

THE INITIATION PROCESS AND FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH ADOLESCENT
FEMALE GANG MEMBERSHIP

by

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Abstract

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This study sought to address the numerous internal and external factors associated with gang membership among adolescent females as well as the various ways females are initiated into the gang subculture. Motivations and initiation rites were determined based on a series of audio-recorded focus group interviews conducted on 16 female gang members from the North Texas region. The purpose was to identify internal/external factors as well as initiation methods in order to develop programs to reduce or prevent female gang membership.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Empirical research on female gang membership has been traditionally ignored in social science literature (Walker-Barnes and Mason, 2001). Research has focused predominately on male gang affiliation and delinquency (Wang, 2000). However, contemporary empirical research on gangs and gang behavior has progressively expanded to incorporate the role of adolescent females within the gang subculture (Brown, 1977; Campbell, 1984; Curry, 1998; Esbensen, Deschenes, and Winfree, 1999; Harris 1994; Hunt, Joe-Laidler, and Evans, 2002; Hunt and Joe-Laidler, 2001; Miller, 2001; Molidor, 1996; Walker-Barnes and Mason, 2001; Young, 2009). Despite the increasing span of empirical studies conducted on adolescent female gang membership, further research is recommended to shed light on this narrowly studied area of criminology and criminal justice (Rothman, Decker, Reed, Ra, Silversman, and Miller, 2008; Walker-Barnes and Mason, 2001). In an effort to expand the existing academic literature on the female gang subculture, this project analyzed the motivations that influenced adolescent females to join gangs as well as the processes involved in joining a gang.

Early empirical research on female gang participation was exceedingly limited (Thrasher, 1927). A vast amount of gang literature derived from studies strictly analyzing the behavior of male gang members (Thrasher, 1927). Women were traditionally not perceived as dangerous and as such were subsequently overlooked by early social science scholars (Campbell, 1984). Despite the lack of early research on female gang behavior, it is imperative to review it for the purposes of this project.

Thrasher's (1927) early study on more than 1,000 Chicago gangs included only one page regarding female gang participation (as cited in Molidor, 1996, p.251).

According to Giordano (1978), "the bulk of the literature, then, has perpetuated the notion that personal maladjustments characterize the female delinquent" (as cited in Molidor, 1996, p.252). Joe and Chesney-Lind (1995, p.409; as cited in Walker-Barnes and Mason, 2001) argued that "the stereotype of the delinquent is so indisputably male that the police, the general public, and even those in criminology who study delinquency, rarely...consider girls and their problems with the law" (p.304). Walker-Barnes and Mason (2001) regarded the stereotypical gang member as "evident" in the 1995 National Youth Gang Survey's absence of data specifically on females (p.304).

Female gang involvement has become an essential topic in the criminal justice field in contemporary years (Brown, 1977; Campbell, 1984; Curry, 1998; Esbensen, Deschenes, and Winfree, 1999; Hunt, Joe-Laidler, and Evans, 2002; Hunt and Joe-Laidler, 2001; Miller, 2001; Molidor, 1996; Walker-Barnes and Mason, 2001; Young, 2009), yet further empirical research is necessary to comprehend the extent of female gang membership. Young females join gangs for a variety of reasons. The motivations for gang membership range from protection against victimization to emotional fulfillment (i.e. a sense of belonging) (Esbensen et al., 1999, p.34; also see Brown, 1977; Molidor, 1996). Brown (1977) conducted a study on African-American female youth gang members in Philadelphia and found that females joined gangs out of a need for "peer grouping" and acceptance (Brown, 1977, p.223). Through gang affiliation, females established an identity and increased their overall popularity within the school setting and their neighborhoods (Brown, 1977, p.223).

Molidor (1996) suggested that adolescent females join gangs out of sense of power and respect. He interviewed several adolescent female gang members regarding various aspects of the gang life, including their individual motivations for joining a gang. Some of them reported feeling a sense of power and protection through gang

membership (Molidor, 1996; also see Joe and Chesney-Lind, 1995). The sense of power and protection experienced through gang affiliation helped young women feel respected by others (Diaz-Cotto, 2006; Miller, 2001; Molidor, 1996). Fear of potential victimization and possible retaliation forced some non-members to obey gang members (Molidor, 1996). Additional motivations will be extensively discussed in the literature review section.

Another subject less explored by scholars is female gang initiation. Female gang initiation has been increasingly studied (Miller, 2001; Molidor, 1996; Rothman et al., 2008; Tobin, 2008). According to Tobin (2008), females, similar to males, are recruited into gangs through their peers. Young females' descriptions of a "good gang member" are comparable to that of males (Miller, 2001, p.74). Females, like males, must prove they are "tough, willing and able to fight, loyal, and down for the gang" (Miller, 2001, p.74). Gang initiation is often dependent on each individual gang (Tobin, 2008). The initiation method simultaneously determined the level of respect a particular female would obtain once she became a member of that particular gang (Tobin, 2008). Getting "jumped in" (i.e. fighting, beating) is a common initiation ritual, however, sexual initiation can also be utilized as a mode of gang initiation (Tobin, 2008).

The data for this study consisted of a series of audio-recorded interviews conducted on numerous gang members. The data were originally collected for a previous study and included male and female focus groups. For purposes of this project, only the responses from the females were transcribed and analyzed. As mentioned previously, this study strategically focused on the internal and external motivations for female gang membership as well as the various methods of gang initiation among young females. Two broad research questions were developed for direction and guidance (Marshall and Rossman, 2006).

The two research questions were chosen to further illuminate the subject of female gang membership and its unique subculture (Brown, 1977; Campbell, 1984; Curry, 1998; Esbensen et al., 1999; Harris, 1994; Hunt, Joe-Laidler, and Evans, 2002; Hunt and Joe-Laidler, 2001; Miller, 2001; Molidor, 1996; Walker-Barnes and Mason, 2001; Young, 2009). Uncovering the numerous reasons for female gang involvement may provide organizations and policymakers with valuable information to develop proficient methods to prevent or reduce the likelihood that youths will join gangs. The central research questions are as follows and were developed subsequent to the transcription of female responses.

- ✓ Do internal (i.e. psychological) and external factors (i.e. family members, peers, neighborhood) play a direct or indirect role in gang membership among adolescent females?
- ✓ Does the gang initiation process for adolescent females differ from that of adolescent males?

Based on the selected research questions, the objectives of this study consisted of identifying the potential risk factors for gang membership among young females and the various forms of gang initiation. The identification of risk factors may also assist in desistance from gang affiliation (Bolden, 2013) or the creation of extra-curricular programs specifically geared to prevent female gang membership (Petersen and Howell, 2013; also see Batchelor, 2009, Esbensen and Deschenes, 1998).

As mentioned, the research questions were empirically analyzed using transcriptions from secondary data. The interviews were transcribed to strategically include only female responses. Ethnic identification could not be identified, however, several joined predominately Hispanic gangs and the remaining joined predominately African-American gangs. Data was considered secondary due to its preexistence. For

that reason, a qualitative secondary data analysis was deemed suitable for this study. Qualitative secondary analysis entailed the use of existing data to develop new social scientific and/or methodological understandings (Irwin, 2013). In addition, a qualitative secondary data analysis was suitable for this study as the researcher sought to relate the preexisting data to a new set of research questions (Irwin, 2013). The original data focused on various aspects of gang membership, regardless of gender. Individual responses were qualitatively analyzed using the two broad research questions regarding gang initiation and the potential factors attributed to gang membership among females. Prior to any type of data analysis, previous empirical research on female gang membership will be reviewed in the subsequent chapter.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The Female Gang Member

During the past two decades, our understanding of female gang members has been substantially reevaluated (Tobin, 2008). Various scholars have sought to revive this academically scarce topic in criminology and criminal justice (Batchelor, 2009; Brown, 1977; Campbell, 1984; Chesney-Lind and Pasko, 2004; Curry, 1998; Esbensen et al., 1999; Diaz-Cotto, 2006; Harris, 1994; Hunt, Joe-Laidler, and Evans, 2002; Hunt and Joe-Laidler, 2001; Miller, 2001; Molidor, 1996; Moore, 1991; Tobin, 2008; Walker-Barnes and Mason, 2001; Young, 2009). Qualitative studies often suggested gangs were male dominated (Mason and Walker-Barnes, 2000). Far less attention was paid to the views and experiences of gang-affiliated females (Esbensen et al., 1999). Other researchers focused on examining the importance of gender within the context of gangs (Chesney-Lind and Pasko, 2004; Esbensen and Deschenes, 1998; Esbensen et al., 1999; Joe and Chesney-Lind, 1995).

Despite the existence of contemporary research on female gang members, females were not traditionally perceived as a major component of the gang subculture (Thrasher 1927). Female gang members were virtually “invisible to the gang gaze” (Young, 2009, p.227). As Young (2009) noted, early scholars, such as Thrasher (1927) perceived female gang membership as exceptionally rare. Female gang members were traditionally viewed by their male counterparts as “tomboys (the “shemale”) or sex objects” that occupied a “secondary role within the group” (gang) (Young, 2009, p.227; also see Chesney-Lind and Pasko, 2004). The Department of Children, Schools and Families’ (2008) report similarly concluded young females in gangs “are subservient in male gangs and even submissive, sometimes being used to carry weapons or drugs,

even being sexually exploited” by male gang members (as cited in Batchelor, 2009, p.400; Miller and Brunson, 2000). Despite the notion of “sexual availability” between female and male members, it is not considered an explicit condition of gang membership (Curry, 1998, p.103).

Females’ second-class status in gangs results in various consequences. Scholars (Chesney-Lind and Pasko, 2004; Miller, 2001; and Young, 2009) have discussed the potential dangers of sexual exploitation among females who join gangs. Pitts (2007) concluded that “young women in gangs are often sexually exploited in exchange for drugs” (as cited in Young, 2009, p.228). Relationships with male gang members tend to be abusive and dominant (Pitts, 2007; as cited in Young, 2009). Contrary views were reflected by Young (2009) who studied female gang members in the United Kingdom (UK). Young (2009) found that relationships between females and their male counterparts were recognized as friendships and not coercive or exploitative (Young, 2009). This “friendship recognition,” as referred to by Young (2009) is commonly illustrated in mixed-group gangs (p.228) (i.e. male and female gangs).

Despite the various disadvantages females are likely to encounter within a gang, more girls are joining gangs than in the past (Howell, 2007). Scholars often disagree when attempting to reach a definitive number of female gang members. Miller (1975), for instance, asserted that only about 6% of gang members in the New York area were female (as cited in Curry, 1998, p.104), which was lower than the “general rule of thumb” that female gang members comprised approximately 10% of the entire gang population. Howell (2007) estimated the total female gang membership at 25% to 50% of the members in various geographic regions (p.43). Data from self-report studies indicated the proportion of female gang members ranged from 3% to 38% (Walker-Barnes and Mason, 2001, p.304). Some argue these numbers increased as females “became more liberated

and independent during the 1980s, they took on roles more comparable to male gang members” (Molidor, 1996, p.251).

The overall picture of the average female gang member has drastically changed over the years. Thrasher (1927) noted the minor role of females within the gang subculture. Females were stereotypically described as tomboys and frequently utilized for sexual purposes with the gang (Thrasher, 1927). The traditional view of crime was predominately viewed as masculine act(s) of violence (Moore and Hagedorn, 2001). Women were not presumed to partake in random acts of violence, such as those illustrated in the traditional gang subculture. Their perceived ‘soft’ demeanor was partially the reason why females were overlooked in early gang research (Moore and Hagedorn, 2001). Campbell (1990) argued that “girls were defined solely in terms of their . . . relations to male gang members” (p.166; as cited in Moore and Hagedorn, 2001, p.1).

The modern views of female gang members have also been substantially reformed. Taylor (1993) noted, “female gang members now are hard-core and deadly” (as cited in Molidor, 1996, p.45). Young’s (2009) study on young female gang members in the UK yielded similar outcomes. She found that “teenage girls are no longer hovering on the periphery of street gangs but are hard core members actively engaging in the kind of extreme violence that is usually the preserve of men” (Young, 2009, p.224). For girls, according to Chesney-Lind and Joe (1995), violence is not “celebrated” or “normative” (p.428). Instead, violence is “more directly a consequence of and a response to the abuse, both physical and sexual, that characterizes their lives at home” (Chesney-Lind and Joe, 1995, p.428). Female gang life is not perceived as an expression of “liberation,” but is an attempt by young women to “cope with a bleak and harsh present as well as a dismal future” (Chesney-Lind and Joe, 1995, p.428)

Reasons for Joining

Female motivations for joining gangs vary extensively. Some adolescent females reported joining a gang as a result of family, friends, or personal reasons (Walker-Barnes and Mason, 2001). Others specifically reported living in a dysfunctional family prior to joining the gang (Molidor, 1996). Extensive alcohol and drug use on behalf of parents, stepparents, or boyfriends has also been empirically tested as additional reasons for female gang affiliation (Molidor, 1996, p.253). In Molidor's (1996) study, young female gang members indicated they had experienced physical or sexual abuse from a loved one (also see Diaz-Cotto, 2006). The loss of parental/guardian protection further inclined them to join a gang. The lack of familial structure and belongingness has also been found to influence gang membership among females (Esbensen, Deschenes, and Winfree, 1999; Harris, 1994; Miller, 2001; Molidor, 1996).

Family

The challenges young girls face during adolescence can be another motivating factor to join a gang. The need for acceptance is highly desired by adolescent females (Molidor, 1996). According to Freud (1936, p.236; as cited in Molidor, 1996), teenagers may feel tense and anxious in the presence of parents and feel safe only when apart from them (p.254). Teenagers struggle to separate from the parents/guardians, but simultaneously seek a sense of belonging provided through a familial structure (Molidor, 1996). Some young girls were psychologically unprepared to endure independence (Molidor, 1996). As a result, these girls resorted to gangs to maintain a familial structure while separating from parental attachment (Molidor, 1996).

Familial factors have long been regarded as a "focal point" for gang membership among females (Young et al., 2014, p.173). Familial structure, composition, and the

quality of parent-child relationships have been empirically observed to explain anti-social behaviors among youth and delinquency (Young et al., 2014). The family, according to Miller (2001), has long been considered an imperative point for understanding delinquency and gang behavior among girls (p.45). Living within a dysfunctional family was commonplace among some female gang members (Miller, 2001; Molidor, 1996; Wang, 2000). Familial factors, such as “weak parental supervision, lack of parental attachment, family violence, and drug and alcohol abuse by family members” have been empirically determined to contribute to gang membership (Miller, 2001, p.45). Drug and alcohol abuse of behalf of parents or other close family members was regularly accompanied by physical, even sexual abuse (Molidor, 1996). Gang-affiliated females were significantly more likely to have witnessed physical violence among adults in the home (Miller, 2001).

Multigenerational Gang Membership

Other studies indicated multigenerational gang membership (Diaz-Cotto, 2006; Miller, 2001; Young et al., 2014). Diaz-Cotto’s (2006) study on Chicana (Mexican-American) gang members illustrated the existence of multigenerational gang members. Gilman, Hill, and Hawkins (2014) found that youths living with an active gang member were eight times more likely to join a gang (p.212). Youths socialized into a gang through family gang members are revered and respected. Original gangsters (OGs) or “old-timers” were often referred to as “veteranas/os” (Diaz-Cotto, 2006). Veteranas/os consisted of aunts, uncles, cousins, parents, and even grandparents. The “sense of continuity” with the gang tradition led some young females to pursue gang membership (Diaz-Cotto, 2006, p.81).

Violent behaviors can be inculcated through the socialization of gang-involved family members. Young females are often socialized into the gang by other gang-involved family members (Alridge, Shite, Ralphs, and Medina, 2011; Decker and Van Winkle, 1996; Miller, 2001). Several researchers have claimed that some families share positive attitudes about gang membership and encourage youths to join (Rutter and Giller, 1983; Vigil, 1988; as cited in Young et al., 2014, p.180). Decker and Van Winkle's (1996) findings regarding youth gangs coincides with that of Miller (2001) in that younger siblings were encouraged to join gangs because of siblings or immediate relatives (i.e. cousins, aunts, uncles) (also see Young et al., 2014). Familial gang membership was viewed as inhibiting "positive benefits for both gang and non-gang activities" (Young et al., 2014, p.180). Some young females with siblings in gangs reported getting respect, recognition, and protection through their siblings' gang connection (Miller, 2001). Gang involvement essentially enhanced their familial reputation (Alridge et al., 2011; Young et al., 2014).

Abuse and Victimization

Females that reported abusive family histories specifically mentioned physical and sexual abuse (i.e. rape) prior to joining a gang (Diaz-Cotto, 2006; Fleisher and Krienert, 2004; Harris, 1994; Miller, 2001; Moore and Hageborn, 2001; Molidor, 1996; Taylor, 2008). Miller's (2001) study regarding female gang members found that 52% of female gang members had been either sexually assaulted or raped at some point in their lives (Miller, 2001, p.46). The violent nature of their lives influenced future gang involvement (Harris, 1994; Miller 2001). Miller (2001) found approximately 35 instances of rape or sexual assault. More than half of the females in Miller's (2001) study were afraid

of their fathers and their “corporal punishments” for disobeying (see Young, Fitzgibbon, and Silverstone, 2014, p.176).

Others scholars differentiate sexual and physical abuse as motivations for female gang membership (Wang, 2000). Wang (2000) distinctly found that sexual and physical abuse did not directly predict future gang membership among middle-school females. Instead, the lack of parental love, care and guidance highly predicted subsequent gang membership among females in his particular study (Wang, 2000). This finding is contrary to previous (Harris, 1994; Molitor, 1996) as well as contemporary (Diaz-Cotto, 2006; Fleisher and Krienert, 2004; Miller, 2001; Moore and Hageborn, 2001; Taylor, 2008) research conducted on female gang members citing physical and sexual abuse as major influences for gang membership among females.

Peers

Peer variables are significantly associated with female gang membership (Esbensen and Deschenes, 1998). Deschenes and Esbensen (1998) found that negative peers were significantly stronger for females than males. Negative peer commitment and the lack of prosocial peers were positively correlated with subsequent female gang membership (Esbensen and Deschenes, 1998). Anti-social behavior was said to partially derive from a social learning process (Bandura, 1977). Potential gang prospects were socialized with active gang members and subsequently adopted deviant behaviors, and pro-gang definitions (Esbensen and Deschenes, 1998; also see Bandura, 1977).

Others female youths reported becoming gang affiliated through neighborhood peers. Decker and Van Winkle’s (1996) study on youth gangs found that most gang members affiliated themselves with neighborhood friends who were already involved in gangs (p.68). Gilman, Hill, Hawkins, Howell, and Kosterman (2014) comparatively found

that anti-social peer environments significantly predicted later gang membership. Gang affiliation subsequently increased the status of the individual within the neighborhood (Decker and Van Winkle, 1996). Other non-members recognized the potential repercussions (i.e. victimization) for not becoming involved in gangs (Decker and Van Winkle, 1996). This particular dilemma was primarily displayed among non-gang members having gang-affiliated neighborhood peers. Some later decided to join the gang after being labelled as gang members, despite non-membership (Decker and Van Winkle, 1996).

Peer Pressure/Coercion

Despite the familial pressure to join, other studies have found peers as a driving factor for female gang involvement (Diaz-Cotto, 2006; Walker-Barnes and Mason, 2001). Female gang membership has been attributed to friendships and peer pressure (Alleyne and Wood, 2014; Esbensen et al., 1999; Walker-Barnes and Mason, 2001). Some female gang members reported joining a gang because a friend was actively involved in a gang (Esbensen et al., 1999). Popularity has also been cited as an attributive factor (Esbensen et al., 1999). Females resorted to gangs in response to peer acceptance. Wang's (2000) study on girls' perceptions of gangs found that females often regarded a sense of belonging and peer pressure as chief reasons for female membership. Miller (2001) found that the majority of female participants reported previous gang exposure to neighborhood peer networks as a major reason for gang affiliation. Numerous female participants in Miller's (2001) study reported gang membership as a result of friends' involvement in a gang. Pitts (2007) further asserted that "young people are coerced into joining a gang from the pressure they experience from their peers who arguably could be gang members" (as cited in Alleyne and Wood, 2014, p.560).

However, persuasion into gang membership was highly debated among scholars (Brown, 1977). Brown (1977) contradicted the argument that young females are pressured into gang membership. He believed females were not coerced into gang membership, unlike males who are forced into membership. Brown (1977) argued females were permitted, but not obligated to join gangs. This type of 'voluntary' membership was perceived as a chief reason for females' limited participation in gang activities (Brown, 1977). Females were often recruited by active gang members through promises of identity, status, and protection (Decker and Van Winkle, 1996). Females with lower levels of self-esteem were considered additional motivations for gang membership (Brown, 1977) as they viewed themselves as less sociable and attractive. Membership provided a 'psychological reinforcement' for females desiring identity and group status.

Other scholars have broadly focused on comparing and contrasting predictors of gang membership using gender as the independent variable (Esbensen and Deschenes, 1998). Females reported an elevated level of strong maternal attachment, yet males reported even higher levels (Esbensen and Deschenes, 1998). Males, however, were found to have higher attachment to their fathers than females. Parental attachment is also attributed to subsequent gang membership (Esbensen and Deschenes, 1998). Females also reported lower levels of self-esteem, which increased the susceptibility of gang membership (Esbensen and Deschenes, 1998). Lower levels of commitment to school were associated with females, but not for males (see Esbensen and Deschenes, 1998). In addition, the relationship between prosocial peers and gang membership were significant for females, but not for males. This finding regarding peers is significantly comparable to that of Alleyne and Wood (2014) and Miller (2001) who discovered a positive correlation between female gang membership and peer networks.

Esbensen et al. (1999) performed an empirical study by comparing gang boys and girls. Their findings are comparable to previous scholastic research conducted on motivations for female gang membership (see Fleisher and Krienert, 2004; Harris, 1994; Miller, 2001; Moore and Hageborn, 2001; Molidor, 1996). Esbensen et al. (1999) formulated an eight-scale questionnaire regarding the most common reasons gang girls and boys joined a gang. Reasons for joining a gang included fun; protection; friend or family membership in the gang; forced to join (coercion), respect; money; and, to fit in better (see Esbensen et al., 1999). With the exception of boys being more likely to join a gang to get money, there were no gender differences for gang membership among the other reasons (Esbensen et al., 1999). Approximately half of all the study's participants reported joining a gang for fun, protection, respect, money, or because a friend or family member was in a gang.

Neighborhood

The context of neighborhoods has also played an active role in gang membership among females. Disorganized neighborhoods have long been known as a fundamental site for gangs and juvenile delinquency (Shaw and McKay, 1942; also see Miller 2001). According to Gilman et al. (2014), ecological influences do not operate in isolation. Instead, neighborhood disorganization influenced "family functioning" (Gilman et al., 2014, p.215). "Poor family functioning may influence the child's further exposure to antisocial neighborhood influences" (Gilman et al., 2014, p.215). Approximately 85% of gang females in a study conducted by Fleisher and Krienert (2004) reported they did not need to join a gang for school for neighborhood protection (p.613). Scholars have pointed to gangs as a means for young males and females to "adapt to the oppressive living conditions imposed by their environments" (Miller 2001, p.39). These socially decayed

neighborhoods are predominately located in urban areas where economic marginality is high (Shaw and McKay, 1942).

Psychological

Harris (1994) conducted a similar study on Mexican-American female gang members in the San Fernando Valley area. Harris's (1994) study on Mexican-American female gang members emphasized various themes, including reasons for gang membership. Molidor (1996) and Harris (1994) both concluded that a seeking a sense of belongingness and identity attributed to gang membership (Brown, 1977). Harris (1994) additionally found that many of the female participants in her study reported the need for identifying with a group as a motivation for membership. Females who experienced loneliness and low levels of self-esteem were likely to endure an elevated "sense of social isolation and self-rejection" (Wang, 2000, p.626). This profound feeling of loneliness was likely to trigger a desire for gang membership (Wang, 2000).

Reasoning for Joining: A Comparative Review between Ethnicity

When comparing the existing gang literature between Hispanic and African-American female gang members, various similarities and differences exist with regard to their motivations for joining a gang. Both Hispanic and African-American female gang members are likely to come from dysfunctional homes where violence (Brown 1977; Harris, 1994; Miller 2001), substance abuse, and poverty (Brown, 1977), prevail. Abusive relationships and negative family environments are emphasized (Harris, 1994, Walker-Barnes and Mason, 2001), but more so for Hispanic females. Negative family environments can be viewed as a motivation for gang membership (Alleyne and Wood 2010), among both males and females, but some scholars have attempted to dispute this

notion (see Bowker and Klein, 1983; Jankowski, 1991; as cited in Walker-Barnes and Mason, 2001, p.306).

Some argue that dysfunctional parent-adolescent relationships do not affect involvement in gangs among African-American females (Bowker and Klein, 1983; as cited in Walker-Barnes and Mason, 2001). Others have even suggested that gang members were just as likely to originate from “broken” homes as they were to come from “intact nuclear families” (Jankowski, 1991; as cited in Walker-Barnes and Mason, 2001, p.306). Walker-Barnes and Mason (2001) distinctively concluded, based on a study conducted on at-risk African and Hispanic females, that gang membership may be the product of estranged parental relationships. However, Walker-Barnes and Mason (2001) also found that “emotionally distant parents” may be a consequence of gang membership, as opposed to motivation.

As mentioned previously, sense of belonging and identity have been extensively noted as potential motives for female gang membership (see Brown, 1977; Harris, 1994; Miller, 2001; Walker-Barnes and Mason, 2010). These motivations for membership are vastly common among Hispanic and African-American gang members. According to Brown’s (1977) study on African-American gang members, sense of belonging “fulfills some of very basic psychological needs” (p.223). Similarly, Harris (1994) found that the desire to belong to a group satisfies “the need for group support and cohesiveness” (p.293). The group cohesiveness found in gangs may fill the void experienced by negative family environments (Alleyne and Wood, 2010) or single-parent households (Brown. 1977). For some Hispanic female gang members, gangs provide “a strong substitute for weak family and lack of conventional school ties” (Harris, 1994, p.295). Similarly, for some African-American females, gangs offer a type of “psychological reinforcement” (Brown, 1977, p.223) when mainstream institutions (i.e. school, family)

(Merton, 1938) fail to “provide an atmosphere of stability” (Brown, 1977, p.223). Just as both ethnicities vary with regard to their motivations for joining gangs, modes of initiation also vary among individual gangs.

Female Gang Initiation

Gang initiation for females have been scarcely documented by scholars until recent years (Miller, 2001; Miller and Brunson, 2000; Molitor, 1996; Rothman et al., 2008; Tobin, 2008). Initiation rituals are often determined by gang leaders (see Molitor, 1996, p.253). Initiation is also considered a rite of passage (Miller and Brunson, 2000). Rituals may consist of being sexually initiated into a gang (Molitor, 1996; Young 2009), “jumped” in, “blessed” or “walked” in, committing a specific illicit act, getting tattooed, or fighting a rival gang member (Miller, 2001; Miller and Brunson, 2000; Tobin 2008). Brown (1977) argued that joining a gang is a simple process. He specified that a female must initially express an interest in being a gang member (Brown, 1977). If a female was accepted into a gang, “she automatically [became] part of the gang” (Brown (1977, p.224). Other scholars, such as Miller (2001), argued that gangs do not allow anyone to join. Females must prove they have the “heart” and are “down” for the gang in order to become officially accepted (see Brown, 1977, p.224; also see Miller and Brunson, 2000; Miller, 2001).

Sexual

Initiation can be “extremely painful” and “humiliating” to females enduring the ordeal (Molitor, 1996, p.253; see Miller, 2001 for specific details of violent initiations). Initiation varies by gang, and how the female enters will also determine the level of respect she will possess once she becomes a member (Portillos, 1999; as cited in Tobin, 2008, p.126). Brown (1977) previously argued that males were primarily the ones tested

for loyalty. However, Miller, (2001) contrasted with Brown (1977) in that potential female gang members were also tested prior to official membership. Harris (1994) similarly found that “eligibility for membership is both ascribed and achieved” (p.292). Some female gang members in Miller’s (2001) study recollected moments where the ‘testing process’ became less ‘explicit’ over time (p.75).

The process of being ‘sexed in’ has been documented by various scholars (Miller, 2001; Miller and Brunson, 2000; Molidor, 1996; Tobin, 2008; Young, 2009). For females, this initiation rite could be considered one of the most humiliating processes of joining a gang. Being “sexed in” to a gang involves having sexual intercourse with multiple leading gang members (see Molidor, 1996; Miller and Brunson, 2000). Once females are sexually initiated into the gang they are degraded by other members of the gang, both male and female (Miller and Brunson, 2000). Females initiated in this fashion are labelled as “sexually available” (Miller and Brunson, 2000, p.439).

Females ‘sexed in’ to the gang are often subject to disrespect by other fellow gang members (Miller and Brunson, 2000). Increased disrespect toward these young females is probable. Females could be more inclined to deny they endured this type of initiation. This notion is highly disputed by scholars as accounts of these types of rituals are primarily disclosed by male gang members (Decker, and Van Winkle, 1996; Miller and Brunson, 2000). Decker and Van Winkle (1996) believed this demonstrated the “belief systems and bravado of adolescent males about their sexuality and control over females” (p.72). There was often debate as to the frequency with which this particular type of initiation ritual is used among young females (Tobin, 2008). Miller (1998) noted that getting ‘sexed in’ served to keep young women “disempowered” (p.446). This particular initiation method additionally exposed females to sexual exploitation by male gang members (Miller, 2001). Disrespect was also illustrated in the form of derogatory

terms (Miller, 2001). The stigma of being 'sexed in' to a gang was overcome by challenging members (males and females) who displayed signs of disrespect (Miller, 2001). Challenges were often displayed with violent behavior, such as fighting. Decker and Van Winkle (1996) reported that males regarded 'sexing in' as a ritual for females; however, most female gang members discard this notion (Howell, 2007; Miller and Brunson, 2000; Moore and Hageborn, 2001; Tobin, 2008).

Violent

Getting 'jumped in' is considered another form of gang initiation used by both males and females, alike (Miller, 2001; Tobin, 2008). It is regarded as the most common method of gang initiation (Bolden, 2013; Tobin, 2008). The process of getting 'jumped in' involves receiving a moderate to severe beating from other fellow gang members, often without fighting back (Miller, 2001). The process is usually time compressed and serves to demonstrate toughness. Female participants in Miller's (2001) study recalled taking several blows to the head while being jumped in. Some regarded being 'jumped in' as a formality into the gang (Diaz-Cotto, 2006, p.86). Tobin (2008) mentioned another less violent form of jumping in called "fair fight" (Tobin, 2008, p.126). Fair fighting involves a single fight between the gang prospect and an active gang member. Other forms of gang initiation may comprise of committing an illicit act or physical assault against a rival gang member (Miller, 2001).

The violent nature of gang initiation forces some females to prove toughness and loyalty to their corresponding gang (Tobin, 2008). This method offers females the opportunity to prove they are "down for the gang" (Miller, 2001, p.75). Violent forms of initiation (i.e. 'jump in', 'walk the line') allow females to gain male gang members' respect (Quicker, 1999; as cited in Tobin, 2008, p.126). Other female prospects are required by lead gang members to commit specific crimes, usually against rival gang members (i.e.

drive-by shooting) (Miller, 2001; Tobin, 2008). After the commitment of a specific crime, females are then perceived as equal to the males. Initiation also serves to demonstrate whether prospective female members are “gang material” (Miller, 2001, p.76).

Non-Violent

Despite the prevalence of violent gang rituals, non-violent initiations also exist. Non-violent gang initiation rituals vary by individual gangs. Some gangs prefer to initiate their female gang members by ‘blessing’ them or ‘walking’ them into the gang (Tobin, 2008, p.126). This process often consists of allowing the prospect to become part of the gang by letting her walk into the gang. ‘Blessing’ an individual into a gang traditionally involves several gang members reciting a prayer over the prospect (Tobin, 2008, p.126). This process is traditionally carried out by a high-ranking gang member to initiate close relatives, wives or girlfriends into the gang without violent entry (Bolden, 2013). Various names are used to describe this non-violent initiation process, including crowned in, walked in, or an original (Bolden, 2013).

Some individuals, including females, are born into the gang through parental gang affiliation (Diaz-Cotto, 2006; Miller, 2001). In other words, a child born to a gang member was automatically part of the gang and did not go through an initiation (Bolden, 2013; also see Decker and Van Winkle, 1996; Diaz-Cotto, 2006). According to Diaz-Cotto (2006), female gang affiliation meant “being born in the barrio” (neighborhood) or having siblings/relatives who were high-ranking members of a particular gang. In order to properly address the second broad research question regarding the comparison between female versus male initiation rites, it is crucial to review previous empirical research conducted on male gang initiation.

Male Gang Initiation

Gang initiation among males has been well documented in previous empirical studies (Decker and Van Winkle, 1996; Goldman, Giles, and Hogg, 2014; Tobin, 2008; Vigil, 1988; Vigil, 1996). Gang initiations are primarily informal in nature and vary by individual gang (Tobin, 2008). They are predominately used to “weed out the weak and uncommitted” (Vigil, 1996, p.151). Several of the initiation rituals are “rooted in violence” (Tobin, 2008, p.75). Violent initiations are prescribed to male prospects to demonstrate toughness, as toughness is associated with “manliness” (Vigil, 1996, p.152; also see Vigil, 1988), comparable to that of females (Miller, 2001; Miller and Brunson, 2000; Molitor, 1996; Tobin, 2008). “Showing that one is tough is almost a requisite for group membership, especially with the ordeal of gang initiation, and it reflects a salient concern about toughness” (Vigil, 1988, p.428). Withstanding a violent gang initiation often merits the respect of other fellow gang members as it indicates male prospects are physically capable of defending their gang if necessary (Vigil, 1996).

The most common initiation ritual among male gang members involves being jumped (beat) in (Decker and Van Winkle, 1996; Tobin, 2008). Getting jumped in was utilized as a formality into the gang. Vigil (1996) referred to this gang formality as a “gang baptism,” which “marked passage to a new status” (p.151). Being jumped in can take on several different variations depending on the individual gang (Decker and Van Winkle, 1996). Getting jumped in primarily indicated the male prospect was subjected to a moderate beating on behalf of two or more “established gang members” (Goldman, et al., 2014, p.821). Male prospects are rarely permitted to fight back. Male prospects who have previously demonstrated they were “able to take it” were “subjected to briefer pro forma attacks” (Vigil, 1996, p.151).

Other male prospects are required to demonstrate toughness through the commitment of a specific type of crime(s) (Decker and Van Winkle, 1996). Some male prospects have the option of being jumped in or committing a crime prescribed by lead gang members (Decker and Van Winkle, 1996). Committing a crime was often referred to as going on a “mission” or “posse” (Decker and Van Winkle, 1996, p.70). Illicit acts typically involved committing a crime against a rival gang member (shoot, fight). Victims were primarily known to male prospects and the gang prior to the commitment of a particular crime. Loyalty to the gang is ultimately tested; such is illustrated in Decker and Van Winkle’s (1996) study in which a few male gang members revealed they were asked to shoot siblings involved in rival gangs. These violent acts subsequently offered them membership and status within the gang (Decker and Van Winkle, 1996). In order to further understand the nature of female gang memberships, it is imperative to examine the theoretical dynamics of their subcultural behaviors.

Theories related to Gang Membership

The prevalence of negative peers and family environments often determine strength of social bonds. Hirschi (1969) emphasized the importance of maintaining strong social bonds with mainstream institutions (i.e. school, parents) to desist in deviant behaviors (i.e. crime, delinquency, gangs). According to Hirschi’s (1969) social control/bond theory, the presence of strong social bonds essentially determines whether adolescents, in this case, females, are willing to risk their connections with mainstream institutions in exchange for deviant behaviors (i.e. gang membership). In some instances, weakened social bonds may exist prior to gang membership, as a result of detrimental familial environments, such as histories of physical and sexual abuse, substance abuse, etc. (see Miller, 2001; Alleyne and Wood, 2010). Weakened social bonds are often associated with delinquency and subsequent gang membership (Weerman, Lovegrove,

and Thornberry, 2015). These weakened social bonds also place adolescents, including females, at greater risk of being influenced by delinquent peers who provide these youths with a sense of a family (Dukes, Martinez, and Stein, 1997). Conflicts are also likely to persist as adolescent females become active gang members, as parents and teachers “usually dislike gangs” (Weerman, Lovegrove, and Thornberry, 2015, p.72). “Although traditional social control theory (Hirschi, 1969) viewed social bonds as relatively static and emphasized the impact of social bonds on delinquency, interactional theory (Thornberry, 1987) emphasizes the bidirectional nature of these relationships” (as cited in Weerman et al., 2015, p.72).

Interactional theory (Thornberry, Krohn, Lizotte, Smith, & Tobin, 2003; as cited in Alleyne and Wood, 2010) linked the previous criminological theories related to gangs and gang behavior into an integrated theory of crime. According to interactional theory, “gang membership results from a reciprocal relationship between the individual and peer groups, social structures, weakened social bonds, and a learning environment that fosters and reinforces delinquency” (Hall, Thornberry, and Lizotte, 2006; as cited in Alleyne and Wood, 2010, p.548). Alleyne and Wood (2010) referred to this integrational theory as a “marriage” between social control and social learning theory (p.548). Individuals are more likely to persist in deviant behavior if their social bonds with society (i.e. their community) are broken (Hirschi, 1969; also see Alleyne and Wood, 2010). This deviant behavior is reinforced with the combination of socially disorganized neighborhoods (Shaw and McKay, 1942), negative family environments (i.e. abuse, lack of supervision), and deviant peers (i.e. gang members) (see Alleyne and Wood, 2010).

The existence of negative peers (i.e. gang members) may also increase adolescent females’ susceptibility of joining a gang (Sutherland, Cressey, and Luckenbill, 1995). Deviant behaviors, such as gang affiliation, can be a learned process (Sutherland

et al., 1995). Similar to learning criminal behavior, gang behavior can be learned through a socialization process involving a small group of peers (i.e. gang, click) (see Sutherland et al., 1995). According to Sutherland et al. (1995), these differential associations may vary in frequency, duration, priority and intensity. The frequency and duration of these differential associations assist in inculcating non-conforming values to these females. Non-conforming values may be learned with ease given that prior research suggests histories of negative family environments, such as physical and sexual abuse, and substance abuse (Alleyne and Wood, 2010, Miller 2001).

Some females may seek refuge from these negative familial experiences through gang membership. Gangs may provide young females with a sense of familial structure and belonging (Molidor, 1996); one that is not achieved in their individual homes. Weerman et al. (2015) argued that “joining or leaving a gang may also lead to changes in other aspects of the peer context, in particular the amount of time spent with peers and the level of perceived peer pressure and group reinforcements for delinquent behavior” (p.72). Based on Sutherland et al.’s (1995) differential association theory, “definitions favorable to misconduct may be more prevalent in an environment where gang members exist....because such definitions may be learned through modeling or other vicarious experiences” (as cited in Winfree et al., 1994, p.170).

The addition of socially disorganized neighborhoods may also play a significant role in gang membership. Shaw and McKay’s (1942) social disorganization theory described neighborhoods of low-socioeconomic backgrounds, predominately minority, and physically decayed, as breeding grounds for criminal/delinquent behavior and gangs. Gangs are often regarded as “collection of individuals who are the products of social disorganization in certain neighborhoods” (Sanchez-Jankowski, 1993, p.195). Some adolescents, predominately minorities, are born and raised in socially disadvantaged

neighborhoods where intergenerational membership is encouraged and positively viewed (Decker and Van Winkle, 1996; Diaz-Cotto, 2006; Miller, 2001; Young et al., 2014).

The social isolation experienced in these neighborhoods further alienates these youths from mainstream institutions (i.e. schools) that are responsible for inculcating social control (Hirschi, 1969) and conventional behaviors. The strain built from the lack of opportunities (i.e. education, work) in these communities further pushes these youths to resort to gangs as a means of achieving an end (i.e. money, status, belonging, self-esteem) (see Merton, 1938). The “limited access to opportunity structure” (Cloward and Ohlin, 1960; as cited in Brown, 1977, p.222) faced in low-income neighborhoods further isolates females from “dominant institutions” (Harris, 1994, p.294). These anti-social attitudes may change over time as adolescents mature.

Desistance from gang membership and deviant behaviors is extensively emphasized in various life course theories developed over the years (Melde and Esbensen, 2011; Sampson and Laub, 1993; Thornberry, 2003). Life course theories assist in comprehending the complexity of gang desistance. According to the life course perspective, “behavior that is initiated in adolescence can have important consequences for transitions into adulthood, and these transitions, in turn can shape the course of adult development” (Thornberry, 2003). There are certain life events, also known as “trajectories” (i.e. motherhood, school) (Thornberry, 2003, p.5) that aid in shaping future pathways into conventional behavior. As the literature applies to adolescent females, certain trajectories heighten the possibility of gang desistance, including motherhood (Fleisher and Krienert, 2004; Hunt et al., 2005), school (Thornberry, 2003), and disillusionment with gang membership (Carson, Peterson, and Esbensen, 2013).

The transition into motherhood has been highlighted as a significant motive for gang desistance among females (Carson et al., 2013; Fleisher and Krienert, 2004; Hunt

et al., 2005). Similar research has been conducted on gang desistance and fatherhood (Moloney, MacKenzie, Hunt, and Joe-Laidler, 2009). Moloney et al. (2009) found that fatherhood served as a trajectory (Thornberry, 2003) for change; a finding that resonates with the subject of female gang desistance. Motherhood has been one of the several “pathway[s] to maturing out of a gang” (Hunt et al., 2005, p.338). According to Fleisher and Krienert (2004), “pregnancy leads to a disinterest in hanging around on the street and an interest in the safety of the fetus” (p.619). Priorities were often shifted from the individual to the child (Fleisher and Krienert, 2004; Moloney et al., 2009). Other females decided to “partially” desist from gang membership by decreasing their involvement in risky behavior that is likely to impair their role as mothers, such as engagement in violence (Hunt et al., 2005). Motherhood may also stimulate the idea of furthering their education (Hunt et al., 2005).

Other females desisted from gang membership as a result of disillusionment (Carson et al., 2013). This specific motive can also be applied to male gang desistance (see Carson et al., 2013). Some female gang members may come to the realization that a gang does not provide them with a sense of family and protection they originally desired. Females often times become greater targets of victimization as a result of gang membership (i.e. rival gang members, male gang members) (Molidor, 1996). The likelihood of victimization may cause disenchantment in gang membership. Certainly other factors, such as education, adult intervention, and the prevalence of violence, may also serve as supplemental motives for females leaving a gang (see Carson et al., 2013 for additional motives).

Gang desistance can also be linked to a strengthening of conventional social bonds and re-attachment to parents and teachers (Weerman et al., 2015). “Social bonds vary over the life course and are always responsive to environmental changes (Dannefer,

1984; Na and Paternoster, 2012; as cited in Weerman et al., 2015, p.72; also see Fleisher and Krienert, 2004). As females change or reduce engagement in the gang lifestyle, so do their social bonds with mainstream institutions (Fleisher and Krienert, 2004; Hirschi, 1969; Weerman et al., 2015). Although this study will not specifically focus on desistance, it is imperative to briefly reexamine this particular topic in order to make proper conclusions based on traditional or existing theory of crime.

Chapter 3

Methods

This current study was based on grounded theory. Grounded theory is considered one of the most common methods of conducting qualitative research (Strauss and Corbin, 1997). The basic idea of grounded theory analysis is to read and re-read a textual database and “discover” (or label) variables called concepts, categories, or themes. This type of approach allows for the observation of interrelationships between variables (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Although this study was based on grounded theory, according to Marshall and Rossman, (2006), broad research questions were developed to further guide the researcher.

To explore these questions, secondary (or preexisting) data was used. Secondary data was initially collected from a series of focus group sessions through the Safe Cities Project in North Texas from September to November 2007. Each session was comprised of two groups of ten gang members who were interviewed by designated researchers. The sessions lasted 60 to 90 minutes each, and were held in the evenings. The sessions were recorded using digital audio recorders. By the tenth session, theoretical saturation was reached. According to Krueger and Casey (2000), this is the point when researchers stop gaining new insights from focus groups. Transcriptions of female responses were created by the researcher.

The transcribed data set included only female responses. Each session was manually transcribed through the process of listening to the entire ten sessions, which originally comprised of both genders. Sessions of the original data that were comprised only of male participants were excluded for the purposes of this study. Once all of the female responses were transcribed, transcripts containing only female responses were

reviewed by the researcher to develop themes, which would subsequently be utilized to develop two central broad research questions:

- ✓ Do internal (i.e. psychological) and external factors (i.e. family members, peers, neighborhood) play a direct or indirect role in gang membership among adolescent females?
- ✓ Does the gang initiation process for adolescent females differ from that of adolescent males?

These research questions were chosen subsequent to the transcription of female responses. After reviewing the female responses, themes were developed with later assisted in the development of our central research questions. The data allowed for themes to be identified, thus shedding light on the internal and external factors associated with female gang membership. Female gang membership is continuously perceived by various contemporary scholars as relatively unexplored (see Batchelor, 2009; Chesney-Lind and Pasko, 2004; Diaz-Cotto, 2006; Miller, 2001; Tobin, 2008; Young, 2009). The two research questions were specifically asked as part of the interview schedule and also rendered a significant amount of responses from female participants in the original data set. The transcribed data was assessed based on “appropriate depth” and “pertinent detail” (Hinds et al., 1997: 412; as cited in Long-Sutehall et al., 2010, p.340). According to Long-Sutehall et al. (2010), there must be sufficient information contained in the primary transcripts about the topic of interest in order to make assumptions that the secondary research questions can be answered (see Long-Sutehall et al., 2010, p.340).

Qualitative secondary data analysis was employed for this study. As mentioned previously, the original data set consisted of ten (10) focus group sessions including both male and female gang members. Ethnic identification of the female respondents could

not be extracted, however, it can be determined that nine (9) of the female participants joined predominately Hispanic gangs and seven (7) of them joined predominately African-American gangs. After transcribing, the total number of female respondents totaled 16. Females ranged in age from 15 to 19. The exclusion of male responses allowed the researcher to exclusively focus on females, the chief interest of this study. According to Vartanian (2010), primary data is directly collected by the researcher through, "questionnaires, focus groups, observation, and the examination of writing or speeches, or a variety of such collection methods" (p.3). Secondary data can include any data for the purpose of examining "a research question other than the question(s) for which the data was originally collected" (Vartanian, 2010, p.3).

This study performed additional analysis of the original data (Long-Sutehall et al., 2010). Long-Sutehall et al. (2010) identified that one of the chief purposes of selecting a secondary data analysis is to access a research population that is considered "elusive" or "sensitive in nature" (p.335). Despite the advances in contemporary empirical research regarding female gang membership, scholars highly suggest the continuation of research (Fleisher and Krienert, 2004). Secondary analysis may also be conducted to "describe the contemporary and historical attributes and behaviour of individuals, societies, groups or organizations" (Long-Sutehall et al., 2010, p.336).

The process of carrying out the secondary analysis must also be discussed. Researchers are highly encouraged to generate research questions that are "sufficiently close" to those empirically tested in the primary research (Long-Sutehall et al., 2010, p.337). The original dataset empirically tested numerous aspects of gang membership (for both males and females), including recruiting processes, motivations for joining, and initiation rites. The primary research narrowly focused on questions regarding the various dynamics of gang behavior among both male and female gang members.

Secondary data was adequate for the purposes of exploring the sensitive topic of gang membership among adolescent females. Their underage status implicated a series of ethical issues that may interfere with subsequent research and analysis (see MacFarlane, Waterman, Conerly, Damon, Durfee, and Durfee, 1986; also see Mulvey and Phelps, 1988). Mulvey and Phelps (1988) noted some ethical problems with juvenile justice consisting of problem definition, over-identification, informed consent, and confidentiality. The issue of informed consent is well emphasized in Decker and Van Winkle's (1996) study on juvenile gang members. In their particular study, Decker and Van Winkle's (1996) encountered the potential ethical issue of parental consent prior to interviewing selected participants. The use of secondary data substantially diminished some of the possible ethical implications mentioned by Mulvey and Phelps (1988). The audio-recorded interviews utilized in this study lessened various ethical issues, such as informed consent of minors and their underage status (MacFarlane et al., Mulvey and Phelps, 1988; Long-Sutehall et al., 2011).

Chapter 4

Findings

The transcripts containing only responses from the female participants in the original study were used to answer the main research questions: 1) do internal (i.e. psychological) and external (i.e. family members, peers, neighborhood) factors play a direct or indirect role in gang membership among adolescent females?; and 2) does the gang initiation process for adolescent females differ from that of adolescent males? A secondary data analysis was conducted in an effort to address our main questions. Secondary data analysis was conducted by individually reviewing the transcriptions, which contained female responses regarding their experiences about the gang life. Transcriptions were reviewed in their entirety in order to uncover any potential patterns among the females regarding their reasons for joining and the actual initiation process they underwent in order to gain gang membership.

The researcher was specifically interested in responses regarding motivations for joining a gang and the various gang initiation methods used to gain membership by sampled females. The process of socialization into the gang life and subsequent membership originated with the females' individual neighborhoods, including family members (Decker and Van Winkle, 1996; Diaz-Cotto, 2006; Miller, 2001), and deviant peers (Gilman et al., 2014; also see Bandura, 1977). "Pro-gang definitions" (Esbensen and Deschenes, 1998, p.819) were instilled in numerous ways, including socialization. It is imperative to note that numerous factors exist in uncovering gang involvement motivations and initiation rites for females are dependent on the individual gang.

External Factors for Joining

Family

The various motivations that drove these females to join a gang varied extensively. This current study found that a majority of the females mentioned joining a gang as a result of gang involvement on behalf of family members. Numerous females reported becoming involved in gangs as a result direct of socializing with gang-involved family members. This finding corresponds with that of Miller (2001) who discovered that a large portion of female gang members in her study became associated in a gang as a result of socializing with older gang-involved individuals in their communities. This young female revealed her subsequent gang affiliation was a result of having family members actively involved in gangs: *"well I started getting involved with them because of my family...my family is all [name of gang] and I just started hanging around with them more."* The perceived inevitability of gang membership was illustrated by this female who stated *"you just grow up with them, that's all you see around you...that's I guess...you know you're around them and you think that's what you gotta do too."* The continuous exposure to gang via gang-involved family members ultimately led numerous of them to join gangs.

Gang-involved family members, primarily siblings, held a strong influence on females' decision to integrate themselves into the gang subculture (Miller, 2001). This particular female mentioned *"it's because most of us around here have old brothers and the older brothers know each other, you know? And we're the youngest."* Another female commented that she joined through socializing with her brother, *"like me I used to hang around with my brother. My brother is like about five years older than me."* This particular female stated she became involved in the gang subculture through her older siblings: *"I got two older brothers they're [name of gang] too and you know? I always used to be with*

them and like the oldest one they got little brothers that are like my age too. So we all just started hanging around too." The "sense of continuity" (Diaz-Cotto, 2006, p.281) with the gang tradition is quite vivid based on numerous female responses. Females who mentioned becoming involved in gangs a result of gang-involved family members, illuminated the concept of multigenerational gang membership.

Multigenerational gang membership was existent within this sample. Multigenerational gang membership among these females primarily consisted of "aunts, uncles, cousins," and even grandparents. One female commented "*my grandma is 56 and her boyfriend used to be from [name of gang].*" In cases of multigenerational gang involvement, females viewed gang membership as the norm rather than the exception. Another female replied she joined her particular gang because "*my dad's in it too.*" Another mentioned similar motivations for joining a gang "*that's how I got in too. My daddy grew up in [name of neighborhood]... my dad's 51 years old. He told us about the gang and stuff like that.*" Some of instances, it appeared gang membership was encouraged or positively viewed (Young et al., 2014)

Socialization

Socialization in the gang subculture predominately initiated at an early age. A majority of females reported some form of socialization prior to joining a gang (Esbensen and Deschenes, 1998). Socialization or social learning of the gang lifestyle typically initiated prior to their adolescent years. Socialization took the forms of hanging around with gang members and wearing colors representative of their particular gang, as this female recounted "they start wearing the colors" The frequency and duration of differential associations (Sutherland et al., 1995) assisted in increasing females' interest

for gang membership, as this female mentioned: “they start liking it, you know? So they’re like oh yeah I wanna get down, you know? I represent, you know?”

For those females raised around gang-involved peers and family members, the “sense of continuity” with gang membership pushed some to join (Diaz-Cotto, 2006, p.8). Females did not disclose whether they were encouraged to join, however, socialization among gang members heightened their probability of joining gangs (see Rutter and Giller, 1983; as cited in Young et al., 2014, p.180). This female recounted her individual experience of being socialized into a gang prior to joining:

Most people are like...they start hanging around with you. You know you meet them...they’re just like oh y’all are cool I wanna kick back with y’all, get high with y’all and they start getting into it you know.....they start liking it, you know? So they’re like oh yeah I wanna get down, you know? I..I... represent, you know? They start wearing the colors, you know?

The idea of ‘growing up’ within the gang lifestyle was also emphasized. Several females reported exposure to gangs through their individual neighborhoods. The combination of gang contact through family members and the presence of gang in their neighborhood streets seemed to contribute to their subsequent membership (Decker and Van Winkle, 1996; Miller 2001) as this females recounted: “*because you just grow up with them, that’s all you see around you...that’s I guess...you know you’re around them and you think that’s what you gotta do too. And at the time you’re young but you don’t think right...and I guess that’s how it happens, it just happens, you don’t even notice when you’re already with them*” Another female recounted a similar upbringing into the gang subculture: “*It’s the thing, you’re little...like I said, you know? I got an older brother. My older brother is locked up...and for him I got the other brother, my older brother. So you know? And I guess that’s just how it is...I mean. It just don’t happen overnight...you*

know what I am saying, it's just...you just go right along." Future membership was indirectly encouraged by gang-affiliated family members primarily through socialization (i.e. hanging around, wearing the colors). Based on the female responses, it can be suggested that the presence of gang-affiliated family members in the household encouraged several females to pursue gang membership. This finding further validated that of Gilman et al. (2014) who found that youths living with an active gang member were exceedingly likely to join a gang in the future (p.212).

Peers

Female gang members who were not introduced to the gang subculture through family members, were encouraged to join by peers who were actively involved in gangs (Deschenes and Esbensen, 1998; Esbensen et al., 1999). The inevitability of gang membership was expressed by a few female participants, as this female stated "you just brought around them and when you just hang around with people so much it just...you already know how it's gonna be so why not just...join 'em." Those who reported becoming involved in gangs as a result of hanging out with gang-involved peers, also mentioned they were socialized at a young age prior to joining: "*When I was younger but I started you know like paying attention to them, that's when I started hanging out with them more...in middle school*" another female stated she began to frequent her fellow gang members by "*hanging out with them...just hanging out.*" Socialization ultimately intensified over the years, which led to membership.

The presence of gang-involved peers also appeared to contribute to future gang membership among females in this study. Although to a lesser extent, gang-affiliated peers may also be attributed to females' subsequent affiliation in gangs. Some reported socializing with peers who were already involved in gangs. None of the females in this sample reported being peer pressured into a gang, however, previous studies ascertain

the reality of peer pressure and gang involvement (Alleyne and Wood, 2014; Esbensen et al., 1999; Walker-Barnes and Mason, 2001). This finding supported that of Esbensen and Deschenes (1998) who found that commitment to negative peers (i.e. gang affiliated) was positively associated with gang membership among females. Several females mentioned they grew up with their fellow gang members: *“that’s who I grew up around, you know? Those are the people I feel comfortable around, you know? And I just...those are my friends.”* Another female stated *“the people we hang out with is the people with grew up with”*, followed by *“we all grew up together”* from another female participant.

The social bond established between females and their fellow gang members further solidified their commitment to the gang (Vigil, 1988). Another female discussed the idea that her gang provided her with a sense of support that was virtually non-existent in her household: *“they’re my friends, they helped me out whenever my parents weren’t there for me, or when you know nobody was like, you know? Nobody seemed to be getting along with me or trust me.”* Another female participant mentioned that her *“friends understand us whenever our parents didn’t.”* Frequenting gang-involved peers, as with gang-involved family members, provided several female respondents with group support (Harris, 1994).

School

The academic setting may have also indirectly contributed to gang membership among the female sample. A few females mentioned indifference experienced on behalf of teachers and principals at their school. Dislike for their teachers and principals was bluntly stated: *“they’re stupid. I don’t like them.”* Some reported being informally labelled as gang members by their teachers and principals despite them not being involved in gangs (Lemert, 1951). Another female respondent mentioned that teachers cannot

specifically call another individual gang affiliated, *"they're not gonna say oh you from [name of gang] nah! They can't say that. I think they're just scared....I don't know."*

They confessed their peers were mainly comprised of gang members who they knew from their neighborhoods (Decker and Van Winkle, 1996; Deschenes and Esbensen, 1998; Esbensen et al., 1999), as this female commented: *"the people we hang out is the people we grew up with."* The reality of being labelled as gang members despite being non-membership inclined some of them to subsequently join.

Teachers often stigmatized these females for their acquaintances and their dressing attire. This particular female mentioned that labelling was often dependent on *"what they wear or the way they ride and they always trying to say...or you're this or you're that."* Another sampled female mentioned that *"everything is always gotta do with a gang, it doesn't matter what you do they always gonna say you in a gang."* The inevitability of membership was indirectly made possible by the stigmatization and labelling of academic teachers and staff. Another female mentioned that some of their teachers were even labelled them as "bad", as this female explained: *"they be like oh you're bad like...you're a bad kid."* This finding concurred with that of Decker and Van Winkle (1996) who discovered that some of the gang members in their sample decided to join after being labeled as such, despite non-membership. Gang membership seemed to offer females a "social shelter from stigma" (Becker, 1963, p.38-9; as cited in Bernberg, Krohn, and Rivera, 2006, p.82; Lemert, 1951).

Internal Factors for Joining

Sense of Belonging

The sense of belonging to a cohesive group was considered another attributive factor for gang membership among the sampled females. Several females reported not wanting to feel “left out” and decided to join in order to maintain group cohesiveness. This finding resonates with that of various scholars who have discovered that sense of belonging and group cohesiveness were directly associated with female gang membership (Esbensen et al., 1999; Harris, 1994, Miller, 2001; Molidor, 1996). This particular female response expanded on the need to belong to a group: “I guess you don’t want to feel left out and you just have so much friends and so involved with gangs...and you just think it’s so cool and you wanna go and hit it with them too.” It can be inferred that for some females the need for “group support and cohesiveness” (Harris, 1994, p.293) drove them to pursue gang membership as this young female mentioned: “They’re my friends, they help me out whenever my parents weren’t there for me, or when you nobody was like, you know, nobody seemed to be getting along with me or trust me. They seemed to be the people that took me in.” Another female similarly discussed the sense of group support experienced through gang membership: “Our friends understand us whenever our parents didn’t.” Gang membership appeared to prevent the disruption of social ties several of these females developed with gang-involved peers and family members.

Excitement

The fun and excitement attached with gang membership was also discussed by female respondents. Some reported fun or excitement as motivations for joining a gang (Esbensen et al., 1999; Harris, 1994; Hunt and Joe-Laidler, 1995; Young et al., 2009).

Fun and excitement were not considered primary reasons for joining a gang, but must not be discarded as a motive for female gang membership. Excitement as a motivation for gang membership was primarily accompanied with gang-involved friends and family members. Pro-gang attitudes (Esbensen and Deschenes, 1998) were adopted by individual female members through socialization (Bandura, 1977), which made gang membership appear socially acceptable and welcoming. A few female respondents mentioned that partaking in gang membership signified they were never bored. This particular female respondent mentioned that: *"you hanging' out with somebody like all the time...it ain't ever boring."* Another female mentioned excitement that accompanies gang membership: *"you just think it's so cool and you wanna go and hit it with them too..."* The attention brought through gang membership was also noted as a motivation for joining: *"that's how it is, everybody wanna watch or do something."* Another female mentioned engagement of violence as exciting, *"they be like ooh dang they just fightin'....ooh I like that, you know? They wanna get in it...that's how it be."*

Popularity

Popularity as an internal motive for joining a gang was far less prevalent, but nonetheless present based on various female responses. Female participants indirectly mentioned the popularity associated with joining a gang (Brown, 1977; Esbensen et al., 1999). Popularity was primarily a concern in the academic setting. Gang membership provided some females with popularity and status within their schools and neighborhoods (Brown, 1977). Some female participants commented enjoying the attention given by non-gang members during violent encounters at school grounds with rival gangs. This female corroborated, *"And really most people it ain't even in the gang that when they see somebody like they fixing to see somebody fight they be like oh I am about to go watch*

that fight...everybody wanna watch the fight or something, it's look cool and you can probably be the nerdiest kid in the school...that nerdy kid's gonna watch that fight."

Female Gang Initiation

The results indicated that the most prevalent forms of gang initiation among female gang members were 'walking' (non-violent) and being 'jumped' (i.e. fighting) in a gang (Tobin, 2008). Extremely degrading initiations, such as engaging in sexual initiations were nonexistent in this current study. However, sexual initiation should not be discarded as a form of gang initiation. Some females may be more reluctant to disclose sexual initiation, as disrespect and potential victimization are possibilities (Miller and Brunson, 2000). The majority of the females mentioned some form of socialization prior to being initiated, primarily through differential associations (i.e. gang-involved family members, peers) (Sutherland et al., 1995). Obtaining gang membership appeared to be a gradual process for some while others reported merely expressing an interest in joining and being subsequently initiated: *"Well let's say you already know about it and you just want to get jumped in, they just get people."* One female mentioned *"it just don't happen overnight...you know what I am saying? It's just...you just go right along."* This finding is slightly contrary to that of Brown (1977) who studied the behavior of African-American female gang members in Philadelphia and found that self-interest and subsequent acceptance by gang members led to almost immediate membership (p.224).

Submersion of females into the gang subculture occurred at an early age. Responses from several females, predominately Hispanic, indicated membership was achieved through a socialization process between females and fellow gang members, typically family members (i.e. siblings), but also consisted of peers who they were acquainted with since childhood. The "frequency" and "duration" of differential

associations appeared to play a significant role in later membership (Sutherland et al., 1995). The characteristics illustrated in Sutherland's et al. (1995) differential association theory surface among various female responses *"Well, it depends. If you prove yourself sometimes it takes a while. You know because you never know who you're going to have to do something to prove yourself that you're down. But if you get jumped in, it depends how many people it is and how long you go for."*

A majority of the females, reported being jumped into a gang (Tobin, 2008). This is despite the common misconception that having a close family member in a gang eliminates the requirement of having to be physically initiated (Miller, 2001; Molidor, 1996). Proving toughness was discussed by various females and is imperative in obtaining the approval by fellow male gang members (Diaz-Cotto, 2006). Beatings can be moderate to severe, as this female mentioned *"get ready to get your ass whipped."* Violent initiations ultimately demonstrated toughness and loyalty to the gang. Two Hispanic females referred to the combination of showing toughness and allegiance to their gang as being "down" for their gang (Miller, 2001; Miller and Brunson, 2000). Being "down" for the gang suggested engaging in violent behavior, such as being jumped in (Diaz-Cotto, 2006; Miller, 2001). One female mentioned *"they [gang members] want to know if you're down enough."* If they were able to withstand the beating, that signified that "you know you kicked the right person in" and "you gotta see what they're about."

Although some females described their initiation processes similar to their male counterparts, a large portion of them were 'jumped' in (Tobin, 2008). A female participant discussed her initiation process in significant detail while elaborating on the motivations that drove her to join a gang: "it depends, girls. Girls...like whenever I got jumped in was like 14 and I was going to high school and these...my cousin and [name of gang member]. They're like already gonna be 30 already and some other girl her name [name

of gang member], she jumped me in too and I was like 14 and they're all over the ages from 5."

None of the females in the current study reported being "sexed" into a gang. Numerous females reported disapproval with this form of initiation. Some females even believed being "sexed" in degraded other female gang members, including those that joined the gang in other more 'reputable' ways (i.e. jumped, walked in, etc.). These findings are similar to those of Miller and Brunson (2000) who found that females who are sexually initiated into a gang are often degraded and disrespected by both male and female members (p.438). Sexual initiation might not be perceived as a form of exhibiting toughness and loyalty to the gang (Miller, 2001, p.74). A female reported that the initiation process for females is slightly distinctive than that for males – sexual initiation: *"Girls is different...there's only one thing different about it...there's getting jumped in, getting like...ok it's jumped in...proving like you're down and getting diced. Dice is when you get two dice and roll it and whatever number it is you know that depends on the girl you know, that's how many people...guys you have to sleep with. But I think that's stupid, I got...man! That's stupid I got jumped in! I don't care if it was two dudes and I don't care who it was."*

Females gang members initiated through other forms (i.e. jumped or walked in) found sexual initiation as a means for male members to disrespect them. Some females regarded sexual gang initiation as an unnecessary requisite for membership "It can be some unnecessary too, like...like the girl can dance or something....I am for real! Some people get in a click by having sex with all the boys!" Numerous sampled participants mentioned experiencing disrespect on behalf of some fellow male members despite them not being sexually initiated into a gang. Male gang members commonly used derogatory terms and proposed sexual advances to their female counterparts. Negative comments

may send an indirect message to other male members that certain female members are “sexually available” (Miller and Brunson, 2000, p.439), as this female mentioned, “*and it make ‘em wanna call ya’ll hoes and bitches and you gonna suck my thing.*” These derogatory terms infuriated females who were violently initiated into a gang: “*they make you wanna fight...*” Derogatory terms infuriated these females as they did not perceive themselves as “sexually available” (Miller and Brunson, 2000, p.439). Negative comments made by fellowmale gang members are extended to females who were not sexually initiated in the gang, as this female explained: “*it make us look bad too ‘cause they wanna call you that! All girls can’t be no bitches ‘cause for me I am not gonna take it...I am gonna, I am gonna go to the limit with you until we just can’t go no more...it’s just like that!*”

Although none of the females in this study admitted to gaining membership through sexual initiation, this form of initiation is well noted in previous studies (Miller, 2001; Miller and Brunson, 2000; Tobin, 2008). Females may be more reluctant to disclose whether they were ‘sexed’ into a gang out of fear of being disrespected by their male counterparts (Miller and Brunson, 2000). Transcriptions revealed that females sexually initiated into a gang were more likely to be disrespected by fellow male members. This sense of disrespect infuriated females who were violently initiated into a gang to demonstrate toughness (Diaz-Cotto, 2006). Based on the various responses, sexual initiation exposes females to verbal and possibly sexual victimization on behalf of males (Miller & Brunson, 2000).

Gang initiation was not always required to be violent. Fewer female respondents discussed non-violent gang initiation. Females who reported non-violent gang initiation previously had gang-involved peers or family members (Miller, 2001; Tobin, 2008). This form of initiation was typically reserved for close relatives of seasoned gang members

(Bolden, 2013, Decker and Van Winkle, 1996; Diaz-Cotto, 2006), such as younger siblings. Proving loyalty and toughness through violence was not mandatory for gaining membership (Brown, 1977), as socializing with active gang members often compensated for a violent initiation. This particular female briefly recounted her non-violence entrance into her gang: "I mean I never got jumped in.... but like I said I got two brothers too.... and I got cousins and ever since like I just started hanging around with them more and that's how I got to hanging around with them and being involved with them..." The infrequency of non-violent gang entrance shed light on the notion that having gang-involved family members exempted females from being violently initiated into a gang (Bolden, 2013, Decker and Van Winkle, 1996; Diaz-Cotto, 2006). Most female respondents were required to demonstrate loyalty for their gang and overall toughness in order to ascribe membership (Miller, 2001).

Chapter 5

Limitations, Implications, and Conclusions

Limitations

This study encountered various limitations that must be properly addressed. The initial, and possibly most pronounced, limitation to this study involves the selectivity of research questions. There are countless factors that can be attributed to female gang membership (see Literature Review). As noted by Walker-Barnes and Mason (2001), female youths may consider joining a gang for familial, peer, and personal reasons. The lack of familial structure, physical and sexual abuse, and extensive history of drug and alcohol use by parent(s) (Diaz-Cotto, 2006; Harris, 1994; Miller, 2001; Molidor, 1996) are just a few of the countless motives that can be attributed to female gang membership. This study may not address all questions related to adolescent females' motives for joining gangs. Instead, reasons for joining were selected based on responses given by female participants in the original interview. This limits the reasons for joining a gang to those addressed in the original audio-recorded interviews.

The validity and reliability of the transcribed female responses may also present a further limitation to this study. Determining the reliability of these transcribed responses could lie in the existing body of literature on the female gang subculture (Batchelor, 2009; Brown, 1977; Campbell, 1984; Curry, 1998; Diaz-Cotto, 2006; Harris, 1994; Hunt, Joe-Laidler, and Evans, 2002; Hunt and Joe-Laidler, 2001; Miller, 2001; Molidor, 1996; Young, 2009; also see References section for additional researchers on female gangs); however, discrepancy with responses could be challenging to detect given the contemporary nature of female gangs within criminology and criminal justice. Some female gang members could not more reluctant to disclose certain information to interviewers.

Another possible limitation to this study involved the concept of generalization. Responses were derived from female gang members affiliated with either a predominately Hispanic or African-American gang. Caucasians or other ethnicities did not partake in the initial focus group interviews. The lack of participation from other ethnicities may limit the generalizability of our findings as they apply to other geographical regions, such as rural areas. These findings may not adequately apply to females residing in areas that do not inhibit large populations of minorities, in this case, Hispanics or African-Americans.

The presence of a small sample size may also hinder generalizability of the findings in this study. The sample size consisted of nine (9) females that joined predominately Hispanic gangs and six (6) that joined predominately African-American gangs. It is recommended that this study be replicated to encompass a larger sample size to avoid potential issues with generalizability. Future empirical research could specifically focus on comparing urban female gang members and rural female gang members.

Implications

There are various implications tied to these particular findings that are crucial for the development of programs targeted to prevent or reduce gang membership among adolescent girls (Petersen and Howell, 2013). Programs tailored to the individual needs of young girls exposed to “harmful family conditions, physical abuse, and sexual victimization” could potentially assist in minimizing their need to join a gang (Petersen and Howell, 2013, p.503). Although none of the female respondents in this study reported physical or sexual abuse in their households, this issue is a harsh reality for others (Miller, 2001; Molidor, 1996) and should not be discarded as a motive for the development of gender-specific or gender-neutral programs geared toward gang

prevention (Petersen and Howell, 2013, p.502). Victimized or “beyond risk” females could also benefit from these types of gender-specific and gender-neutral programs (Petersen and Howell, 2013, p.503).

The need to break the cycle of familial gang involvement is another potential implication drawn from this particular study. Majority of females reported becoming involved in gangs as a direct result of associating with gang-involved family members. The “sense of continuity” with the gang tradition among close family members often forced some females to subsequently join gangs (Diaz-Cotto, 2006, p.81). This implication could be a challenging endeavor to take on given the commonness of gangs in many of these females’ neighborhoods. Gang exposure and subsequent membership appeared inevitable to some females in this study (Miller, 2001). This familial cycle may be challenging to break, however, the development of programs meeting the needs of adolescent, at-risk girls could be a key component to potentially reducing gang violence within their neighborhoods (Petersen, and Howell, 2013).

Programs aimed to prevent gang membership among at-risk adolescent girls, whether gender-specific or gender-neutral, must assess the individual needs of every girl. The reality is that availability of governmental funding for such programs is often scarce. Petersen and Howell (2013) understand the difficulty with implementing gang-prevention programs for youths given the “intractability of gang problems and embeddedness of gang members” (p.503). The potential lack of governmental funding should not deter the possibility of developing affordable programs for at-risk girls in social-decayed neighborhoods. Gender-neutral programs could afford a potential solution for the lack of governmental funding, as these programs include both genders and are just as effective as gender-specific anti-gang programs (Petersen and Howell, 2013). These findings are recommended to be applied in conjunction to previous literature on the female gang

subculture (Batchelor, 2009; Brown, 1977; Campbell, 1984; Curry, 1998; Esbensen, Deschenes, and Winfree, 1999; Hunt, Joe-Laidler, and Evans, 2002; Hunt and Joe-Laidler, 2001; Miller, 2001; Molitor, 1996; Walker-Barnes and Mason, 2001; Young, 2009, Young et al., 2014) to derive to the appropriate solutions to prevent or desist gang membership among adolescent females.

The most significant implication drawn from this study involved teachers and other school personnel intentionally or unintentionally labeling females as gang members. Several females reported being labelled by their teachers as gang members as a result of acquainting with gang-involved peers. "Labeling young people as gang members may criminalize behaviour when the term gang is permissively applied" (Bullock and Tilley, 2008, p.44). On the other hand, labeling may provide youths with "status that is not justified and which reinforces the problem" (Bullock and Tilley, 2008, p.44). Some females were unjustifiably labelled as gang members simply for acquainting with gang-involved peers. Stigmatization was extended to include females who were not formally involved in the gang subculture. Proper action(s) must be taken by school administrators to prevent the unjustified labelling of young females, as previous literature warned about the likelihood of engaging in deviant behavior as a result of labeling (Bernberg et al., 2006; Bullock and Tilley, 2008; Farrington, 1977).

Teachers and school personnel should assess potential repercussions for labeling students. Academic administrators should coordinate with school personnel to develop training forums designed to educate teachers about the negative consequences of labeling students. Labeling further alienated students from their teachers, ultimately decreasing the social bond students share with academic agents of mainstream society (Hirschi, 1969). Students labelled as gang members may seek refuge from the stigma by engaging in deviant behaviors, including that of gang membership (Bernberg et al.,

2006). The label of “gang member” encompasses negative effects for young people as it may “bestows their identity”, which they believe “they must live up to” (self-fulfilling prophecy) (Bullock and Tilley, 2008; p.45; also see Merton, 1948).

Conclusion

Based on the findings, these females primarily join gangs based on Sutherland's (see Sutherland, et al., 1995) differential association theory. Differential association(s) with gang-involved individuals emerged from a majority of sample participants. These differential associations mainly comprised of either gang-involved family members (i.e. brothers, cousins) or peers. Both gang-involved family members and peers facilitated the socialization of pro-gang behaviors and definitions (Esbensen et al., 1999) through the duration and frequency of differential associations (Sutherland et al., 1995). The ‘duration’ of these differential associations (Sutherland et al., 1995) reinforced the learning of unconventional behaviors and attitudes favorable to the gang subculture (Esbensen et al., 1999). Several females reported their fellow gang members were friends they grew up with during their pre-adolescent years.

The presence of negative peers and family members further increased females' susceptibility to join a gang (Sutherland et al., 1995). The frequency and duration (Sutherland et al., 1995) of differential associations appeared inevitable, particularly for females who reported having a gang-involved sibling (i.e. brother). Others reported living within the same neighborhood as their fellow gang members (Decker and Van Winkle, 1996), even prior to joining a gang. Through these differential associations, female prospects learned pro-gang behaviors (i.e. fighting), which further enhanced their commitment to subsequently joining (see Esbensen and Deschenes, 1998). Socialization into the gang subculture by close, gang-involved family relatives or peers heightened

females' "sense of continuity" and commitment to the gang lifestyle (Diaz-Cotto, 2006, p.81). Several females mentioned knowing their fellow gang members (friends, family) since childhood, as they grew up within the same neighborhood (Decker and Van Winkle, 1996; Miller 2001). Females were more susceptible to join a gang if a gang-involved family member was present; a finding reminiscent in Gilman et al.'s (2014) study on at-risk youth who found that youths living with an active gang members were eight times more likely to join a gang. Based on the overwhelming findings, gang-involved family members and peers were undoubtedly the most significant motivations females has for joining gangs. However, the theme of school emerged, which drew imperative implications for school administrators.

The presence of stigmatizing teachers and school personnel also played in significant role in subsequent gang membership among females. The unnecessary labeling of females as gang members on behalf of teachers reinforced their desire to pursue the gang lifestyle (Decker and Van Winkle, 1996). Labeling was made possible through females' differential associations with gang-involved peers and family members (Sutherland et al., 1995). Violent acts at school were automatically associated with gangs. Females who frequented known gang members at school were subjects to unjustified labeling on behalf of teachers. Once stigmatized, females fulfilled the labels given to them by their own teachers (i.e. self-fulfilling prophecy) (Bernberg et al., 2006; Merton, 1948). Violent acts committed at school ground are frequently attributed to gangs. These accusations are based on females' association to gang-involved peers. According to various females accounts, if teachers are aware certain students repeatedly socialize with known gang members at school, they will attach the label of 'gang member' to that particular individual (Bullock and Tilley, 2008).

While addressing the second research question regarding female gang initiation, violent initiations were the most prevalent among female participants in this study. Getting jumped in was the most popular forms of gang initiation (Tobin, 2008). Gang initiation was perceived as an informal, quick process. Several females reported merely expressing an interest in joining (Brown, 1977) prior to achieving membership. Just as males (Decker and Van Winkle, 1996; Goldman, Giles, and Hogg, 2014; Tobin, 2008; Vigil, 1988; Vigil, 1996), majority of the sampled females were required to demonstrate toughness and loyalty to the gang (Diaz-Cotto, 2006; Miller 2001). For males, toughness is associated with “manliness” (Vigil, 1996, p.152). The majority of females felt compelled to prove they had “heart” and were “down” (Brown, 1977, p.274; Miller, 2001) to perform any task necessary to become a member.

Overall, the current study alluded several significant findings supporting previous literature of female gang membership (Batchelor, 2009; Brown, 1977; Campbell, 1984; Curry, 1998; Diaz-Cotto, 2006; Esbensen, Deschenes, and Winfree, 1999; Hunt, Joe-Laidler, and Evans, 2002; Hunt and Joe-Laidler, 2001; Miller, 2001; Molidor, 1996; Walker-Barnes and Mason, 2001; Young, 2009, Young et al., 2014). The presence of gang-involved family members was the most recurring factor regarding females' decision to join gangs throughout this study (Decker and Van Winkle, 1996; Diaz-Cotto, 2006; Harris, 1994; Miller, 2001; Molidor, 1996). Teachers and school personnel also interestingly appeared to be partially responsible for females' decision to join gangs through the process of labeling (Bernberg et al., 2006). The labelling on behalf of school teachers stigmatized several females for their differential associations, which was later partially responsible for gang membership (Bernberg et al., 2006). Discontinuing the cycle of gang involvement could be a challenging endeavor for some females given the tremendous of amount gang exposure received through family and peers.

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