang violence by giving these young men an outlet. So many feel trapped in this vicious cycle of urban life. Education opens doors to opportunities they would not ordinarily be afforded. When asked what schools could do to curb gang violence, one principal stated:

You need information as to where the child is from, the culture of the community, and an understanding of what the long-standing culture of the community is. You need to know the demographics of the community, because those underlying factors will determine what caused these students to be attracted to this kind of behavior. And once you understand that, you can start laying together resources, dialoguing with stakeholders to lay together a foundation for these kids to lie on and reach out to, so they can be served. If they can't find anything to reach out to they are going to reach out to what they find they are comfortable with and other like-minded people. We have to make them feel a part of the group—the larger group—that's trying to be successful.

Knowledge of the subject is the first step. We cannot put a dent in gang violence, if we do not understand what we are dealing with. This problem is bigger than one person. We have to study the community which breeds these individuals. We must find out "what is in the water" in these neighborhoods that keep producing kids that kill. One principal said:

I would start by doing a lot of remedial courses for students participating in gangs. I would also host seminars and classes on career options and goals, giving students the opportunity to get basic training in business, areas of interest,
specialized areas, and anything that would prepare them to venture out into the world and earn an honest living.

We have to start giving these young men hope, we have to show them that there is more to life than their current occupation, gang banging. We need to teach them tools that will help them be noble, productive citizens and allow them to provide for themselves and their families. They need something concrete, something tangible, something they can use to help put food on the table and a roof over their heads. We need to offer them a chance at a decent life.

RQ10: What classroom practices are needed to provide safer schools in a climate where all children can learn?

We need more men in the classroom. There is a need to broaden our pool of teacher applicants to include former military enlistees, retired police officers and men from urban environments who understand this particular group of students. Men are needed who value and can relate to the youth they are teaching; men who are not intimidated by these students. In the focus group with gang members the question was asked, “What can schools do to curb gang violence?” One gang member said, “Them motherf***rs are scared. They want to godd**n teach you and then go home.” Another said:

They don’t have money for the education so h*ll naw, they aint got no f****n money to deal with no crazy gang violence and shit. They ain't got art in school no more; so how are they gonna try to curb gang violence? What they gonna give fu**in social class every Friday at the end of homeroom? That’s wack.”
So many of these young men have given up on education, they do not see any teachers looking like them, talking like them, or coming from their environment. So, why should they listen to them? These young men must respect the teacher if the teacher is going to reach them. Their whole existence is defined by respect. It is the principle by which they live and die. If we want to curb gang violence in schools, we must put teachers in the classrooms to which these young men can relate. One gang member made this statement:

You need a person kids will respect enough to listen to at least. Somebody from their environment that they can look at and be like ok, he’s just like me. They need to see a mirror image of themselves doing something positive.

These young men need to be taught the necessary skills to be successful. If we do not, they will take what they need to survive, by any means necessary.

RQ11: What school policies are needed to make schools safe?

The school climate needs to change. This includes developing policies for safety and discipline. Principals are a major component when developing this transformation. One principal stated:

Police and law enforcement—most of them will have worked with some sort of gang unit and this experience should be incorporated into a school safety program. All school policies be should aligned with and support the school’s safety program. Also, you need to create a systematic approach where goals and objectives are used to engage students and to give them options for something positive, rather than something negative and violent. Additionally, all possible resources should be identified to support any accompanying policies. The following are possible resources that may be used to assist in implementing
school policies and programs: the media, local newspapers, parents and other community members and stakeholders. Students need to see this type of collaboration in order to visualize success beyond violence.

It is going to take collaboration between the community and school leaders to apply and reinforce policies that generate safety and well-being among students. Such policies include having a well qualified principal, as well as teachers who have the ability to understand the importance of leadership. This can be achieved by an understanding of who the students are as individuals and their personal history. This is about discovering who they are and allowing them to manifest a deeper connection with their learning environment.

RQ12: What can be done to lessen the attraction to the gangster lifestyle?

To lessen the attraction, we must first understand the attraction. This is an attraction like no other. It has such a subtle draw that most parents do not notice it until it is too late. The attraction to the gangster lifestyle is almost hypnotic. Gangsters dedicate themselves to this lifestyle; it becomes their reality. It is what they eat, sleep, and breathe. One counselor said:

Something else I want to touch on is what draws them to the gang. It is about the image, the fantasy, the drugs, the women, and the money. I think lot of the kids, before they are drawn into the gang, don’t realize all of the risks and disadvantages of being in that situation as far as becoming a drug dealer, becoming a killer, being killed, being shot at, being jumped, and being stabbed. I don’t think the message is getting across to these youth. You’re committed to protect and stand in front of your gang—whatever the risk may be.
These young men must be educated about the repercussions of their lifestyle. Living this way is defined by much more than the obscured glamorization portrayed by a rap artist, the ostentatious jewelry and the flamboyant cars. One cannot overlook the constant nightmares and living with regret once the gang lifestyle has been acted upon. This is the side they do not hear about, when they are laying in bed at night and cannot sleep. They begin to regret living; because they know what they are doing is morally wrong. They have a difficult time accepting the reality of their decisions and the subsequent ramifications that follow. Lessening the attraction to the gang life can simply be accomplished by bringing awareness of the consequences to the forefront.

RQ13: What can school administrators do to ensure that their faculty is prepared to teach students with gang backgrounds?

The first suggestion is to cultivate continuous teacher development programs that inform and bring awareness to areas such as cultural recognition and community life social. This will give teachers added knowledge and a stronger grasp on understanding the students they are teaching. Without knowledge of the audience, one is limited when conveying a message. For instance, when a consultant prepares a speech for an audience, if he or she is not knowledgeable of the audience, the message will be less effective. These students have to feel that their teachers care and are sincere. If these students sense that a teacher is genuine, there is nothing the student will not do to try to learn and please the teacher. Our teachers have to make a connection with their students; these students have to know it is real. If they do not trust the teacher, they will rebel and will not listen. If teachers want to work with this type of student, and want to see this type of student succeed they must be willing to go the extra mile to make a heartfelt connection;
then, you have a faculty that is prepared and all the principal has to do is model and lead by example.

**Data Analysis**

The data were collected and analyzed to identify a significant correlation between gang violence and various variables that have been linked to have an effect on gang violence. The data were collected at a youth center in Decatur which provides workshops, resources and counseling for young men involved in gang activity. Research questions were used as an outline for the survey and the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software was used for data analysis. A breakdown was analyzed and the results are presented in the following paragraphs. A survey that consisted of 42 questions was given to 22 active gang members. All 22 surveys were completed and returned. Data were coded and inputted and the results follow.

**Gang Values and Role Models**

RQ1: Is there a significant correlation between gang values and the presence or absence of role models?

RNH1: There is no significant statistical correlation between gang values and the presence of role models.

A Pearson r Product Moment Coefficient was used to determine if there was any significant relationship between gang values and the presence of role models. The Gang Member Survey had a response scale of 1 for Never, 2 for Sometimes, and 3 for Always. At the level of significance 0.050, the Pearson r analysis yielded a correlation of -0.003 with a two-tail significance of 0.989. As a result of the Pearson r analysis, the null
hypothesis is accepted. Therefore, there is no significant correlation between gang values and the presence of role models. The Pearson r Product Moment Coefficient results for the research null hypothesis are presented in Table 9.

Table 9

_Gang Values and Role Models_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role Model</td>
<td>2.0091</td>
<td>.36763</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gang Values</td>
<td>2.3295</td>
<td>.63801</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

_Correlation 1_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Role Model</th>
<th>Gang Values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role Model</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.989</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>22.000</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gang Values</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>-.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.989</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

_Gang Values and Religious Beliefs_

RQ2: Is there a significant correlation between gang values and religious beliefs?

RNH2: There is no significant statistical correlation between gang values and religious beliefs.
A Pearson r Product Moment Coefficient was used to determine if there were any significant relationship between gang values and religious beliefs. The Gang Member Survey had a response scale of 1 for Never, 2 for Sometimes, and 3 for Always. At the level of significance 0.050, the Pearson r analysis yielded a correlation of -0.327 with a two-tail significance of 0.137. As a result of the Pearson r analysis, the null hypothesis is accepted. Therefore, there is no significant correlation between gang values and religious beliefs. The Pearson r Product Moment Coefficient results for the research null hypothesis is presented in Table 10.

Table 10

Gang Values and Religious Beliefs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gang Values</td>
<td>2.3295</td>
<td>.63801</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Beliefs</td>
<td>2.0152</td>
<td>.42386</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Correlation 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Gang Values</th>
<th>Religious Beliefs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gang Values</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>-.327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>22.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Beliefs</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-.327</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>22.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Gang Values and Involvement of Fathers

RQ3: Is there a significant correlation between gang values and the presence or absence of a father figure?

RNH3: There is no significant statistical correlation between gang values and the presence or absence of a father figure.

A Pearson r Product Moment Coefficient was used to determine if there was any significant relationship between gang values and the presence or absence of a father figure. The Gang Member Survey had a response scale of 1 for Never, 2 for Sometimes, and 3 for Always. At the level of significance 0.050, the Pearson r analysis yielded a correlation of -0.094 with a two-tail significance of 0.676. As a result of the Pearson r analysis, the null hypothesis is accepted. Therefore, there is no significant correlation between gang values and the presence or absence of a father figure. The Pearson r Product Moment Coefficient results for the research null hypothesis is presented in Table 11.

Table 11

Gang Values and Involvement of Fathers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gang Values</td>
<td>2.3295</td>
<td>.63801</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father Figure</td>
<td>1.7818</td>
<td>.36986</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Correlation 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Gang Values</th>
<th>Father Figure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>-.094</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.676</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>22.000</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Gang Values and Drug and Alcohol Use

RQ4: Is there a significant correlation between gang values and drug and alcohol use?

RNH4: There is no significant statistical correlation between gang values and drug and alcohol use.

A Pearson r Product Moment Coefficient was used to determine if there was any significant relationship between gang values and drug and alcohol use. The Gang Member Survey had a response scale of 1 for Never, 2 for Sometimes, and 3 for Always. At the level of significance 0.050, the Pearson r analysis yielded a correlation of -0.171 with a two-tail significance of 0.446. As a result of the Pearson r analysis, the null hypothesis is accepted. Therefore, there is no significant correlation between gang values and drug and alcohol use. The Pearson r Product Moment Coefficient results for the research null hypothesis is presented in Table 12.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correlation 3</th>
<th>Gang Values</th>
<th>Father Figure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Father Figure</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>-.094</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td></td>
<td>.676</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11 (continued)
Table 12

*Gang Values and Drug and Alcohol Use*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gang Values</td>
<td>2.3295</td>
<td>.63801</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug and Alcohol Use</td>
<td>2.0114</td>
<td>.55355</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Correlation 4*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Gang Values</th>
<th>Drug and Alcohol Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gang Values</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.446</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>22.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug and Alcohol Use</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>-.171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.446</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Gang Values and Individual Leadership Attributes*

**RQ5:** Is there a significant correlation between gang values and leadership?

**RNH5:** There is no significant statistical correlation between gang values and leadership.

A Pearson r Product Moment Coefficient was used to determine if there was any significant relationship between gang values and leadership. The Gang Member Survey had a response scale of 1 for Never, 2 for Sometimes, and 3 for Always. At the level of significance 0.050, the Pearson r analysis yielded a correlation of 0.087 with a two-tail significance of 0.700. As a result of the Pearson r analysis, the null hypothesis is
accepted. Therefore, there is no significant correlation between gang values and
leadership. The Pearson r Product Moment Coefficient results for the research null
hypothesis is presented in Table 13.

Table 13

Gang Values and Individual Leadership Attributes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gang Values</td>
<td>2.3295</td>
<td>.63801</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>2.2727</td>
<td>.44741</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Correlation 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Gang Values</th>
<th>Leadership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gang Values</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>22.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.087</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gang Values and Self-Esteem

RQ6: Is there a significant correlation between gang values and self-esteem?

RNH6: There is no significant statistical correlation between gang values and self-esteem.

A Pearson r Product Moment Coefficient was used to determine if there was any
significant relationship between gang values and self-esteem. The Gang Member
Survey had a response scale of 1 for Never, 2 for Sometimes, and 3 for Always. At the level of significance 0.050, the Pearson r analysis yielded a correlation of -0.188 with a two-tail significance of 0.402. As a result of the Pearson r analysis, the null hypothesis is accepted. Therefore, there is no significant correlation between gang values and self-esteem. The Pearson r Product Moment Coefficient results for the research null hypothesis is presented in Table 14.

Table 14

*Gang Values and Self-Esteem*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gang Values</td>
<td>2.3295</td>
<td>.63801</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Esteem</td>
<td>2.5152</td>
<td>.45690</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Correlation 6*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Gang Values</th>
<th>Self-Esteem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gang Values</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.402</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>22.000</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Esteem</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>-.188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.402</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Gang Values and Perception of Having a Future*

RQ7: Is there a significant correlation between gang values and the perception of having a future?
RNH7: There is no significant statistical correlation between gang values and the perception of having a future.

A Pearson r Product Moment Coefficient was used to determine if there was any significant relationship between gang values and the perception of having a future. The Gang Member Survey had a response scale of 1 for Never, 2 for Sometimes, and 3 for Always. At the level of significance 0.050, the Pearson r analysis yielded a correlation of 0.049 with a two-tail significance of 0.830. As a result of the Pearson r analysis, the null hypothesis is accepted. Therefore, there is no significant correlation between gang values and the perception of having a future. The Pearson r Product Moment Coefficient results for the research null hypothesis is presented in Table 15.

Table 15

*Gang Values and Perception of Having a Future*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gang Values</td>
<td>2.3295</td>
<td>.63801</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception of Future</td>
<td>2.1727</td>
<td>.30423</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Correlation 7*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Gang Values</th>
<th>Perception of Future</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gang Values</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.049</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.830</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>22.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception of Future</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.830</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Gang Values and the Addiction to the Gangster Lifestyle

RQ8: Is there a significant correlation between gang values and the addiction to the gangster lifestyle?

RNH8: There is no significant statistical correlation between gang values and the addiction to the gangster lifestyle.

A Pearson r Product Moment Coefficient was used to determine if there was any significant relationship between gang values and the addiction to the gangster lifestyle. The Gang Member Survey had a response scale of 1 for Never, 2 for Sometimes, and 3 for Always. At the level of significance 0.050, the Pearson r analysis yielded a correlation of 0.229 with a two-tail significance of 0.306. As a result of the Pearson r analysis, the null hypothesis is accepted. Therefore, there is no significant correlation between gang values and the addiction to the gangster lifestyle. The Pearson r Product Moment Coefficient results for the research null hypothesis is presented in Table 16.

Table 16

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gang Values and the Addiction to the Gangster Lifestyle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.8364</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correlation 8</th>
<th>Gang Values</th>
<th>Gangster Lifestyle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.306</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>22.000</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 16 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correlation 8</th>
<th>Gang Values</th>
<th>Gangster Lifestyle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gangster Lifestyle</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.306</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Limitations of the Study**

According to the 22 surveys taken by the focus group of gang members, there were several prominent observations that were made. These observations include the correlation between not having a role model and gang values, religious beliefs and gang values and drugs and gang values among others. While these observations are consistent with the hypothesis and scientific data, they do not show any statistical significance. The survey data was analyzed and interpreted using SPSS software. The results of this analysis did not show any statistical correlation between the different variables. This is due mainly to the small sample size of the participants in the survey. For example, according to the survey, 88% of the participants who did not have a positive role model between the ages of 5 and 10 say they are more violent because they did not have a father figure. However, the small sample size makes it difficult to show this with any statistical significance.
CHAPTER VI
FINDINGS, CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Gang violence in metropolitan Atlanta is an ever increasing problem, given the rise of gangs such as 30 Deep, Diablo’s, Pittsburg Gangsters, and the 9-Trey Bloods running Atlanta, the Rollin 60 Crips, Eastside Neighborhood Crips, and Gangster Disciples running Decatur. The south side has the following gangs; Southside Crips in East Point as well as the Hit Squad and 4 Corner Hustler Bloods in College Park. Numerous Latino gangs are housed in Cobb and Gwinnett County. This study is of the utmost importance, given gang-related crimes pertaining to murders, and home invasions and robberies. Preventative measures have to be taken to keep our communities and schools safe. The data collected for this demonstrate how certain variables have an effect on gang violence. Analytical conclusions were then drawn to bring and show its importance in aiding the fight against gangs and deterring gang violence on our city streets and schools. Finally, recommendations will be given for what can be done to help curb gang violence on school grounds in an effort to decrease violence in our society.

Findings

From the research gathered, this study shows that these selected variables do have an impact on gang violence. From interviews with actual gang members and survey responses, there is more than enough evidence to conclude that gang violence is the result
of many societal factors. Gang members tend to be individuals who are either looking for something or who have an innate drive to be part of something. Those who are looking would join any organization accessible to them. They have to be part of something. If they were aware of their talents they could channel them in a productive direction.

Because no positive role model is interacting with them, they join any available organization that allows them to express themselves. Gang members who were born to lead, born to command, if they had been born in a different time, with different surroundings, they could have had a different lifestyle. If they have been born in the 1960s, they might have joined the Black Panther party. If they had come from a culturally conscious family, they might have joined the Fruit of Islam. Instead, they were born in a neighborhood where black men prey on black men. One gang member said it best:

 Ni**as do what they do know . . . ni**as just do what they accustomed to seeing man, so shit, ni**a we didn’t come up like the people jogging at 6 am. Ni**a all we saw were sirens, ambulances. So, ni**as just a product of their environment, man.

According to Bandura’s Social-Learning Theory (1977), people learn from one another, through observations, imitation, and modeling. Without the proper role models in the community, without fathers in the house, young men in gangs tend to model adults males on street corners or emulate other gang members. For so many males growing up in areas like Los Angeles, Chicago, and Atlanta, they learn from the community in which they live. If the community is infested with drugs, gangs and crime, and they see other young men earning respect, power and cash in this environment, they will aspire to these
heights. We are dealing with young men who do not like themselves, who do not love themselves. These are young BLACK men who are ashamed of being BLACK! These are young men, who have so little self-worth, so little self-esteem that they would rather kill and rob than try to better themselves scholastically in order to prepare for their future. These young men are walking around with hate in their hearts. Their confidence is low. They hurt others in order to get what they want. These individuals have been abandoned at home, at school, and by society in general. The only things in life they have, that will show them any kind of support, are their “homeboys down the street.” When you have nothing, anything will do. At the end of the day, we all want to feel wanted. One gang member said:

H*ll yeah, a ni**a kill one of your homeboys it’s like this ni**a don’t give a f**k about the person he took from me. I had love for this individual and this ni**a came and took that from me. So if he don’t give a f**k about my homie or his parents, he took somebody child from them, took a friend from me, then naw I don’t give a f**k about the ni**a man.

Their love for their friends is so intense that they are willing to die and kill for them, willing to go to jail for them. All of this occurred because no one took the time with them and consequently, they were raised by the streets. Edwin Sutherland’s Social Disorganization Theory (1939) says high crime rates are directly linked to neighborhood ecological characteristics. This is what happens when you have neighborhood blocks, alleys and corners, being substituted for fathers, mothers and teachers. Some of these young men are coming to school every day from a war zone, and they are released back into that war zone as soon as school is out. These neighborhoods are producing young
men who do not care about life. One gang member said about his home environment, "Killing is acceptable because it's a warfare environment.” War is what these young men see every day, war is what they know, and war is death. Many of the victims in this war are young black males.

Most of these young gang members are addicted to drugs, alcohol, and this gangster lifestyle. They do not believe in themselves let alone their futures. Psychologists and psychiatrists cannot determine why young black men kill with such ease. Edwin Sutherland's Differential Association Theory says individuals learn the values, attitudes, techniques, and motivation for criminal behavior through interactions with others. Well, maybe if we get from behind our desk, stop reading numbers and charts, stop trying to medicate the problem, stop trying to incarcerate the problem, stop ignoring the problem and "actually talk to the problem," we just might find out what the real problem is. They drink and use drugs to self-medicate themselves from the harsh realities of their sins. Many of these men suffer from post traumatic stress syndrome. Most have nightmares waking up in cold sweats. Very few live in any form of peace for more than a few moments. Most suffer 24 hours a day, seven days a week. One gang members said, "fuc***g wake up sweatin knowin that you know what I'm sayin knowin that I pulled a mutherf****r (killed someone). Sh*t, you know what I'm sayin? I did that sh*t, so you know I gotta come to terms with that sh*t.” This is a lifestyle filled with pain, sorrow and suffering. Accordingly, many gang members would say that they commit violent acts just to feel alive. All of this is learned from their environment. The loyalty, the love, death before betrayal, the no fear of jail—all of these learned attributes lead to gang violence. Unfortunately, it also leads to more black-on-black violence.
These young men are not born addicted to this gangster lifestyle. They adapt this lifestyle from interactions with other gang members and then they become addicted. This is usually a lifetime addiction, because once they become involved in the behavior, it is almost impossible to regain any innocence.

Morten’s (1938) Strain Theory states that social structures within society may encourage individuals to commit crime. These social structures can be anything from poverty to broken homes (not having a father), from drug-infested communities to low-self-esteem. From believing that you do not have any hope (not having a future), to addiction to the finer things in life. One gang member stated: “Ni**as start selling dope. Gang violence is at its highest because of money; paper; killing over territory; killing over supplies; robbing and killing for the supplies. It’s over money.” One thing all these young men need is a strong religious belief. They need something to give them boundaries, to give them a moral sense of right and wrong. Without that belief, there is nothing to keep them balanced. Without that sense of balance, those social structures become their higher power. They need that belief in a higher power to keep them from falling victim to all of these societal ills. One counselor says it best:

One way is to keep a sense of worth in young black and Latino men. They need to understand there is a higher calling on their life and that they were put here for a purpose or reason and it’s not to kill one another and go to jail or to sell or intake drugs. You have a duty to serve in whatever capacity or vocation you decide to go into. If your mind is not geared to doing the best that you can do to make things better, then you’re going to become misguided, to think that it’s all about you. It’s not about you; you are here for a purpose and the purpose is not
you. It is the people around you. So, if you give the kids a sense of purpose
whether it comes from religious beliefs, family, and instill these into them young,
this will steer them away from gang violence or things of that nature.
We must teach these young men to believe in something and to know their purpose. If
they do not, they will worship a negative social structure that is idolized in the urban
environment as a way to deliverance.

All of these variables affect gang violence. They all aid in destroying young
black males, allowing them to fall victim to pitfalls that society presents as an alternative
to a hard life of poverty and affliction. These variables present an illusion that life is not
worth living, that these young men are not worthy of love. These illusions cloud
judgment, destroy self-esteem, and cause individuals to take the ‘by any means
necessary’ mentality made famous by Malcolm X and to replace it with the phrase made
famous by rapper 50 cent, “get rich or die trying.” These young men are growing up
unfulfilled, with a blank stare, viewing life as meaningless. Something has to be done.
We have lost too many. Time is of the essence. We need to act fast and act now,
because for these young men who are living this gangster lifestyle, death is certain. Life
is not.

Conclusion

In conclusion, where do we go from here? What are the action steps? As long as
this epidemic stays contained to ghettos across America, we who live elsewhere will
continue to act as if it is a two-minute news flash about some senseless killing on the
wrong side of town. We will not acknowledge that it was somebody’s child who died or