

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE INCREASE  
IN LATINO GANG MEMBERSHIP:  
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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By  
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CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

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## DEDICATION

Dedicated to my wonderful family. Especialmente para mis padres, Jose Y Ortencia Gamiño. Sin ustedes no hubiera logrado llegar a donde estoy. Gracias. Y tambien is dedicated para my little brother Manuel Gamiño and my sister Diana Gamiño. Thanks for the smiles that helped me make it through the hard days of completing this thesis.

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## ABSTRACT

This research sought to explore the differences that might emerge in Latino gangs throughout generations, specifically, in regards to the recruitment and initiation process, reasons for joining a gang, and behaviors and values promoted in the gang. Additionally, the research explored the participants' perceptions in regards to what is needed to address the issue of Latinos joining gangs in disproportionate numbers. The participants consisted of two groups; group one included eight former Latino gang members, who joined a gang during or before the year 2005 and group two included six former/active Latino gang members, who joined a gang after 2005. This qualitative research collected data through in-depth interviews. Results indicated more Latinos are being initiated by being blessed into gangs by family members. Similarities were found in how much the environment played a role in the decision of Latinos to join gangs; however, there were differences with regard to the role of drugs, entertainment, and seeking the advancement of the Latino community. Both groups reported that their gang promoted similar behaviors and values, i.e. violence, drug use, drug dealing, respect, and loyalty. All participants identified several possible approaches, to the issue of Latinos joining gangs. This research recognized that gangs exist currently to meet the needs of many Latino youth, and thus cannot simply be eliminated; they need to be addressed through creative alternatives that satisfy the same needs, i.e. provide a place of belonging, economic opportunities, pride, and protection.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Statement of Problem**

Gangs and their associated activities represent an increasing problem in the United States. Various definitions of what constitutes a gang exist. Generally, a gang is a group with a unique organized quality. What make gangs distinct from other groups are their:

(a) spontaneous and unplanned origin; (b) intimate face-to-face relations; (c) sense of organization, solidarity, and morale that is superior to that exhibited by the mob; (d) tendency to meet through space and meet a hostile element that can precipitate cooperative, planned conflict, a morale-boosting activity in itself, (e) creating of a shared esprit de corps and common tradition heritage of memories; and (f) a propensity for some geographic area of territory, which it will defend by force if necessary. (Lewis, 2012, p. 7)

In 2009, there were approximately 1.4 million gang members and 33,000 gangs in the United States (US Department of Justice, 2011). According to the National Gang Center (2012), gangs are responsible for an average of 47% of violent crimes in the majority of jurisdictions and for up to 90% of violent crimes in jurisdictions with higher populations. Crimes committed by gangs include theft, assault, drug trafficking, weapons trafficking, prostitution, and homicide. Gang members are also showing increased involvement in white collar crimes, including mortgage, credit card, and bank fraud. A majority of gang-related delinquency occurs in large cities and suburban counties, where 96% of the total gang homicides occurred in 2009 (National Gang Center, 2012).

Juvenile involvement in gangs is increasing exponentially. Two out of five gang members are under the age of 18 (National Gang Center, 2012). It has been a tactic of gangs to encourage youth to join, due to older members being incarcerated and the probability of youth receiving lighter crime sentences (US Department of Justice, 2011). Additional factors as to why youth may resort to gangs include, but are not limited to, status seeking, individual motivation, personal safety, fun aspects, financial gain, and a sense of family (Sasone, 2011).

Latinos account for 47% of total gang members, while African Americans account for 31%, Caucasians for 13%, and Asians for 7% (National Gang Center, 2011). The 2010 Census defined Latino or Hispanic people as those of Mexican, Cuban, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or any other Spanish origin, regardless of race. According to the Census, in 2010, Hispanics made up a total of 16% of the population of the United States (Eniss, Rios, & Albert, 2011). Latinos are overrepresented in gangs. Although they constitute 16% of the population, they make up 47% of the gang member population.

In Latino communities, some additional factors may help explain the development and institutionalization of gangs. Historical experiences play a role in the gang creation, including a history of racial discrimination and financial burden (Sasone, 2011). Sasone (2011) explains that children of migrants struggle to acculturate to the U.S, in the process feeling displaced, isolated, and alienated. Street gangs play such a prominent role in the lives of youths because many of them come from families that are struggling financially, psychologically, and culturally. Many

face the reality of living in single parent homes, witnessing domestic violence, being surrounded by alcoholic and drug addicted family members, experiencing poverty, and suffering discrimination (Sasone, 2011). Starting with kids hanging out in the streets, a new subculture was born: the street gang. Gang involvement continues to grow because the gang subculture intervenes and provides a substitute for the caregiver role when parents are absent, becoming highly influential (Sasone, 2011). Fernandez (2011) identified eight factors that contribute to Latino juvenile delinquency:

1) Inadequate community resources, 2) Poor quality of educational services and risk for drop out, 3) Low income neighborhood, 4) Law enforcement interaction with youth, 5) Lack of leadership, 6) Insufficient parental involvement/role models, 7) Lack of employment opportunities, and 8) Economic disparity. (p.3)

These eight neighborhood-level factors are organized by the level of impact, as identified by Latino juveniles, the first being the most influential in juvenile delinquency. Inadequate community resources refer to the lack of safe and engaging after-school activities, the lack of culturally-appropriate services, and the lack of knowledge and/or use of available resources. The second factor is the poor quality of educational services, which focuses on the dearth of educators in communities with high Latino populations who are involved in the education and well-being of the students. Low-income neighborhood, the third factor, indicates the presence of housing projects, where more youth on youth crimes occur. Law enforcement interaction with youth, the fourth factor, describes the tension between police and youth from low-income neighborhoods, where youth identify police as being

“reactive, rather than proactive” (Fernandez, 2011, p.34). The fifth factor, identified as the lack of leadership, refers to Latino juveniles not being able to identify community leaders and positive role models. The sixth factor identified by Latino juveniles is insufficient parental involvement, including single parents, parents who are incarcerated, or parents who are not present at home for reasons such as long working hours. The seventh and eighth factors that contribute to overall juvenile delinquency, including gang activity, are the lack of employment opportunities and economic disparities (Fernandez, 2011).

Although a large amount of research has been done on gangs, the adolescent proclivity toward anti-social behavior, and subcultural norms, limited research has been done on why Latino youth join gangs in disproportionate numbers (Lewis, 2012, p.18). Additionally, few studies have looked at the factors contributing to the rise in active gangs, including Latino gangs, that has occurred after the decline seen from 1996 to 2003 (National Gang Center, 2012). The National Gang Center (2012) explains that gang members use social media in order to recruit new members, sell drugs, and communicate with other members. Thus, social media might be correlated with the increase in gang activity.

In order to understand why Latino youth are joining gangs in disproportionate numbers, it is important to understand whether gangs in the present time have changed from those studied decades ago. Moore, Garcia, Garcia, Cerda, and Valencia (1991) provide some examples of the changes seen in gangs between generations. The authors studied the differences between active Chicano gang members from the

1950s, the 1970s, and the 1990s. They identified differences in drug use, weapons use, level of violence, age structure, difficulties in maturing out of the gang, and clothing styles. Moore et al. (1991) additionally identified differences in the communities these gangs resided in, including an increase in immigrants and economic shifts. During the 1970s, an expansion of very low-wage service and manufacturing industries led to the influx of immigrants into these communities. For gangs, this meant an increase in the number of participants because it was more difficult to find legitimate jobs, and youth resorted to gangs (Moore et al., 1991).

Although Moore et al. (1991) explored how gang activity and culture among Chicanos, changed from the 1950s to the 1990s, the study is somewhat outdated. The numbers of Latino youth in gangs seem to be increasing exponentially, as cited by the National Gang Center 2012, with limited to no research examining the factors contributing to that rise. Therefore, this study focuses on identifying more recent changes to Chicano gang culture, including differences in the initiation process, the recruitment process, reasons for joining, behaviors within the gangs, and the values among gang members who have become active after the year 2005.

### **Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to explore factors that have emerged within Latino gangs and within the communities where these gangs reside and to identify their role in the rise of Latino gangs in the last decade. This research study attempted to answer the following questions about Latino gang membership by comparing information collected from the perspectives of former or active gang members who

joined a gang during or before the year 2005, with those of former or current gang members who joined a gang after the year 2005:

- 1) What is the current recruitment and initiation process for Latino gangs, and how do they differ from the initiation and recruitment process of a decade ago?
- 2) What are the reasons Latinos join gangs and how do these reasons differ from a decade ago? Specifically, what role does the environment play in Latinos' decision to join gangs?
- 3) What are the current behaviors and values within Latino gangs and how do they differ from the behaviors and values from a decade ago?
- 4) What do both groups identify as needed in order to better address the issue of increasing numbers of Latino youth joining gangs?

### **Significance of the Study**

Research has established that Latinos are overrepresented in gangs in the United States and their affiliation is increasing; however, no recent study has examined the factors contributing to this increase. Therefore, it is important to identify what factors play a role in Latinos' involvement in gangs. The results of this study can potentially bring awareness to the factors contributing to the increase in gang involvement. The results can additionally add understanding of the needs of Latino youth, which might be leading them to join gangs. The results can assist social workers in creating or improving intervention and prevention programs that augment protective factors, counter risk factors, and meet the needs of Latino youth.

Social workers can also use the data to advocate for changes in policies and law. For example, gang members are currently criminalized. A strategy currently used to decrease gang involvement is gang injunctions. Gang injunctions are a restraining order against gang members that prevent them from taking part in certain activities and behaviors and that prohibit their presence in designated areas. This strategy, however, has failed to prove effective in the long term (Maxson, Hennigan, & Sloane, 2004). Additionally, the law is used to punish those who are active in gangs. Federal legislation allows prosecutors to enhance the penalty for crimes committed by gang members, a policy known as gang enhancement (National Institute of Justice, 2011). Being charged as a member of a street gang can lead to up to 3 years of imprisonment, and committing a crime while being in a gang can add anywhere from one to 25 years to a sentence, depending on the crime committed (National Gang Center, 2012). This criminalization approach has not proven effective. The results of this study can assist social workers in advocating for different approaches that can empower Latino youth rather than focusing on punishing gang members after being caught. Importantly, these will be approaches that gang members themselves think might be more effective with this population.



## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Gangs have been present in the United States for a long time. While the history of street gangs in the United States dates back to 1783, data suggest that what were considered more serious street gangs emerged at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Sante, 1991). Latino gangs started to form in the 1920s (Blankenstein & Sandoval, 1998). The topic of gangs is not a new one, and it is a topic that has raised the interest of scholars over the years. There is an abundance of articles and research around gangs in general. Latinos are currently overrepresented in the gang population, and therefore more research on Latino gangs has been emerging.

Data suggest that over the last decade, gangs in general have been on the rise, and there is a lack of research attempting to explain the 15% increase in gang members that occurred from 2006 to 2012 (National Gang Center, 2012). Even though significant research has been done on the topic of gangs, certain areas still lack sufficient data. The risk factors and reasons for joining gangs are two areas for which research has increased and a variety of information is available. However, limited information currently exists about the recruitment and initiation processes of gangs in general, and Latino gangs in particular. There is also a lack of research regarding the changes that new generation Latinos are bringing into gangs, and how these changes might be contributing to the increase in gang membership since 2006. The following sections present the information that has been collected about Latino

gangs; where there is a scarcity of data about Latino gangs, information about gangs in general is included.

### **Targets of Gang Recruitment and Gang Recruitment Process**

The need to belong to a group makes the process of gang recruitment easier. Middle school students have been shown to be the main target of recruitment by Latino gangs. Gang members approach middle schools in low-income communities in an attempt to engage children who are vulnerable, and who are searching for a niche in which they can find a sense of belonging (Blankenstein & Sandoval, 1998). Youth who are common targets of gang recruitment tend to have anger issues, poor self-esteem, lower academic performance, a history of drug use in the family, and a male role model who has been incarcerated (Harper, 1989).

In the last years, gangs in general have grown more sophisticated in their recruitment practices. According to the National Gang Intelligence Center (2012), gangs are utilizing technology in order to connect with other gang members and to communicate and reach out to potential recruits. Gangs are not only more sophisticated in the recruitment process, but they also purposefully seeking out recruits with particular profiles (Ooms, 2013). For example, they not only approach youth who are vulnerable and have poor self-esteem, but they also now reach out to individuals who can bring something valuable into the gang, such as knowledge or resources. Youth who lack the stereotypical look of a gang member are recruited so that the gang activities can remain undetected by the police, school administrators, or other adults in authority positions (Ooms, 2013). Knowledgeable youth who affiliate

with gangs are encouraged to attend college, and many are encouraged to attain employment in law enforcement, the judiciary, or legal arena, in an attempt to collect information on adversary gangs and law enforcement operations (National Gang Intelligence Center, 2012).

The recruitment process tends to take anywhere from two weeks to two months. Blankenstein and Sandoval (1998) assert that “the process may be seductive and deceptively innocent, beginning with a simple question: ‘Where are you from?’ followed by an attitude of ‘adoption’ of the child: ‘We’re from that area too! You’re one of us’” (p.24).

Once the targets of gang recruitment have been identified, different techniques are used for the actual recruitment. Carlie (2002) identified five main techniques used for recruitment in gangs; these have also been identified in Latino gang recruitment. Techniques might differ based on the purpose or the situation. The first recruitment process is ‘seduction,’ a technique that dates back to the early history of gangs. Seduction is the process of glorifying a gang and creating ways to lure youth into joining. Symbols that represent the gang, such as tattoos, colors, and gang signs, are one way to seduce or attract youth to believe they will be part of something powerful and organized (Carlie, 2002). Parties are another way that youth are seduced; being part of something fun can influence youth to make the decision to join. However, Carlie (2002) explains that the most successful seduction tactic is the promise of monetary gain, sex, and glamour. The second recruitment process is ‘subterfuge.’ Subterfuge is defined as the use of misrepresentation, in which youth are not aware

that they are joining a gang; the gang might be misrepresented as a “club” that will be there to love, care for, and accept the individual. The third recruitment method is ‘obligation.’ Here, a gang member might do a favor for an individual, such as lending money, and as a way to pay back the favor, the individual needs to join the gang. ‘Coercion’ is the fourth technique, and is referred to as an “old age technique” (Carlie, 2002). Coercion refers to the act of forcing an individual to join. It usually comes in the form of threatening to kill the individual or a family member if he refuses to join the gang. The fifth recruitment process is ‘self recruitment.’ In this process, the youth themselves are the ones to contact the gang members, asking to join (Carlie, 2002).

### **Gang Initiation**

Once recruitment targets have been identified and the recruitment processes have taken place, the initiates need to demonstrate their strength and courage. In Latino gangs, a common initiation is for the initiate to be ‘jumped.’ Here, three to six members of the gang physically assault the initiate, who does not attempt to defend himself. The purpose of such initiations is for new initiates to demonstrate that they have ‘heart’ and to demonstrate their loyalty to the ‘hood’ (Blankenstein & Sandoval, 1998).

There are a variety of additional initiation processes, at times referred to as initiation ceremonies. These differ based on the gang; some gangs might not have an initiation ceremony at all. Other gangs might only have an initiation ceremony for some specified individuals, or for all. A particular individual might not be required to

go through an initiation ceremony if a family member has 'blessed' him or her into the gang. The possible methods used as part of an initiation ceremony include (Carlie, 2002):

- Initiation by cop: a police officer needs to be killed.
- Being jumped in or beat in.
- Sexed in: used to initiate women, who must have sex with one or several members.
- Jacked in: commit theft.
- The Line: the individual must run between two lines of gang members, and must remain on his feet from one end of the line to the other.
- Drive-by shooting: commit a drive-by shooting.
- Russian Roulette: play Russian roulette and win.
- Blood in: commit a gang assigned murder to join the gang.
- Circled in: fight through a circle of gang members standing around an individual.
- Deeded in: have sex with someone with an STD and not contract it.
- Punched in: be aggressively hit right over the heart.
- Courted in: automatically accepted for their skills.

These initiation processes have been found to play a part in gangs in general, as well as in Latino gangs in particular.

Latino prison gangs may differ in their initiation process. The largest Latino prison gangs are the Mexican Mafia (La Eme) and Nuestra Familia. Both of these

gangs started inside prison. The Mexican Mafia was created in 1957 at the Deuel Vocational Institution (DVI) in Tracy, California. Its members consisted of Hispanics from Southern California, and the gang was in part created as a form of protection for Hispanics in the prison. Nuestra Familia was created in the 1960s, in part to protect Northern California Chicanos from the Mexican Mafia. Part of the recruitment process for these prison gangs is that the person must meet certain criteria to join, such as being Hispanic and having charges unrelated to hurting children. Their initiation ceremonies include taking a “blood in, blood out” oath of lifelong allegiance (Skarbek, 2014).

### **Reasons for Joining a Gang**

#### **Environmental Factors**

In a variety of studies, the environment has been shown to play a major role in the risk of youth joining a gang. Fernandez (2011) identified eight environmental factors that increase this risk: 1) inadequate community resources, 2) poor quality of educational services and risk for drop out, 3) low income neighborhood, 4) law enforcement interaction with youth, 5) lack of leadership, 6) insufficient parental involvement or role models, 7) lack of employment opportunities, and 8) economic disparity (Fernandez, 2011). Youth who experience these factors in their community, have a much higher chance of joining a gang than those who do not.

It was found that youth from neighborhoods where drugs are more accessible and where violence prevails have three times the likelihood of joining gangs than youth from different neighborhoods (Fernandez, 2011). This may be due to

protection; if the youth resides in a neighborhood with a high prevalence of violence, the individual might feel the need to join a gang as a means of survival (Vigil, 1988). Besides protection from neighborhood violence, youth might also be seeking protection from abusive families or from other gangs (Walker-Barnes & Mason, 2001).

Residing in a low-income neighborhood also increases an individual's risk for joining a gang. Youth who are raised in economic deprivation might join gangs as a means to acquire financial gain. As Persily (1998) states,

In some areas gangs are providing alternative economies to youth who have no resources by providing not only a sense of identity, but also a means to meet basic needs for food, clothing and shelter. In these cases, crime, primarily drug trafficking, and violence is endemic to their survival, and long term solutions are not easy to find without addressing the basic survival needs of their members.

Schools also appear to play a role in adolescents opting to join gangs. Out of frustration towards school, some youth might turn to a gang, which can provide an alternative to school and can help raise self-esteem (Carlie, 2002). Schools play a significant role in students' self-esteem; getting high grades, meeting expectations, and being respected by teachers can all lead to high self-esteem. However, when students fail or feel disrespected by teachers, their self-esteem can be low, which can in turn lead to truancy and drop out (Carlie, 2002). Students' frustration with not living up to middle class values or expectations with regards to education can lead them to gangs as a means of adjustment (Yablonsky, 1997). If a student drops out of school, legitimate employment might be more difficult to find, and many youth might feel that joining a gang is the only way to demonstrate they have become a man.

Therefore, youth might also join gangs as a rite of passage from childhood to adulthood when other opportunities are not as easily attainable (Carlie, 2002).

Additionally, youth who come from single-parent households and who have minimal parent supervision may also have a higher chance of gang membership (Hill, Howell, Hawkins & Battin, 1999). Carlie (2002) agrees with the importance of parental supervision; he claims youths might join a gang because they are seeking a surrogate family (Carlie, 2002). From 50 to 85 percent of youth who resort to gangs come from single-parent homes or from homes where no parent is present. During the adolescent years, structure, support, supervision and love are crucial, and if parents are not present, youth might get involved in gangs to meet those needs (Lingren, 1996).

Gangs are formed in response to an absence of legitimate free-time activities. Youth like to experience excitement. Therefore, if other alternatives are unavailable, youth might resort to gangs as a way to have fun (Carlie, 2002). Youth might also join gangs because they are following in the footsteps of others. At times, family members 'bless' their younger relatives into the gang (Carlie, 2002).

### **Discrimination**

Discrimination has been identified as potentially playing a role in Latinos joining gangs. Valdez (1998, cited in Rivera, 2001) hypothesized that the displacement felt by Latinos in the United States influenced the creation of Latino street gangs in the country. Valdez further states that these feelings of displacement are affected by economic disadvantage, racism, and prejudice. Such factors have been



shown to limit the opportunities available to Latino youth, thus increasing their chances of joining a gang.

Joining a gang can also play a part in the formation of self-identity for those brought up in neighborhoods with discrimination (Vigil, 1988). Such youth might join a gang seeking the acceptance that society denies them. Besides seeking acceptance, youth might join gangs in search of power, due to “feelings of alienation and hopelessness about achieving any degree of success in the larger society” (Yablonsky, 1997, p.20).

Howell and Egley (2005) state that youth might be at a higher risk for joining a gang if they lack a sense of belonging:

Changing demographics in some small towns and rural areas may contribute to the emergence or escalation of gang problems. This may be related to the immigration of newly arrived racial or ethnic groups into an area. For example, language barriers and being ostracized by the dominant population of years at school and on the streets may lead excluded youths to band together and coalesce into a permanent youth group and potentially come to be recognized as a gang. (p. 2)

The formation of Latino prison gangs was also influenced by the displacement experienced by Chicanos. Such gangs formed out of a need to unite and protect themselves from gangs of different races (Skarbek, 2014). Additionally, allegations of race discrimination against California’s prisons have been made. Inmates are divided based on race and face racial lockdowns in the prisons’ attempts to combat gang activity. However, instead of helping reduce the violence, these actions feed the tension between gangs based on race. In a lawsuit filed in 2011, it was claimed that “rather than targeting actual gang members, they assume every person is a gang

member based on the color of their skin” (Thompson, 2013), possibly affecting the growth of gangs in prisons.

### **Individual Factors**

Individual factors that might be predictors for Latino youth joining gangs include identification as learning disabled, low commitment to school, high externalization of behavior, and poor refusal skills (Hill, Howell, Hawkins & Battin, 1999). Spergel (1990) describes a person at risk as “an emotionally unstable individual who has difficulty making satisfactory interpersonal relationships and with poor impulse control” (p.230). Another individual factor can be the pursuit of recognition or reputation. According to Spergel (1990), “a need for recognition or reputation is the most common explanation for why people participate in gangs” (p. 226). For many, gangs signify power and importance; people might therefore join a gang in search of status.

### **Behaviors and Values Promoted in Latino Gangs**

Gangs in general have become a national concern because of the behaviors they act out. Latino gangs are involved in several behaviors, which are influenced by the values held within the gang. These values can provide a connection between gang members, as apparent in gang members’ use of specific colors, signs, language, and apparel, all of which can serve to strengthen gang member identity and the sense of belonging (Vigil, 1996). Kinnear (2009) further states that members of a gang demonstrate loyalty and respect to one other and to the gang. Malec (2006) agrees,

stating: “[Gangs] encourage values such as mutual respect, acceptance, and the dedication to a common cause and way of being” (p. 81).

Gangs in several jurisdictions have modified or ceased the use of traditional or stereotypical gang indicia and no longer display gang colors, tattoos, or hand signs. Others are forming hybrid gangs to avoid police attention and make it more difficult for law enforcement to identify and monitor them (National Gang Intelligence, 2012).

Latino gangs are highly involved in behaviors involving drugs. Earlier gang studies have indicated ambivalence or negative reactions toward gang members’ drug use or sale in the local area. Individuals who were caught using drugs were forced out of the gang, and neighborhood drug dealers would be threatened to stop drug sales in the neighborhood (Spergel 1998). However, in more recent reports, 69% of US law enforcement agencies report gang involvement in drug distribution (National Gang Center, 2012). These reports further suggest that gangs are not only involved in local drug dealing, but they have established relationships with Central American and Mexican drug trafficking organizations to extend the smuggling of drugs over the US-Mexico and US-Canada borders.

Another behavior that Latino gangs engage in is criminal behavior. Most Latino gangs have been connected to some type of crime or violence. Although national homicides decreased from 2007 to 2012, gang related homicides increased during that same time period (National Gang Center, 2012).

In large cities where gangs account for 15 to 30 percent of the population, they are responsible for 65 to 85 percent of the violent crimes committed. Being involved in a gang is a predictor for high levels of participation in violent activities. However, gangs overall are evolving in terms of the criminal acts they are involved in. The National Gang Center (2012) reports that while gangs continue to be involved in thefts, vandalism, fights, and local drug dealing, they have also moved on to crimes such as immigrant smuggling, prostitution, human trafficking, and white collar crime.

### **Approaches to Address the Increase in Latino Gang Membership**

The involvement of Latino youth in gangs is a concern that needs to be addressed. According to the literature, there are a variety of both micro and macro approaches that can reduce the possibility of youth joining gangs.

According to Castillo (2010), parents need to be more involved in the lives of their children in order to decrease the possibility of joining a gang. This approach could include parenting classes that would educate parents on how to identify signs that their children are involved in gangs.

Lewis (2012, p. 119) gives the following suggestions for addressing the issue of young Latinos joining gangs:

- Youth must be encouraged to adopt new learning models and behaviors by social, human service, and science-based agencies to spark their interest in the future and expand their vision beyond the present.
- Current and ex-gang members must be given the opportunity to be heard in governmental policy-related forums to facilitate gang reduction activities.
- Youth-focused federal, state, and local bidding must promote collaboration among home, school, community organizations, law enforcement, courts, and counseling centers to prevent gang membership

by educating youth about prosocial values, which will then be reinforced through the legal system.

- Youth-focused initiatives implemented by federal and state governments must seek to provide full- and part-time employment for first-time student workers to give them opportunities during summer and between semesters that offer an alternative to drug sales. Such programs can also equip youth with vocational skills to help offset the economic stressors resulting from single-parent circumstances.

To prevent youths from joining gangs, communities must strengthen families and schools, improve community supervision, train teachers and parents to manage disruptive youth, and teach students interpersonal skills. One hindrance to stopping the increase of gangs is the lack of awareness on the part of school staff, parents, and community leaders. Existing gang prevention programs have proven helpful to a certain extent; however, most have not shown “noteworthy results” (Howell, 2010). Esbensen, Matsuda, Taylor, and Peterson (2011) indicate that the design of the programs is not necessarily wrong, but the lack of fidelity to the programs might contribute to the programs’ inability to achieve success. Thus, staff need to be better trained to successfully apply the programs that have already been created. A couple programs, however, have demonstrated a great level of success.

Homeboy Industries is recognized as the largest and most successful gang intervention and re-entry program in the world and has become a national model. The program was started in 1988 by Father Gregory Boyle. Homeboy Industries works with former gang members by providing job training and social services, such as classes and mental health services, for free. Their purpose is to help former gang members reestablish themselves in their communities. Based on the observations and experiences of Homeboy Industries representatives, being able to work is the biggest

factor contributing to the success of formerly incarcerated and previously gang-affiliated individuals; Spergel, 2007, also indicates that having job opportunities decreases youth's chances of joining a gang. In the Homeboy Industries 2014 annual report, results from the 18-month trainee survey results demonstrated: 96% were not arrested in the last 3 months, 91% felt safe with current living situation, 86% of trainees have experienced fewer adverse effects of alcohol or drugs since attending Homeboy Industries. The founder, Father Greg, states that what they need to do is create hope for these individuals. As he says, "I've never met a hopeful kid that joined a gang" (Homeboy Industries, 2014, p. 1).

Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T) is a gang prevention program that has also demonstrated success. This program is school based, and it focuses on bringing awareness to youth about the consequences of involvement in gangs. The program is taught by law enforcement officers in an attempt to increase trust between communities and law enforcement. The program has demonstrated some level of success. A study found that one year after the completion of the program, there was a 39% reduction in the odds of joining a gang among students who participated in the program, compared to those who did not (Esbensen, Peterson, Taylor, & Osgood, 2012).

Howell (2010) suggests that in order to decrease gang membership, communities should provide strategies and services that include the following (p. 15-16):

- Addressing risk factors for joining a gang
- Strengthening families

- Reducing youth conflicts
- Improving community-level supervision of youth
- Providing training for teachers on how to manage disruptive students
- Providing training for parents of disruptive and delinquent youth
- Reviewing and softening school “zero tolerance” policies to reduce suspensions and expulsions
- Ensuring that punitive sanctions target delinquent gang behaviors, and not gang apparel, signs, and symbols
- Providing tutoring for students who are performing poorly in school
- Increasing adult supervision of students after school
- Providing interpersonal skills training to students to help them resolve conflicts
- Creating a center for youth that offers recreation and provides referrals for services
- Providing gang awareness training for school personnel, parents, and students
- Teaching students that gangs can be dangerous
- Providing training to school resource officers in conflict mediation

Most of these interventions are at the micro level, mainly including teaching youth skills, educating parents, teachers, and adults on how to identify signs of gang involvement, and implementing programs that might prevent youth from joining gangs.

The Cure Violence Health Model is a program in Illinois where former gang members go out to the communities and make contact with members of these communities. The program views violence as a disease and approaches in a health based model. They have three steps in their approach: 1) interrupt transmission, 2) identify and change the thinking of highest potential transmitters and 3) change group norms. This program has demonstrated success in decreasing violence in different communities established. In Baltimore, the program decreased gun shootings by up to 56% in areas where this program is implemented (Webster, Whitehill, Vernick, & Parker, 2012).

Macro level approaches, on the other hand, are limited, mainly involving law enforcement policies that criminalize gang-involved youth. Some such approaches include gang enhancements; in California, this is done as part of the California Street Terrorism Enforcement and Prevention Act, by which sentences are increased for individuals who are suspected of belonging to a gang. Gang enhancements have not demonstrated long-term success, however, although they continue to be practiced (Delgadillo & Schiff, 2007). Additional suggestions made for the macro level include creating new federal crimes to more harshly punish gang members, securing the border to stop Latino gang members from migrating to the United States, increasing police salaries, and increasing police vigilance (Muhlhausen and Little, 2016).

Even though the macro level interventions focus on punishing the gang members themselves, Klein (1995) recognizes that other major issues lead to the creation of gangs, and these issues should be addressed. The author states:

Street gangs are an amalgam of racism, of urban underclass poverty, of minority and youth culture, of fatalism in the face of rampant deprivation, of political insensitivity, and the gross ignorance of inner-city America on the part of most of us who don't have to survive there. (p. 234)

Klein (1995) thus stresses the need to work on the entire community and societal structure, rather than just attacking the gang structure. The structure needed to be battle is the poverty that exists in specific communities and with specific populations, the lack of opportunities created for vulnerable populations, and the discrimination certain populations experience through marginalization.



CHAPTER III  
METHADODOLOGY

**Overview**

The Department of Justice indicates that the number of gangs and gang members is increasing in the United States (US Department of Justice, 2011). However, there is limited information on what is contributing to this increase in gangs. Therefore, this research explored factors that are contributing to this increase in gang membership, specifically in the Latino community. This research compared Latino former gang members who joined in the year 2005 or prior, to Latino former or current gang members who joined gangs after the year 2005. The guiding questions of this research were:

1) What is the current initiation and recruitment process for Latino gangs, and how do they differ from the initiation and recruitment process of a decade ago?

2) What are the reasons Latinos join gangs and how do these reasons differ from a decade ago? Specifically, what role does the environment play in Latinos' decision to join gangs?

3) What are the current behaviors and values within Latino gangs and how do they differ from the behaviors and values from a decade ago?

4) What do both the groups identify as being needed in order to better address the issue of increasing numbers of Latino youth joining gangs?

The research sought to identify the factors that could be studied in depth, then they were selected for analysis. The hope was this research could lead to the development of effective prevention and intervention programs for at risk Latino youth and current gang members.

### **Design**

An exploratory study was conducted to answer the research questions and explore the topic of increased Latino gang membership from both the micro and macro levels. Although exploratory research lacks the ability to provide conclusive answers, it does provide tentative answers, and helps in designing future research that can potentially lead to a definitive answer (Rubin & Babbie, 2014). A qualitative research method was employed in the study. Qualitative research enables an in-depth understanding of the meanings of human experiences and allows theories to be generated (Rubin & Babbie, 2014). In this study, it allowed the process to be completed at a low cost and provided a more flexible plan that could evolve as certain behaviors and characteristics were observed. This flexibility provided significant insight into why Latino gangs and gang membership are increasing. Face-to-face open-ended interviews were conducted, giving the participants room to provide any response and comments they felt were relevant. This allowed the researcher to gain insights into topics that had not previously been considered.

### **Sampling Plan**

The participants were inmates at San Joaquin County Correctional Facility. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling, a nonprobability sampling

approach in which the researcher selects the participants to be studied. Nonprobability sampling ensures the participation of individuals who fit the characteristics necessary to represent the phenomenon being studied (Rubin & Babbie, 2014). The researcher used a classification list of inmates who identified themselves as either current or ex-gang members, and selected the groups to be compared from this list. Among other data, the list included the age and the ethnicity of the inmates. Using this information, the researcher identified inmates who fit the criteria for the two groups of participants. In order to be eligible for the first group, the participants needed to meet the following criteria: 1) self-identify as Latino, 2) joined a gang during or prior to the year 2005, and 3) be between the ages of 28 and 55. In order to be eligible for the second group, the following criteria were used: 1) self-identify as Latino, 2) joined a gang after the year 2005, and 3) be between the ages of 18 and 27. A total of 14 participants were selected – eight for the first group and six for the second group.

Recruitment began in December 2015 after receiving approval from the University Institutional Review Board. San Joaquin County Correctional Facility in French Camp, California, granted permission to come to the facility and recruit participants. The list of inmates who had identified themselves as either current or past gang members was provided by the facility to the researcher. The list needed to remain within the facility at all times for the protection of the participants. The facility set up official visits between the researcher and individuals who met the criteria for the study. Each visit took place in a mental health interview room, with two officers standing outside the door. The officers were unable to listen to what was

being said. Additionally, an officer looked into the room through a small window every 10 minutes to assure the safety of the researcher. The researcher could call an officer if needed. The door was not locked and either the researcher or participant could walk out at any time, although this did not happen. During the research, the researcher was doing an MSW internship in the facility. Therefore, the researcher had access to the facility and inmate population and was easily able to set up appointments with the inmates without having to inform additional staff of the reasons for the interviews. The researcher explained to all potential participants the purpose of the research, outlined their rights and responsibilities, and requested their participation.

### **Data Collection**

The data were collected through face-to-face semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured questions provided a guide, while at the same time allowing the interviewer to be flexible, informal, and conversational. Additionally, this format allowed the interviewer to adapt the interview and questions to the style of the interviewee (Rubin & Babbie, 2014). The questions were open-ended, in an effort to solicit detailed responses from the participants. The interviews were held from the beginning of January 2016 to mid-February 2016.

During the first meeting, the participants were informed of the process of the interview and were given a consent form to sign. If upon reviewing the informed consent, the person agreed to participate, he had the option to have the interview immediately or set up an appointment for a later time. With the permission of the

interviewee, the researcher took notes as the interviews were taking place, especially to capture non-verbal responses. The researcher was not allowed to tape the interviews because the facility wanted to protect the participants and make sure the tapes could not be subpoenaed and used as evidence against any of the inmates. The interviews lasted an average of one hour and a half, with the longest interview being four hours, and the shortest one being 20 minutes.

### **Instrumentation**

The open-ended questions were developed by the researcher. Various factors influenced the development of the questions, including a review of the existing literature. The topic was discussed with colleagues and potential questions were explored. The personal experiences and interactions of the researcher with this population also contributed to the development of the questions. The researcher took into account the perspectives of the participants in order to create questions that would not sound offensive. The interview schedule is attached (see Appendix A).

### **Data Analysis**

The collected data were transcribed in narrative format, using direct quotes. The data were analyzed using the five-step approach described by Neuman (2005). The first step was to organize the data according to the research questions. Secondly, the data were coded. Three stages of analysis were used in the coding: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. In open coding, the data were analyzed to find conceptual categories or themes. In axial coding, the relationship between categories was examined to see whether additional themes were needed. In the last stage of

coding, selective coding, the researcher examined all the data again and identified and selected data or direct quotes that supported the conceptual coding categories that were created. During the final step, interpretation and elaboration of the data occurred, which led to theorizing about what could be contributing to the increase in Latino gangs, as well as to the identification of any major differences between gangs of different generations. All findings were reported in narrative format.

### **Protection of Human Participants**

The study was conducted after receiving approval from the University IRB. At the first meeting, the purpose of the research was explained, and it was emphasized that participation was completely voluntary, with no penalties for refusing to participate. The researcher also explained that no rewards would be given for participation. The researcher clarified that the information about who gave consent to participate and who refused would not be provided to the correctional facility. The participants were also informed that they could choose to skip any question they were uncomfortable answering and that they could terminate participation at any time without any penalty.

Upon agreeing to participate, the researcher provided the participants with the consent form. The consent form further explained the purpose of the study and the participant's rights. The consent form was available in English and Spanish; all 14 participants were fluent in both languages, and all 14 decided to read and sign the English consent form. The researcher reviewed the consent form with the participants. The researcher verbally explained that all information collected would

be protected from inappropriate disclosure under the law. The researcher took notes with the participants' permission. They were informed that all data would be locked in a secure location and that all notes would be shredded three years after the completion of the study. The consent form explained that the identities of the participants would not be included in the study, their responses would not be connected to their names, and all data would be reported in aggregate. After reviewing the consent form, the researcher allotted time for the participants to ask any additional questions.

In some cases, study participants may experience distress after opening up about their experiences. In order to protect possibly vulnerable participants, all participants were provided with an explanation of the process by which they could request mental health services within the facility. If extra help was requested by the participant, the researcher had permission to refer the participant to mental health services in the correctional facility. Information about Friends Outside Agency and their phone number was also provided to the participants whose release date was near.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to compare responses of Latinos who have joined gangs in the year 2005 or prior, to those who have joined a gang after 2005. The comparison was an attempt to identify differences that might explain the growth of Latino gang members. This exploratory study used a qualitative design to explore how Latino gangs have changed in the last decade. The research was guided by the following research questions: What is the current initiation and recruitment process for Latino gangs, and how do they differ from the initiation and recruitment process from a decade ago? What are the reasons Latinos join gangs and how do they differ from the reasons from a decade ago? What are the current behaviors and values within the Latino gangs and how do they differ from the behaviors and values from a decade ago? What do both of the groups identify as necessary in order to better address the issue of increasing numbers of Latino youth joining gangs?

#### **Overview**

Data were collected from inmates who were serving time at San Joaquin County Correctional Facility. A total of 14 Latino males were the participants who contributed to the research. The participants were divided into two different groups. Group one consisted of eight former gang members who joined a gang during or prior to the year 2005. Group one participants' ages ranged from 28 to 52. Group two consisted of six participants who joined a gang after the year 2005. From group two,



five were former gang members, and one was currently an active gang member. In group two, participants' ages ranged from 18 to 22. Participants voiced their experiences and beliefs regarding Latino gangs' recruitment and initiation process, Latinos' reasons for joining gangs, behaviors and values within Latino gangs, and their perception of what is necessary in order to address the issue of the increasing number of Latino youth joining gangs. This chapter discusses major findings and common themes that emerged from the responses of the 14 participants.

### **Recruitment and Initiation Process**

The first research question focused on the different recruitment and initiation processes. The data were distributed into the two distinct groups. Group one's set of data, refers to information collected from the eight participants who joined a gang during or prior to the year 2005. Group two's set of data is referring to information collected from the six participants who joined a gang after the year 2005. At the end, there are tables presented, comparing the two groups by reiterating some quotes, including additional quotes, and recapping data to assist in that comparison.

### **Recruitment Process**

#### **Group 1**

In terms of the recruitment process, three major themes emerged from group one, those who joined gangs during or before 2005. The three major themes that emerged from these eight participants were: embracing, personal association, and deception.

## **Embracing**

Seven participants identified “embracing” as a form of being seduced and recruited into a gang. Participants observed that after making that initial contact, active gang members offered a place of belonging, a place of true connection among members, and a place where true love is given. One participant stated, “They brainwash you, they make you want to feel loved.” Another disclosed that, “They claim the purpose is to benefit us, our family, and our “raza” (The Mexican/ Mexican America people); to be against those who are racist. They make these statements to lure us in; to embrace us. They claim unity in order to attract us.”

Another participant confirmed the use of embracing:

They embrace you; tell you that they like you, that you will never be alone. For me, not having a father, it sounded really good. It was inviting. The big homies sometimes can act as what we perceive better than our brothers. They educate you, and share a history of a struggle similar to yours. They teach you a style of walking, with your head up full of pride. They tell you that you are a gift from God.

## **Personal Association**

Four of the eight participants shared becoming affiliated with gangs after being introduced to them by family members or friends. Once the introduction occurred, the individuals were asked if they were willing to be part of the gang. As one participant stated,

I started hanging out with the same crew since I was like 14. They were just friends from the neighborhood. When I was 16, one of my friends started to hang out with gang members. He met them through other friends. So one day he introduced us to Nortenos in Hayward at a party. When they met us, they just asked us if we wanted to be part of them. So they just asked and tried to convince us to join. If we agreed, it did not mean we were part of the gang. Basically by saying yes, we are just accepting to be tested.

## **Deception**

Two of the eight participants claimed they lacked full knowledge of what they were joining and were deceptively brought into the gang. These two participants were referring to gangs within a correctional facility. They both stated being approached and asked, “Are you a homeboy?” One shared the interaction:

When I arrived to jail, one of the active members asked me, “Are you a homeboy?” Growing up in a Hispanic area, to me that meant “Are you cool? Can we trust you?” At 19, I replied, “I am a homeboy”, because I knew I had to stick to my race. I was unaware that my statement meant I was accepting to function as a Northerner. I also did not know that if I said, “I am cool, I don’t bang”, and accepted no gang affiliation, that they would just leave me alone. So I started hanging out and functioning with the gang.

The second participant shared a similar situation:

When they first saw me they ask me if I was homie. When they asked me that, I had no idea they were asking me if I was a Northerner, or if I was willing to be one. Once I realized what I got myself into, I thought that riding alone was not an option. I would of never have stepped into it if I knew that I could ride alone. I felt like I was forced into it.

## **Self-Recruitment**

Only one of the eight participants shared taking the initiative of approaching the gang members. “I saw them hanging out in my cousin's neighborhood. They had nice clothes, nice cars, and good shoes. I wanted that, so I approached them because I wanted to be part of them too.”

## **Recruitment Process**

### **Group 2**

The same questions were asked of the second group, the group that joined gangs after 2005. Two major themes emerged with regard to their recruitment process- these included personal association and glamorized.

#### **Personal Association**

All six participants shared becoming gang affiliated after having a family member or a close friend introduce them to the gang. All six explained that after being introduced to the gang, the active gang members tried to lure them into becoming involved in the gang activities. One participant shared, “My cousins just introduced me to them. So when they saw me hanging out with them, they just asked me if I wanted to join, but I had to demonstrate I had heart.” A second participant expressed, “I believe friendships are the main connection that you can have to a gang. They introduce you and then you become involved.”

#### **Glamorized**

All the participants identified the gang life being glamorized in order to attract them into joining. After being approached for the first time, participants shared being lured in by being promised to be “untouchable”, “powerful”, and making the life seem “fun”. One of the participants further shared, “I was engaged since the beginning. At first it seemed it was all about just drinking, getting high, making money, and having girls.” Another participant shared, “I truly believed it was cool.

They (gang members) were making money; they were respected and feared by others. They made me believe I was becoming someone by being part of the gang.”

### **Embracing**

A unique response for the second group was embracing. One of the participants recognized embracing as a form of recruitment.

After my best friend introduced me to them, they embraced me. They told me I could be part of their hood. There was no greed, no selfishness; they shared with me everything they had, even if it wasn't a lot. I was the youngest from the clique, and they treated me as a little brother and I saw them as older brothers.

Table 1

#### *Comparison of Recruitment Processes*

<b>Recruitment</b>	<b>Group 1</b>	<b>Group 2</b>
<p><b><u>Similarities:</u></b></p> <p>Both group 1 and group 2 shared that association, where a friend or family member introduce you to the gang, continues to be a main form of recruitment.</p>	<p>Well, they did not search me out in the streets nor anything. My friends took me to the gang. Once I was introduced, and they saw me a few times, they asked me if I wanted to join.</p>	<p>My cousins just introduced me to them. So when they saw me hanging out with them, they just asked me if I wanted to join, but I had to demonstrate I had heart.</p>
<p><b><u>Differences:</u></b></p> <p><u>Group 1:</u> Seven from group one shared being seduced into the gang by being embraced.</p> <p><u>Group 2:</u> All six participants were seduced into the gang by the glamorization of the gang life</p>	<p>They brainwash you, they make you want to feel loved.</p> <p>They claim the purpose is to benefit us, our family, and our “raza”; to be against those who are racist. They make these statements to lure us in; to embrace us. They claim unity in order to attract us.</p>	<p>When I first met them, they started talking about I was going to be able to have money if I was with them. They showed me their nice cars, and they hooked me up with some girls.</p>

## **Initiation Process**

### **Group 1**

Three major themes of Latino gangs' initiation processes were found when exploring the answers from group one, those who joined a gang during of prior to 2005: loyal association, blessed in by the family, and physical altercation.

#### **Loyal Association**

Six of eight participants stated that as long as they constantly engaged with the gang members, and demonstrated loyalty, they were considered to be part of the gang. They explained that there was no formal "initiation" process. However, all six participants stated that throughout their active years, they needed to demonstrate they had "heart" and were "solid". For them having "heart" and being "solid" meant "being down for your own", "being loyal", and "demonstrating courage". One stated, "As long as you were down for whatever, they treated you as a brother, and we could be part of the gang." Another reassured, "I was involved with them, and they quickly considered me a homeboy. I just needed to demonstrate my machismo, and for them to know I am a dependable homie." A third participant shared how he was considered part of the gang:

We didn't really have an initiation process. We just hung out with them, but we were constantly being put to the test. We demonstrated that we were down, that we were the real deal. Sometimes they would ask us to do things like commit grand theft, jump others, or even stab others. That is how we demonstrated we had heart.

**Blessed in by Family**

Two of the participants who initiated by association, shared being brought in by family members. “I just needed to hang out with them, and I demonstrated I was down, but they quickly trusted me because my cousins were in the gang.” Another agreed, “I have uncles and cousins who are in gangs. They took me under their wings. It was easy for me to become one of them, because of the name my family members had put forward.”

**Physical Altercation**

Two participants reported being involved in a physical altercation as part of the initiation process. One shared, “I just needed to fight two guys and remain standing after about 14 minutes, in order to become part of them.” A second participant shared, “I got jumped by 3 guys for 13 seconds. We are not allowed to cry, nor scream, we need to take it.”

**Initiation Process****Group 2**

In the second group, two major themes relating to the initiation process emerged: loyal association and blessed in by the family.

**Loyal Association**

All six participants identified association as their initiation process. The six participants agreed that as long as they affiliated with the gang and demonstrated to have heart, which they define as being loyal, they were part of the gang. One claimed,

“As long as you live in the area, hang out with them and you demonstrate to be down for them, you are one of them.” A second participant added:

I just had to hang out with them, but they get a feel on you. They want to see if you are down. They ask you to do little jobs along the way, but they don't say we need to complete a certain task in order to join. They are just constantly testing your courage and loyalty.

A third participant shared, “My initiation was more just by association. I was brought in and accepted as their own, but I had to make sure I completed assignments down the road to make a name for myself.”

### **Blessed in by family**

Four of the participants shared being brought into the gang by family members. “I didn't need an initiation process. So many of my family members were involved, that they just took me in.” Another added, “My cousins brought me in. I just had to demonstrate I had heart by completing tasks that demonstrated I wasn't a coward.”

Table 2

#### *Comparison of Initiation Processes.*

<b>Initiation</b>	<b>Group 1</b>	<b>Group 2</b>
<p><b><u>Similarities:</u></b></p> <p>Both groups identified “personal association” as the most common initiation process.</p>	<p>As long as you were down for whatever, they treated you as a brother, and we could be part of the gang.</p>	<p>As long as you live in the area, hang out with them and you demonstrate to be down for them, you are one of them.</p>
<p><b><u>Differences:</u></b></p> <p>An increase in Latinos being blessed into a gang by family.</p>	<p>One fourth of the participants from group one were blessed in by family.</p>	<p>Two thirds of the participants from group two were blessed in by their family.</p>



## **Reasons for Joining Gangs**

The second research question focused on the factors contributing to Latinos decision to join gangs. Participants shared several influencers playing a role in their decision to become active gang members. The first set of data is the information collected from the eight participants who joined a gang during or prior to the year 2005. The second set of data is referring to information collected from the six participants who joined a gang after the year 2005. At the end, the similarities and differences between the two groups are presented.

### **Group 1**

The eight participants from group one, those who joined a gang in 2005 or prior, voiced several factors contributing to their decision to join a gang. The factors were categorized into six major themes: environment, discrimination, acceptance, entertainment, imprisonment, and advancement.

### **Role of the Environment**

All eight participants identified the environment as impacting their decision to become involved in a gang. Within the environment section, four sub themes emerged: neighborhood, lack of supervision, active family members, and lack of opportunities.

**Neighborhood.** All eight participants reported that, to some extent, the neighborhood influenced their decision to join a gang. Within the theme of neighborhood, four sub themes emerged: neighborhood with high gang activity, need of protection, poverty, and drugs availability in the neighborhood.

**High gang activity.** Five participants described their neighborhood as one with high gang activity. One participant shared:

I saw them (gang members) hanging out in my neighborhood since I was young. They were the guys who dressed nice in the streets, they are the ones who offered kids to be somebody. The older guys approach the youngsters, referring to them as little homies, and offering a place to belong.

A second participant asserted, “I believe Latinos join gangs because of the neighborhood that we grow up in. We are hardworking, but when young, we play out what we see. Gangs are what I saw in my neighborhood.”

**Protection.** Four participants identified joining a gang because of a need for protection. “For me it was about protection. I thought I could not be alone, or I wouldn’t be safe. So many people create their clicks, and I felt I needed to be part of one for others to not mess with me.” A second stated, “In my community, many wanted to join to feel protected. There was a lot of beef between turfs, and we felt the need to join a gang to be safe.”

**Poverty.** Four participants shared that the poverty in their neighborhood led them to join a gang in search of monetary gains. Three of the participants were involved in the selling of narcotics in order to sustain themselves financially. The fourth participant stated that, as a gang, they were involved in robberies that resulted in large amounts of money. “I know it was bad to be involved in illegal ways of making money, but that seemed the only way for me to make my money. I was able to get good cars, nice clothing, and my own place.”

**Drugs.** Four participants shared that drugs in their neighborhood highly influenced their decision to join a gang. Three of the participants had an interest in

dealing narcotics after observing others in the neighborhood involved in such activity.

The three participants shared that they were drug dealing first, then they interacted with gangs through drug transactions, and eventually they joined a gang. “First I got involved in drug dealing and then I joined a gang. I was selling because I wanted to have nice things, but I did not want to be a burden to my single mother.”

One of the participants shared beginning to use substances after being offered drugs in his neighborhood. The participant then became addicted to drugs, eventually impacting his decision to join a gang.

I first tried weed and alcohol when I was 12 years old. However, I would say I started becoming addicted around the age of 17. When you are in addiction, in that darkness, it is inevitable that you will end up surrounded by others in that same darkness. We are all in misery, and when we get together we do things for each other. I first became addicted, then came the small crimes to be able to feed my addiction, then came incarceration, and finally I joined a gang at 19.

**Lack of supervision.** The second sub theme within the environment domain was lack of supervision. Seven participants shared having low parental supervision; these seven participants came from single parent households. Six stated that missing a male figure in the household meant their mothers were obligated to work extra hours. Therefore, the mothers were seldom present at home, resulting in being unable to supervise and be involved with their children. These six participants further agreed that lacking a male figure in their lives, impacted their decision to look for a male figure elsewhere, and ending up looking up to males who were involved in gangs.

One participant stated, “My father was a stranger. We didn’t have a relationship. He kept coming in and out of prison all through my childhood and

teenage years. I ended up searching for a father figure in the streets.” A second participant noted “I could not have a relationship with my dad because he was lost in his addiction. I was just always roaming the streets.”

A third participant shared his experience:

My dad was murder when I was like 2 years old. After that, my mother fell into a deep depression. She was not mentally present, and she had no idea what activities I was involved in. That made it easy for me to be in the streets and eventually join a gang since I was 12 years old.

Another added:

My mom didn't put much interest on me when I was young; she never came to my school meetings. She was just always working. She had to work extra hours because she was the only parent at home. I was completely unsupervised after school, and that is when I started hanging out with certain people that led me to join a gang.

**Family members in gangs.** The membership of family members in gangs was the third sub theme within the environment domain. All eight participants reported being the only member of their immediate family who became active in a gang. Two reported having extended family members who were active, and that they played a big role in their own decision to join a gang. One participant shared, “I grew up in gangs; my uncles were gang members. Since the age of 5, I thought my uncles were true thugs. I saw their pistols, and it seemed fun. I wanted to be part of it.”

**Lack of opportunities.** A unique response emerged; one of the participants shared how the lack of opportunities in his neighborhood contributed to his criminal outcome.

I had big dreams for myself. I actually graduated high school, and I was signed up to go the marines. But I got a DUI when I was 18, and the marines

told me I couldn't go because of that DUI. I know not being able to go to the marines did not mean I had to be involved in criminal activities, but I am sure that being able to go to the marines would of kept me away from those bad activities.

### **Discrimination**

The second major theme found in regards to what influences Latinos to join gangs, was discrimination. This theme was further organized into two sub themes: racism/prejudice and pride.

**Racism/prejudice.** Five participants shared their belief that discrimination, in the form of prejudice and racism, led to their gang activity. Two participants, who were wrongly classified as Northerners, believe discrimination led to the wrong classification, and to “forcing” them to function under the Northerners’ structure. Another stated, “As minorities, we receive a lot of pushback from society, and we need to fight that racism somehow. For many of us, it is through the gang.” Another explained:

Other kids will call us names like ‘wetbacks’ and ‘go back to the border’ and at times even jump us. I was tired of getting jumped and I wanted to fight back. I believed being part of a crew was going to give me more of a chance of fighting back against those who discriminated against us. You know, I just clicked up with kids in the same situation.

One of the participants shared:

Growing up, I was treated by white people as if I didn't belong here. I resented being looked at as less than. Racism impacted my decision to join because gang activity was my way of seeking a sense of power that I felt racism stripped away.

**Pride.** Three participants shared that they joined a gang as a means to achieve a sense of pride. They explained that the discrimination they faced, stripped them

from their dignity, and they attempted to recover that dignity and protect their pride by joining a gang. One participant elaborated:

I know how we are viewed. I saw how my single mom was treated. We were always treated as if we were not enough; I don't know if because we are Mexican, or because we grew up broke. But I liked how the gang members in my neighborhood were looked up to; how they carried themselves with pride, and they were never scared. Everyone else looked up to them or were scared of them, and I wanted that. I wanted to walk around with my head up, feeling proud of who I am and what I represent.

Another shared, "Being part of a gang, for me meant being a man. It meant a way of standing up for myself, a way of experiencing a sense of pride."

### **Acceptance**

Six participants affirmed joining a gang seeking a place where they could belong and be accepted. The participants perceived themselves as being unaccepted at home or unable to connect with peers with whom they did not share a similar struggle; they found acceptance in the gangs. One stated, "I knew gangs were bad, but it was the only place I was validated." A second participant shared,

Now that I look back, I realize that I joined a gang searching for approval and acceptance. You know, not having a father figure, and eventually having an abusive stepfather, I needed to seek a place of belonging somewhere else, and that place was with the homies from the block.

A third participant shared, "I found a place where I belonged in the streets. Being in a gang, filled up a void; it created a sense of belonging and a feeling that someone cared." Another added, "I wanted to be part of something; it meant having a family, and feeling safe. These were the people I belonged with. They shared a history of struggle similar to mines."

## **Entertainment**

The fourth theme found among group one's participants, was that Latinos were part of a gang as it provided them entertainment. Five of the participants decided to join, or to continue the gang activity because it was fun, and it was a form of entertainment. "I felt an adrenaline rush by knowing what I could get away with. It simply was exciting and fun." Another added, "It was fun to be with the homies. It started with regular activities: smoking, cruising, and being with girls." Another added:

We would do activities that regular teenagers are engaged in. We will just kick it and have a good time; but being from the community from which we belong, eventually having a group of teens hanging out and having fun, can lead to interactions with gang members and eventually join or create a gang.

## **Incarceration**

Three participants stated they became involved in gang activity after being incarcerated. They shared that after being released, they were obligated to take the gang activity to the streets. Two of the participants claimed becoming active after being wrongly classified as Northerners. Once they were classified as Northerners, they carried this label to the streets; they felt the need to function within the Northerner structure. One of the participants shared the interaction leading to the wrong classification:

I was going to be sent to prison. When we get in the van, they classify us. So when I got in the van, the sergeant asked "What do you run?" I said I did not run anything. He did not take my answer, and continued questioning me.  
 -"You are Mexican aren't you?"  
 -"Yeah"  
 -"Ok, then what do you bang?"

- “Nothing”
- “Where are you from?”
- “Stockton”
- “What area?”
- “South Stockton”
- “Ok, that is Northerners area, you are a Northerner.”

The second participant shared a similar experience:

When I got arrested they decided to classify me as a Northerner. I told them I did not want to run with the Northerners, that I was not involved in gangs. They decided that I was; they told me that if I am Mexican I must be in some kind of gang. Since I was from San Jose, I was classified Northerner, because they claimed San Jose was a Norteno County.

The third participant reports he was aware of the existence of gangs before his incarceration, but never considered joining one.

After going to prison, I quickly became involved with Nuestra Familia. For me, being active while incarcerated was a form of survival. Upon being released, I carried out executions in the streets. Once I became involved it was difficult to put a stop to it. I carried out many of their orders, and I did not know how, nor when to stop.

### **Advancement of the Latino community**

Three participants stated that they joined a gang because they truly believed that the gang stood for the “betterment of la raza”. The participants referred to “la raza” as Latinos, but mainly referring to Mexican Americans. The participants shared their belief that the gang was a form for Mexican Americans to unite, stand up for themselves, and advance as a people. One participant shared, “I joined because I believed in the betterment of “la raza”; that is what they preached about.” A second participant shared, “I partially joined because I was convinced that by joining I was promoting unity. I believed we were struggling and striving for the same cause: for the betterment of la raza.”



## Reasons for Joining Gangs

### Group 2

The six participants from the second group were asked the same questions in regards to their reasons for joining a gang. Their responses were organized into four themes: role of the environment, entertainment, discrimination, and acceptance.

#### **Role of the Environment**

The participants shared several factors from their environment that played a role in their decision to join a gang. In the environment theme, there were four subthemes that emerged: neighborhood, active family members, lack of supervision, and lack of opportunities.

**Neighborhood.** Four subthemes emerged within the role of the neighborhood, these included, drugs availability in the neighborhood, neighborhood with high gang activity, poverty, and the need for protection.

**Drugs.** Six participants shared the availability of drugs in their neighborhood influenced them, to a certain degree, to join a gang. Four participants shared becoming involved in drug dealing in their communities prior to joining the gang. They were, in part, influenced to join a gang because it supported their drug transactions. One participant shared:

In reality, for me, the gangs were mainly about drugs. For me it was all about making money, so I started interacting and selling to gangs. I even got to the point of talking to cartels. I eventually joined a gang because it made my network bigger.

Four participants shared drugs in their neighborhood contributed to their struggle with addiction, prior to joining a gang. The four shared the same belief, that using drugs made them more vulnerable to be captivated by a gang.

The older guys really influence the younger ones. They tell us where to go and what to do and what is right and what is wrong. And I think many of the youngsters are influenced by older man because we're constantly under the influence of drugs or alcohol, and it doesn't let us think straight.

**High gang activity.** Five participants shared growing up in neighborhoods with high gang presence. One participant explained, "I simply grew up in a neighborhood where the wrong crowd was hanging out in the corner, and that was what captured me."

**Poverty.** Four of the participants stated coming from low-income communities and joining gangs in search of financial opportunities. One of the participants stated, "For me, joining a gang was all about making money. That was the easiest way in my neighborhood to make money." A second participant shared something very similar, "For us it was just about trying to make some money." Another added "Gangs are an ongoing cycle and a way for us to make money; this is the employment opportunity in our hood."

**Protection.** A unique theme emerged where one participant reported joining a gang in search of protection.

In a gang we also seek protection. I remember when I was young my mom bought us new bikes, and they were stolen. We knew exactly who stole them. There were some African American from the block, & I wanted to go get my bikes back. But my mom didn't let me; she said she didn't want any trouble. And we simply lost our bikes. For me that just wasn't right so I think that

gangs help in that way, help us protect each other, and help us not let other races take advantage of us.

**Family members who are active.** All six participants reported being the only ones in their immediate family who became active gang members. However, four of the participants reported having extended family members, such as cousins and uncles, who were active gang members. All four shared their decision to join a gang was impacted by having extended family involved.

**Lack of supervision.** Three participants reported that the lack of supervision at home influenced their decision to join a gang. The three participants lived in single parent households, and they shared not having both parents involved in their life influenced their decision to spend more time with peers who were involved in gangs.

One participant shared:

My parents separated when I was 10 years old and I lived with my dad because I wanted to stay in San Jose. I was in the streets since the age of 12, because my dad was going through his addiction and he didn't really know what I was up to. I also did not have any communication with my mom because she was mad that I had chosen to stay with dad.

**Lack of Opportunities.** Two of the participants reported the lack of opportunities played a role in their criminal outcome. One participant shared:

I was able to graduate and my goal was to go to the army. I wasn't allowed to enlist to the army because I had a juvenile record. That led to me continuing to hang out with the crew who was gang banging in the streets, and eventually I became more deeply involved.

A second participant shared his experience:

When I was young, I really had aspirations for myself. I went to a school where I was able to take all Spanish classes from kinder to third grade. When I was in those classes I was one of the smartest kid; I was always good at math. I remember I told my mom I was going to be the first Mexican president. But one day a kid in school told me, “You can’t be the president; you have to be a citizen.” So I said, “Ok, I will be a doctor. And they replied, “You know, you'll never have a job because you're here illegally.” I felt that because I was Mexican I couldn't be someone. Growing up, I still wanted to be someone, and if a gang member was all I could be to feel a sense of power, then I was going to do it.

### **Entertainment**

The second theme that emerged from the participants’ responses was entertainment. Six of the participants identified “wanting to have fun” as one of the reasons why they joined the gang. For example, one participant said, “It simply was an adrenaline rush to be involved in the activities we did when in the gang.” Another added:

Part of why I joined the gang was because it was fun, but I wasn't really enjoying it. What I mean is that the parties were fun, drinking was fun, getting high was fun. But when we went to take care of other things, I will ride along with them, but I'll be in the back seat quiet and I didn't feel good about what we were doing. But for me it was just that we had to take the bad with the good. But at the beginning, the gang seeming fun is what attracted me.

A third participant shared “I thought it was fun, and I believed it was cool; being in the gang was my way of becoming someone.”

### **Discrimination**

The third theme, discrimination, was organized into two subthemes: Racism/prejudice and pride.

**Racism/prejudice.** Two of the participants, partially attributed their decision to join a gang, to the racism/prejudice they perceived from society. One participant stated, “That (gang members) is what comes out of ghettos, we arise from the hate we perceive from the rest of the society.” A second participant reported:

I don't think any of us are bad people, some are just more lost than others. Sometimes we just need protection and need society to accept us more. They treat us as if we were the enemy and push us away. They need to understand us, rather than judge us.

**Pride.** Pride emerged as a unique response under the discrimination theme.

One of the participants shared joining a gang in order to feel a sense of pride.

I joined the gang seeking some Mexican pride. My parents walk with their heads down because they feel afraid in this country. They are here illegally, and they feel like we do not belong here. My mom used to beg me to try to go unnoticed. She was afraid that one day people would notice us, and that we would get deported. As a child, I learned to walk with my head down. As I was growing up, I observed the way gang members carried themselves. They walk like they own the place; they walk with their heads up; they walk with pride. I wanted to walk with that pride as well, not with fear.

## **Acceptance**

Acceptance emerged as a unique answer as to why individuals join a gang.

One participant stated seeking a sense of belonging, impacted his decision to join a gang.

In 7th Grade, I noticed that I was the only one that didn't really have solid friends. My family moved constantly, and I ended up being in different schools and I never got to make a good best friend. I didn't have any cousins down here; most of them are in Mexico. When I was in the 9th grade, I finally made one good friend. He was pretty cool with me. His cousins were in a gang, so he would hang out with them too. He introduced me to the rest of the gang. I wanted to be part of something, and I felt I belonged in the gang.

Table 3

*Comparisons of Reasons for Joining Gangs*

Reasons for joining	Group 1	Group 2
<b><u>Similarities:</u></b>		
<p><b><u>Environment:</u></b> All participants from both groups agreed the environment played a major role in their decision to join a gang.</p>	<p>I believe Latinos join gangs because of the neighborhood that we grow up in. We are hardworking, but when young, we play out what we see. Gangs are what I saw in my neighborhood.</p> <p>In my community many wanted to join to feel protected. There was a lot of beef between turfs, and we felt the need to join a gang to be safe.”</p>	<p>I simply grew up in a neighborhood where the wrong crowd was hanging out in the corner, and that was what captured me.</p> <p>The environment where we grow up has to do a lot with the decisions we make. What else are we supposed to do, if this is what is normal in our neighborhood?</p>
<p><b><u>Discrimination:</u></b> Several participants from both groups described discrimination as an influencer to joining a gang.</p>	<p>We were called names like beaners, and we would get pushed around in the school bus. They’ll tell us we smelled like burritos. It might sound funny, but it really made us feel bad. We knew we were different, and we needed to unite with our own, and fight against those who made us feel ‘less than’. We got together with those who went through similar situation, and the ones who understood, were those in the neighborhood, involved in a gang.</p>	<p>That (gang members) is what comes out of ghettos, we arise from the hate we perceive from the rest of the society.</p>

<b><u>Differences:</u></b>	<b>Group 1</b>	<b>Group 2</b>
<b><u>Acceptance:</u></b> Six participants from group one joined a gang seeking acceptance, versus only one from group two.	I wanted to be part of something; it meant having a family, and feeling safe. These were the people I belonged with. They shared a history of struggle similar to mines.	For me it was not about seeking love nor acceptance nor any of that. For me it was all about the money.
<b><u>Advancement:</u></b> Three participants from group one joined seeking advancement for their own, versus none of the participants from group two joined seeking the “betterment of la raza.”	I joined because I believed in the betterment of la raza.  I joined because I believed together we could help each other. We got together to protect ourselves from other races, and to prove to them that we could also succeed. We wanted to better ourselves; we would work hard to improve our vocabulary and educate ourselves.	None of the participants from group two shared advancement of the community as a motive to join a gang.
<b><u>Entertainment:</u></b> Half of the participants from group one shared joining a gang because it was fun, versus all of the participants from group two.	It was fun to be with the homies. It started with regular activities: smoking, cruising, and being with girls	Part of why I joined the gang was because it was fun...the parties were fun, drinking was fun, getting high was fun.
<b><u>Drugs:</u></b> Half of the participants from group one stated drugs played a role in their decision to join a gang, versus those from group two.	First I got involved in drug dealing and then I joined a gang. I was selling because I wanted to have nice things, but I did not want to be a burden to my single mother.	In reality, for me, the gangs were mainly about drugs. For me it was all about making money, so I started interacting and selling to gangs. I even got to the point of talking to cartels. I eventually joined a gang because it made my network bigger.

## **Behaviors and Values in Latino gangs**

The third research question focused on the behaviors gang members find themselves acting out when they are active, and the values promoted. Group one's data includes responses collected from the eight participants who joined a gang during the year 2005 or prior. The second group's data are responses collected from the six participants who joined a gang after the year 2005. At the end, there are tables presented, comparing the similarities and differences between the two groups, in regards of behaviors and values.

### **Behaviors**

#### **Group 1:**

When the first group's answers were explored, three major themes were identified in regards to the behaviors they were involved in when they were part of a gang. The three major themes consisted of: violence, drugs, and structure.

#### **Violence**

All eight participants agreed that violence and crime were a big part of their gang life. Seven of the participants shared that the crimes they were involved in were drug dealing and robbery. They also shared their belief that violence had increased in recent times as compared to when they were active in a gang. One participant shared:

I committed crimes while active, but for us the purpose wasn't to go seek and purposefully kill or hurt others. We were more involved in crimes like robbery, drug dealing, and unfortunately, those activities can lead to confrontations where others could be hurt.



Six of the participants shared the belief that violence has increased within the gang population. One shared his belief:

From my point of view, gangs have always been violent, but in our times we had to make sure to respect the different channels and we had more talks. Supposedly they still have to talk through channels, but it's not getting done, and it results in higher violence.

Four of the participants shared the idea that there is more violence in the streets, because there are more guns available. One participant shared his observations based on his personal gang activity, and compared it with his younger cousin's gang activity:

I see more violence in the streets. Many of our youngsters are catching more murder cases. My little cousin is in a gang and he just thinks everything is funny. He acts as if he is untouchable; he always has a gun on him. I think now their initiation process is more likely to include a gun. Their behaviors appear to be more careless; they want to put themselves out there.

A second participant shared, "We used to solve problems with our fist, and now youngsters quickly run to grab their gun." Another participant shared, "There are more guns and more drugs, leading to higher violence."

A more unique theme emerged; a connection was made between the increase of violence in gangs within jails, to the realignment brought by AB 109. One participant shared:

Now there is more violence in our jails than there used to be. There has been violence in prisons, but in county jails, everyone used to mind their own business. After AB 109, inmates with non-violent crimes were sent to finish their sentence in county jails. They brought with them more structure from the Northerners. That is when more gang activity raised in county jails, but the

youngsters do not really follow the guidelines, so there is simply more gang affiliated activity in jails, and with it more violence.

Another participant shared:

Now there are more beatings, more cutting, and more fights for no apparent reason. Everybody wants to control by fear and not by respect. These gangs want to create killers, but we are psychologically not built that way, so everything just ends up getting out of control.

## **Drugs**

All eight participants agreed that drugs were a part of their gang activity.

Seven of the participants reported being involved in drug transactions. Six of the participants shared that on the streets, drinking alcohol and using some type of drugs, was almost a daily activity. One stated, “Drugs and drinking simply come along with gangs.”

Five of the participants shared that while incarcerated and active in the gang, they were not allowed to use any drugs. These five participants reported that they remained abstemious of any substances when incarcerated, because it was part of the rules and they were closely monitored. The five participants agreed that, “Supposedly, now they have the same rules about not using drugs, but I see that a lot of these youngsters are using. It’s easier for them to get drugs in jail or prison and they use them.” One participant shared, “Drugs really are the main thing of these crime organizations. If drugs are changing, so are the people dealing them and the people using them.”

Four participants attributed changes in the current gang members, to changes in drugs. One shared, “Now everyone is smoking weed, and the problem is that weed

is now being lazed. There are extra drugs being added to a blunt, and is making our youth think differently.” Three participants attributed changes to the use of meth. One participant elaborated:

Meth destroys your brain. Heroin was big on my time; heroin destroys you physically. You get all skinny, your teeth fall out, and you become involved in crime because you want to get money to continue with your heroin addiction. But meth, I don't care what anybody says, that drug messes up your brain. It alters the way these kids think, and they make unintelligent decisions, like get involved in gangs, crime, and become more violent.

### **Structure**

Seven of the eight participants described that when they were active, the gang was highly structured; they described the different procedures, roles, and guidelines. Five of the participants share their belief that street gangs had some structure, but that the structure was more clear when in prison. One of the participants mentioned, “Northerners were highly structured, basically they are organized crime.” He further described the structure:

We had our own constitution. We actually took the Constitution and replaced it so it could only apply to “la raza”. We also have chain of command just like in the army. The founding leaders were ex veterans. Only Nuestra Familia had a constitution, because we needed structure. We were greatly outnumbered so we needed brain power.

Seven of the participants shared there are expectations of individuals in order for them to be active while incarcerated. One participant shared about the procedure to “clear” inmates when incarcerated, a procedure needed in order for individuals to become or to continue to be active.

When we first arrive, they run a “7 on 7” history check up on us. They ask for our name, nickname, what prisons we have been in, where we reside, our

charges, gang affiliation, and court date. We just needed to write this information down in a piece of paper. We need to show them our paperwork, which includes our charges. They want to make sure our charges are not related to sex offenders, rapist, or child molesters. Recently, they added domestic violence as one of the charges they do not accept. If you have those charges, it will result in a removal. They also want to make sure that parts of our deals are not related to rapping anyone out. If we were in county jail, it was easier to get cleared from these history checkups. It has changed now. Now they sit people down, and have the security guys, which are now two youngsters who are monitoring our every move, standing on each side next to the person having the history being run on.

The seven participants further agreed that part of their structure consists of assigning different individuals with certain roles. One of the participants explained some of the different roles:

In my time, some of the roles in the gang included a general, a sergeant, a disciplinary instructor (DP), tear security: one upstairs and one downstairs. The securities were checking on us making sure we are following all the rules. For example, we needed to wake up when they told us to, we needed to have completed a one-hour workout before 3 pm, and we had to write 500 word essays daily. We had the “teachers” who read our essays. We also had “torpedoes”. The torpedoes put in a lot of work. The torpedoes are the ones designated to remove others from the program.

Seven participants shared that when they are incarcerated; following certain guidelines was an important part of the structure. The seven participants agreed that they are not allowed to talk to staff independently, “We were not allowed to talk to C.O’s or any other staff, and if we did we needed to go in pairs.” All seven further agreed they were not allowed to speak to mental health providers, or to take psych medications when active. One stated:

We were not allowed to speak to counselors nor any other mental health providers. If I was active, I would not be allowed to be speaking to you right now. We were not allowed to take psych meds, because they do not want sleepers, they want “soldados” ready for battle.

The seven participants shared how one of the guidelines was that they supply the leaders with money or property, “We need to give 10% of our store to LA CASA.” Another of the most important guideline mentioned by the seven participants was “No red on red,” referring to no fighting among Northerners or Nortenos, under any circumstances

Six of the participants shared the purpose of the guidelines were for members to be ready for “battle”. One shared, “We need to have our shoes on all time because we need to be ready for battle at all times.” A second one stated, “Part of the reason why we workout so much is because they want us to be strong, healthy, and ready in case anything goes down.”

Three participants believed that several of the guidelines were created in order to discipline the members and to help them become independent and responsible. One participant shared, “We need to work out for at least one hour daily, and it has to be when they say it, but part of it is to help us help ourselves, for us to become more disciplined and responsible.” A second participant added, “We are not allowed to scream, because we need to be professional.”

The participants share how breaking the guidelines could result in disciplinary actions or in a removal,

If we do not follow the guidelines we will be disciplined. If it’s a major guideline that was broken, such as ratting someone out, then it will result in us being dropped, which at times can mean being beat up, and at other times it can mean being stabbed.

Seven participants agreed that gangs are becoming more disorganized. The seven participants shared the belief that guidelines are no longer being followed fully,

and that belief was part of the reason why the seven participants decided to drop out from the gangs. They believe favoritism within the gang plays a role in the guidelines being broken.

One participant shared:

I just realized the favoritism that occurs in within the gang. There are higher ranks, and they utilize those of us in lower rank. Is all wrong how the people at the bottom are mistreated. The guidelines are not being followed, they choose who they favor.

A second added:

I saw a lot of favoritism. They choose who they want to be part of the gang, and they are dropping those individuals who they do not like. Everything is currently a mess, and favoritism is playing a major role.

Seven participants explained that another part of the reason the structure is breaking up, is because many of the younger generation Latinos are bringing their personal problems into the gang. One of the participants explained:

These youngsters do not always respect the guidelines. At times they lie about what another individual did in order for that individual to become a target. It can simply be because they do not like that individual, even if they really did not do anything wrong. They are bringing their personal problems, and utilizing the gang to take care of those problems.

One participant shared how he was wrongfully removed from the gang due to the lack of structure:

I was removed by youngsters from Sacramento in 2006. They simply did not like my style, and I noticed they were removing people with experience. They should not be allowed to remove people like that. According to the rules, they can only remove individuals with bad charges, or people who have betrayed us.”

## **Behaviors**

### **Group 2**

The second group also answered the research questions focusing on the behaviors gang members find themselves acting out. Three major themes emerged from the second group's answers in regards to behaviors in gangs. These included violence, drugs, and structure.

### **Violence**

Five of the participants shared that violence was part of their gang activity. Four of the participants believe that violence has increased within the gang community. A 20-year-old participant shared:

I always have a gun on me, but it is more because I feel the need to be protected. These other youngsters try to prove themselves too much and they'll do anything to earn their name. You know, it used to be a rule that we were not allowed to rob our own kind and not allowed to do drive bys. Technically still a rule but is not being followed.

Three participants shared the belief that the increase in violence was due to an increase in drugs and guns on the streets. "There are more guns now and many of the youngsters are just on drugs when they're in the streets and they are not thinking straight."

One of the participants explained:

I think violence has changed for the worst, but at the same time in other areas for the best. What I mean is that in the older days it seems like the OGs (Original Gangster, term used to refer to "true gangsters" from back in the days) really took care of business. And they took people down violently. For us, meaning the younger ones, I think we just resort to violence more quickly. I think there are more fights. At the same time I think guns are more accessible and every youngster wants to have a gun. That makes it easier for

us to just act. So I think to a certain degree maybe there's more shootings and more fights and more cutting and youngsters just wanting to be bad. But I think the real G's were more hardcore back in the days, but they killed those who had broken one of the big rules, such as somebody snitching. But now youngsters are fighting for no reason, even red on red. The fighting is happening over unnecessary things, like maybe even over a girl.

## **Drugs**

All six participants shared using drugs at some point. All six describe it as part of their daily life when on the streets; the six participants shared that weed is one of the drugs being used daily. "For us it was just about drinking, parties, and smoking weed." Five of the participants shared being involved in selling drugs at some point during their gang activity.

Four shared using drugs while being incarcerated, which is breaking a rule. The four shared that it is easier to use, because the leaders do not monitor the drug use, closely. Four participants shared meth was one of the drugs more commonly used. Four of the participants shared that they are battling addiction. "I stopped using meth six months ago. It has been really difficult. It is a drug very difficult to stop using. Many of the people around me use it. I think it is the drug of choice nowadays." Two participants shared their drugs of choice were Xanax and syrup (cough medicine).

## **Structure**

Four of the six participants shared their gang had some level of structure. The four who believed that gangs were structured, were those who were active while incarcerated. These participants described a similar structure to the one described by



the first group. They shared mimicking a military structure, following a constitution, and similar guidelines as participants from group one. However, three of the participants stated that the guidelines were not strictly being followed. They further shared that it was easier to “get away” with not following the guidelines, because their behaviors were not closely monitored.

One participant shared, “The expectations and guidelines depend on who the leader is. Some can be more violent and others can be more humble. It really depends on who runs the regimen and who gets caught.”

A second participant shared the experience of interacting with an active member who broke a guideline, and yet he did not receive a consequence:

One day, this 18-year-old little dude comes up to me and gave me attitude. He was being really disrespectful and he's also active. For no apparent reason, he starts pushing me, and according to the rules we cannot touch each other. I was getting ready to fight back if needed, but then the leader of the northerners from this section of the jail comes up to me trying to discipline me. I asked if the other guy was also going to be discipline, but he refused. That's when I saw favoritism. They choose what happens and to who it happens to. What we do and where we do it. The guidelines are just not being followed nor respected. There really is a lot of favoritism going on.

Four of the participants agreed that there is an increase of “red on red” violence, referring to violence within Northerners and or Nortenos. A 20-year-old participant shared his experience, and states how the main guideline of “no red on red”, is not being followed:

They (other active Northerners) stole my shoes, my jeans, my shirt, everything; they just left me on my boxers. I was jumped by like 10 dudes and that is something that we are not supposed to do. And they jumped me in front of my baby momma. Supposedly there's no red on red, but I know that is changing. Even though I'm young; I am not new to the game. I saw my uncles in the gang, I am aware of what were the original rules. If I had really stolen

the gun, then they have to discipline me, but they don't attack a northerner the way they attacked me. Now there is a lot of red on red. Many are trying to be better than others. We're supposed to be equal but there's a lot of favoritism.

A second participant shared his experience of “red on red” problems, and further shared how the different channels are not being respected:

I had beef with another Norteno. The leader of his crew told me he wanted to settle things down, and if I still had issues with the specific guy, then we could chunk it. So when we talked, everything basically got settled. But that night, two of the northerners came looking for me and they started shooting at me. In reality things were settled, but these youngsters went ahead and made their own decisions without talking to the leader first. The leader should have had a “junta” (meeting) right away to let them know my status.

Table 4

*Comparison of Behaviors in Latino Gangs*

<b>Behaviors</b>	<b>Group 1</b>	<b>Group 2</b>
<p><b><u>Similarities:</u></b></p> <p>Most participants identified violence, drugs, and structure as behaviors engaged in when in the gang.</p>	<p>I committed crimes while active.</p> <p>Drugs and drinking simply come along with gangs.</p> <p>If we do not follow the guidelines we will be disciplined</p>	<p>I always have a gun on me.</p> <p>For us it was just about drinking, parties, and smoking weed.</p> <p>There are consequences for not following the guidelines.</p>
<p><b><u>Differences:</u></b></p> <p>Drug use is changing.</p>	<p>Heroin was big on my time...But meth, I don't care what anybody says, that drug messes up your brain. It alters the way these kids think, and they make unintelligent decisions, like get involved in gangs, crime, and become more violent.</p>	<p>I stopped using meth six months ago. It has been really difficult. It is a drug very difficult to stop using. Many of the people around me use it. I think it is the drug of choice nowadays</p>
<p>Gangs appear to now have less structure, and guidelines are not being followed.</p>	<p>I was removed by youngsters from Sacramento in 2006. They simply did not like my style, and I noticed they were removing people with experience. They should not be allowed to remove people like that. According to the rules, they can only remove individuals with bad charges, or people who have betrayed us.</p>	<p>The expectations and guidelines depend on who the leader is. Some can be more violent and others can be more humble. It really depends on who runs the regimen and who gets caught.</p>

**Values Promoted by Latino Gangs****Group 1**

The first group's answers in regards to the values promoted in the gang were organized into three main themes: respect, loyalty, and purpose.

## Respect

All eight participants shared that the gang taught them about respect, both within prison gangs and in street gangs. Participants defined respect as “behaving properly”, “not overstepping boundaries with other individuals”, and “carrying themselves professionally.” Seven participants suggest that respect has been decreasing among gang members.

One participant shared how respect was taught in the gang, and he further explained how he perceives a lack of respect presently:

In order to function, we needed to give mutual respect. We also respected others; we respected the C.O's, and other gang members. We always tried talking things through. If we were incarcerated, the issues from the street would get dropped. Now youngsters capitalize on their control, and send a torpedo to take revenge on something that happened in the street. Also, some decide to drop people out of the gang, simply because they do not like them. Control is being misused; the guidelines are not being followed. The respect we were taught about is no longer there.

Another participant shared the lack of respect shown by the younger gang members towards the older gang members:

We used to respect the older guys. We saw them as wise, and allowed them to guide us. Now, the youngsters are trying to get rid of the older guys. If we are like 40, and we are in the lower ranks, they ask us to go with the dropouts. They want to have “soldados”, young and active and prepare them for war.

One participant shared how the younger generation of gang members also disrespects families:

There is no longer respect for families. We were not allowed to approach others in the streets when they were with their families, but I have been approached many times. For being a dropout, youngsters from my neighborhood have threatened me in front of my house. The older homies who knew me put a stop to it, but the youngsters wanted to take me down.

## **Loyalty**

All eight participants reported the gang taught them about loyalty. “They taught us about loyalty. For them, loyalty was about always having each other’s backs, and not talking to the enemies. Enemies can be cops or opposite gang members.” Another participant shared, “They taught us about “carnalismo”, about “familia”, about being loyal to each other.” The participant defined “carnalismo” as brotherhood and “familia” as family. The participant shared that the gang expected for members to see each other as family, and behave loyally by “taking care of each other.”

## **Purpose**

Four of the participants shared that when they were active, the purpose of the gang was to move their people forward, through the betterment of the community and education. One participant shared:

At the beginning we were about a cause, a real bond, but it seems like everything became about power and control. When everything started it was about the betterment of la “raza” and not letting others humiliate us. I decided to study my culture, and I dropped out. The gang life does not truly represent my culture; it does not represent my roots or what I stand for. If it ever did represent my culture, the purpose is now lost.

Another participant shared his belief that the gang helped the gang members in a positive way:

In my time, it was about the betterment of la “raza”. They helped me battle my addiction. They helped me educate myself. When I went to prison, I didn’t know how to write and I could barely read. But for them getting some respect meant being an educated Mexican. Now, is rare to find someone who will encourage you to educate yourself, to learn our history, or to put an essay together.

A third participant shared:

I see a lot of lack of education. In my time there was lack of education, but when we got together, part of our purpose was to try to educate ourselves. Now I see these youngsters in here who can't even pronounce words, and they have grown here (United States), with more opportunities, and many who are not first generation Chicanos like I was, and yet they can't read.

The four participants agreed that the cause or purpose has been lost. One shared, "Nuestra Familia has lost direction. Most of the killings that NF carries out are on our own people."

### **Values Promoted by Latino Gangs**

#### **Group 2**

The six participants from group two answered the same questions in regards to the values their gang promoted. Three major themes emerged from their responses, including, respect, loyalty, and purpose.

#### **Respect**

All six participants shared that respect was a value that the gang tried to promote. Four of the participants believe that there is a lack of respect within gang members, especially the young members. The second group consisted of young members, between the ages of 19 and 22, and when referring to young members they were referring to peers and to rising numbers of teenagers joining the gang.

The only participant who is an active gang member, a 21-year-old, shared: I think those who were in the gang a long time ago, like the older generation gang members, are more respectful. The way they talk or carry themselves; they just do it more respectfully. They really are regular people, and I have seen them interact with their kids and they are great parents. I think now is all about drugs and money. And a lot of the respect is gone.

A second participant explained, “Many begin to believe that is all about our own, and we do what we have to do to take care of ourselves. Respect is not a number one thing, even if the gang claims it.”

### **Loyalty**

Six of the participants shared the gang preached about loyalty. “The number one value the gang taught me was loyalty.” Another participant added that loyalty meant, “Having each other’s back and not cooperating with the police.”

The participant who is an active gang member stated:

In here, we are in unity, we can’t fight each other. We look out for each other. It is all about loyalty, (pause), or maybe that is what I tell myself. My initiation process is what got me here. And if I decide to dropout, I will feel like it was all for nothing. I will feel I am letting my “raza” down; I need to believe in that loyalty. I need to remain loyal.

Four of the participants believed that loyalty among members no longer exists. One of the participants reported, “There’s really no loyalty anymore. I thought I could trust the homies, but now you can’t trust anybody. Everybody wants to be bigger than somebody else.”

### **Purpose**

Five of the participants shared being unaware of the purpose of their gang. They shared no one explained what the purpose was, or if there was a cause the gang was striving for. One of the participants shared, “Before, when my uncles started banging, it was about bettering yourself and educating yourself. Now they want us to do this for the people who have been in the game for a long time; it’s all for the lifers.”

A 19-year-old participant concedes, further sharing:

There really is no purpose for the gang. I decided to dropout at a young age, because I just see how much favoritism there is. Now I see how we are just being used to serve the big fish. They do not really care for us, and I was able to truly see that after being incarcerated. In the street, many of us truly believed we were part of something real, but coming here, I saw who really controlled everything and who was making decisions for us. It's not worth it. If there really was a purpose at the beginning, it is now lost.

Table 5

*Comparison of Values Promoted in Latino Gangs.*

<b>Values</b>	<b>Group 1</b>	<b>Group 2</b>
<p><b><u>Similarities:</u></b>            Most participants identified violence, drugs, and structure as behaviors engaged in when in the gang.</p> <p>Most participants from both groups observe and increase of violence, an increase of drug use, and a disorganized structure.</p> <p>All participants identified respect and loyalty as values that the gang promotes.</p> <p>Most participants from both groups observed a decrease in respect and loyalty within the gang.</p>	<p>In order to function, we needed to give mutual respect. We also respected others; we respected the C.O's, and other gang members. We always tried talking things through. If we were incarcerated, the issues from the street would get dropped.</p> <p>You don't see those values anymore. I left the gang because I saw nothing was real. There is a lot of favoritism, and many of us are just used. No respect nor loyalty anymore."</p>	<p>The main values in the gang, were all about respect and loyalty. Honestly I don't see it though, that is part of the reason why I dropped out at a young age. Nothing is real.</p>



<b>Differences:</b>	<b>Group 1</b>	<b>Group 2</b>
<p>Group one- purpose of moving “la raza” forward They shared the gang educated them, and helped them battle addiction.</p> <p>Five participants from group two were unaware of the purpose of the gang.</p>	<p>In my time, it was about the betterment of la “raza”. They helped me battle my addiction. They helped me educate myself. When I went to prison, I didn’t know how to write and I could barely read.</p> <p>At the beginning we were about a cause, a real bond.</p>	<p>Before, when my uncles started banging, it was about bettering yourself and educating yourself. Now they want us to do this for the people who have been in the game for a long time; it’s all for the lifers.</p> <p>Purpose? I don’t know. We were not told about no purpose.</p>

### **Approaches to address the increase in Latino Gang Membership**

The fourth research question focused on what the participants perceived as needed in order to address the issue of gang rise in the Latino community. For this section, the responses of all the 14 participants were combined and explored. Every participant provided more than one suggestion in regards as to what is needed in order to decrease gang activity in Latino communities. The major themes that emerged included- providing engaging extracurricular activities, community involvement, educating parents, bringing former gang members to the community, religion, changes in the justice system, school/teacher awareness, battling discrimination, battling addiction, and battling poverty.

#### **Engaging extracurricular activities**

Twelve participants agreed that extracurricular activities are necessary in order to keep kids occupied and off the streets. Nine stated that youth should have a variety of programs and activities to choose from. One participant reiterated, “The activities need to be engaging. Not just a boring park around the corner, where many

gang members hang out anyways.” Eight believed involvement in sports could decrease Latinos’ chance of joining a gang. One shared:

I wanted to be in soccer, but in my school we did not have a soccer team. My parents didn’t have the money to sign me up for a team outside of school, so I used to just hangout in the streets”

Another elaborated, “Youth need to be in sports. They need to experience healthy competition, and at the same time be able to be part of something.” A third participant shared, “They should be in sports. They also need programs where they have the opportunities to express their feelings. Like art programs, where they can create murals, and write poetry.”

Six participants further identified part of the extracurricular activities should include entire communities, where the community members get to know each other. One participant stated, “They can have monthly barbecues where the community comes together, and where community leaders attend.” One believes community events are important because “If they don't have parents to look up to, they should still have other members of the community that can be involved.”

A participant added that part of the reason why community events need to be created, is because:

A lot of people from the Bay Area are moving out here and they are fighting people from Stockton. So maybe something has to be done about uniting people who come from different communities instead of them wanting to come here to represent their turf. We need an opportunity to get to know each other.

Six participants stated that the leaders who run these programs should be people who look like members of the community. One stated “It’s harder to listen to someone

who doesn't look like me, or hasn't lived like I have. I feel that they don't know what they are talking about, and whatever they have to say doesn't apply to me."

### **Educate Parents**

When exploring the participants' answers, twelve participants shared there is a need for higher parent supervision. Eight further shared that Latino parents could benefit from parenting classes. Seven participants described their mothers as "kind", "loving", and "caring". However, they shared that this "kindness" in a way inhibited their mothers from applying rules and consequences. The participants believed their mothers could have benefited from a parenting class, where they are informed on how to discipline and be consistent with their children. "Everything starts at home, with mothers and fathers; we need to teach parents to pay attention to the feelings of their kids." Another participant elaborated on the need to educate parents on the importance of discipline and supervision:

Parents should be educated on how to better parent their kids. They need to be taught that their kids need love; they need someone that will listen to them and explain things to them rather than hit them. Because if they are constantly getting beat up then they won't be afraid to do what is wrong anymore; they are getting beat up anyways. Parents should also be taught to not be overprotective because then we can't handle freedom. Latino parents need a better understanding on how to discipline and supervise their kids.

One further added, "We need to educate parents on the importance of monitoring what our kids are doing; and we need to keep them away from listening to all that rap music, and to those narcocorridos."

## **Involvement of Former Gang Members**

Eight participants shared their belief that former gang members can be a great positive influence in the lives of youth at risk. A participant stated:

Those who have experienced the life of drugs, the life of gangs and have been able to overcome them, should be allowed to be close to kids at school or in programs. Men who have experienced this life, and who have truly changed, have a lot to offer to our communities.

A participant shared that youth are captivated by those who have been incarcerated, and they can be involved to share a positive message:

Many youngsters look up to those who have been incarcerated. Youngsters in jail have a lot of time to think, and from the inside we control gangs in the outside. So starting by trying to inspire the ones inside and then having them share out in the community, is the best way to go.

A recent 20-year-old gang dropout shared:

I also think those of us who have been through it; we should be given an opportunity to reach out to our youth. I have a little homie who was becoming highly involved in gangs, but since I've been here (in jail), I've been talking to him and I know I have a great influence on him. I have encouraged him to do better and he is doing better for himself. He's not kicking it with the gang and he's focusing back on school. We still have something to offer to society and especially to our own, but we are not given an opportunity to be anybody because of our criminal history.

## **Religion**

Seven participants suggested encouraging youth to become involved in religion could assist in dissuading them from joining gangs. "God needs to be more often introduced to youth; we should take them to church retreats." A second participant shared "If youth become close to God, they might not join gangs, because gangs contradict our walk with God." An additional participant stated, "The word of

God teaches you to love your brother, and if our youth walk down the path of God, they will not be involved in gangs and violence.” Another participant agreed, “We need to teach our kids to be positive, by bringing positivism to their lives. One way to bring that positivity can be through God’s word.”

### **Changes in the Justice System**

Seven of the participants believe that changes within the justice system can support youth’s decision to not join gangs, and can support youth to drop out of gangs once they have become involved. One of the participants stated, “Gang enhancement is a setback, and it is not helping fight gangs, it’s just criminalizing our youth more.” Another added, “Probation and parole should be a real support. Sometimes they just make it harder for us to actually do something good with our lives, once we get caught in a crime.” Four participants agreed that staff within the justice system should receive trainings, including training in some healthy motivation. Four participants shared a concern for certain behaviors being criminalized, making it hard for Latinos to move forward; and “getting stuck in a revolving door.” One elaborated saying:

It is difficult to move forward. We get charges since a young age, for being involved in gangs. We try to make positive changes, but because of our history, we can’t get a job, we have limited opportunities. We end up going back to what we learned to do while in the gang. To hustle and drug deal.

Four participants shared their concerns on how difficult it can be to decide to drop out of a gang while incarcerated, because of the facility’s structure.

It seems like there are consequences for wanting to leave the gang life behind, when we are incarcerated. If I am active while behind these walls, I get more

yard time and get access to more programs. As a dropout, I have access to one group per week, and I get only one hour of yard time every day. As an active gang member, I could be out in yard most of the day. We need more support to make the correct decision of leaving the gang life behind.

Another participant shared that there should be changes in the justice system when it comes to sentencing youth:

I mean, we know that a boy brain is not fully developed until like 24 years old. The judges need to take that into consideration when they're sentencing these kids. When in prison they are more likely to be involved in gangs, if they have not been involved already.

### **Teacher/School Awareness**

Six participants believe schools and teachers can make a difference if they are truly engaged in the students' life. The six participants shared experiencing a lack of teacher involvement and a lack of understanding from their school. Participants shared, "Schools also need more awareness of what the kids are doing; teachers should know the kids and be aware of their life. Teachers should not only teach but be more involved with our kids." A second participant agreed, "School needs to be more aware because it is in schools that a lot of them are being approached." Another participant stated, "Teachers need to be more involved they are the ones that spend more time with us, at the end of the day." One of the participants shared his experience with the school:

I stopped going to school at a very young age. In San Jose the school that I went to was very strict. They wouldn't allow me to be there because of my clothing. I wore red clothing or clothing that for them represented gang affiliation. But my dad didn't have money to buy me anything else; all his money went to addiction. So I just stopped going to school and that's when I started kicking it with the homies.

### **Battling Discrimination**

Five of the 14 participants mentioned that discrimination still continues, and they believe this discrimination needs to be addressed and battled. “We need to acknowledge the existence of discrimination and do something to decrease it.”

Another agreed stating:

Still, today we face racism and discrimination. You can see it in how we are treated in jail; how we are treated in society. I do not want to make excuses for ourselves, but I believe if this country treated us more as their own, and we felt a sense of belonging in our communities, it could help battle the gangs’ issue.

Another elaborated on the discrimination he observed within the judicial system:

There is just a lot of difference on how rich and poor kids are treated. Maybe the criminal justice system wants to let society know that they won't tolerate crime, but it seems they're just not tolerating it from low income Mexicans and blacks.

Additionally, one of the participants shared:

I was denied opportunities because I was not a citizen; because I am not a citizen. There should be more opportunities for undocumented immigrants, because part of the Latino gang population are undocumented immigrants.

Another participant affirmed that the negative view from the rest of the society can negatively influence the outcome:

Society makes it hard on us. So why try to do well? Just by the way we look and for being from the ghetto and minorities, we are mistreated by society. We are treated as criminals just because of the way that we look and act. I was already treated as a criminal even before I started being involved in the gang activity. So I guess sometimes we fulfill what is expected from us.

### **Battling Addiction**

Four of the participants stated that addiction needed to be battled, before the issue of gangs could be addressed. One participant stated:

Most gangs, if not all gangs, have become involved with drugs somehow. Drugs are affecting the increase of gangs in two ways. First off, gangs have become an organized crime and deals drugs. As long as the demand for drugs continues to exist, gangs will continue to function to fulfill that demand. Secondly, youth being under the use of a substance makes them more susceptible to being influenced to join a gang and make inadequate decisions.

A second participant asserted “Drugs are a main reason for the existence of gangs, so maybe a focus needs to be addiction.” Another participant shared:

There are limited programs for youngsters under 17 years old who are falling into addiction. It is a real problem. We see it as a normal part of growing up, but when using drugs, kids don't think straight and are easier coerced into joining a gang.

### **Battling Poverty**

Four participants agreed on the need to address and combat poverty, which in turn will combat gangs. “If we really want to stop this problem we need to battle poverty (and addiction).” Another participant added, “Youth are joining gangs because they want to make fast money. If they had money, or more means to make that money, they might deter from joining a gang.” A third participant reported:

Better jobs and better paying jobs need to be available to those who come from these broken communities. Being in a poor community, increases your chances of being caught with an illegal arm, then you get charged, then you are unable to find a job for your criminal record. What options do our people have once they are stuck in that cycle? They need to provide for their families.

The fourth participant shared:

Society definitely needs to do more for the poor, because it is the poor communities that are joining gangs. And more financial opportunities need to be created for the working class because maybe if the parents have more to provide to their kids, it could really change the outcome in a positive way. We need more money to come into the poor areas not the rich ones that are already doing good.



## **Education**

Four participants believe Latinos need to be encouraged to continue their education, and it can counteract the risk factors of joining gangs. One stated, “We need to push our kids to educate themselves.” Another of the participants further stated:

We need to set high expectations for them; make them aware of different careers and create opportunities for them. Knowledge is power; people need to be educated. We need to encourage our youth to go to school. If they go on and find a purpose, they are more likely to remain on a positive track.

## **Other**

When the participants were sharing their experiences, a common theme that was not part of the research questions, emerged. Nine of the 14 participants discussed the rise of gangs within the gang dropout population. They were referring to those individuals who have decided to drop out of a gang. Within the population those who have dropped out, new gangs are being created.

One participant shared:

Now in the dropout intake, people come here still wanting to be part of something. Many individuals are here alone, don't have family who visit them, and they want to belong somewhere. So now there are little gangs being created within the dropout population. I don't understand why you would drop out to drop in. But each individual have different reasons. No one is benefiting by getting into something else, but you are validated by being in something.

A second participant shared:

Right now there's a rise of drop out gangs. Some just want to continue being part of a gang and want to continue being active but they were betrayed by their own people. A couple gangs are the intake, one of them being the new flowers.

A third participant agreed wanting to belong and protection was a main influence to the creation of dropout gangs:

Currently there are some gangs being created in the dropout intakes. The Squad is one of them. I guess many are creating gangs here because they feel they still need protection or they still feel the need to be part of something.

A fourth participant shared classification in jail is influencing the creation of dropout gangs:

For being Latinos they want to label us. When we are classified, they want to push us into choosing something, as if for being Mexican we must belong to a gang. A lot of people here, when they are first arrested, the question is either, "what gang you belong to?" or "are you active or a dropout?". Many feel like they have to choose; many start functioning with the northerners and then they might take it to the streets, since the outside is controlled by the inside. But others might not want to be involved in gangs at all and they think the only way is to classify themselves as dropouts. That can cause them a lot of issues because just for being in a dropout intake you make it to the Northerner Bad List. So now we have dropout gangs being created here in the dropout population for their protection.

One participant shares that the boredom in the jail housing for gang dropouts leads to creation of 'dropout gangs':

Many of us in jail want to change, but they just make things harder on us. It seems like they [classification] are against us [dropouts]. A lot of people here, in the dropout section, want to change. But for being a dropout, they have us locked down 23 hours a day, with nothing to keep us occupied and now we have gangs being created here in the drop out section. Probably they are being created in here for the same reason out there: they are bored, they are not occupied, and they are seeking for something to do.

### **Summary**

This chapter presented the results from the data collected from Latino current and former gang members. The most significant finding in regards to the recruitment process between the two groups was the difference in the technique of seduction.

Those who joined a gang in 2005, or prior, were more likely to be recruited by seduction in the form of embracement. Those who joined a gang after 2005 were more likely to be recruited by seduction in the form of glamorizing the gang life. In regards to the initiation process, there are more similarities than differences between the two groups. The most common form of initiation for both groups was by association and then demonstrating their loyalty. Both groups claim that as long as they affiliated with the gang, and demonstrated to have “heart” throughout their time in the gang, they were considered part of the gang. A major difference is that participants from group two were twice as likely to be blessed in by family than those from group one.

In regards to reasons why Latinos join gangs, all participants from both groups identified the environment as a major factor in their decision to join a gang. Both groups identified the neighborhood as the major contributor to their decision to join a gang. Both groups identified the high impact gang presence in the neighborhood, poverty, and lack of opportunities has in their decision to join a gang. The groups also shared the impact drugs in the neighborhood, and lack of parental supervision has in their decision to join a gang, but they differ in numbers. Half of the participants from group one identified drugs in the neighborhood as a factor to their choice to join a gang, versus all of the participants from group two identifying drugs in the neighborhood as an impact to them joining a gang. Most of the participants from group one, identified a lack of parental supervision as a factor to them joining a gang, versus half of the participants from group two identifying it as a factor.

A major difference is that gang members who joined a gang before or during 2005 were far more likely to join a gang for the “betterment of la raza” and searching acceptance, versus those who joined a gang after 2005, who seemed to join more for entertainment.

In regards to behaviors, violence and drugs played a huge role in the activities of the gangs from both groups. A major difference found, is that a majority of the participants describe a change in the gangs’ structure, where they claim guidelines are not being followed; they claim gangs are becoming disorganized, due to favoritism.

Exploring the responses as to what the participants perceived as values being promoted by the gangs, all the participants from both groups shared respect and loyalty were values that the gang tried to promote. The majority of the participants from both groups believed that respect and loyalty are getting lost in the gang. A major difference between both of the groups was the value of having the purpose of promoting La Raza’s advancement: half of the participants from group one shared that the gang promoted the purpose of helping the members advance; most of the participants from group two stated lacking the knowledge of what was the purpose of the gang.

A major finding in regards to what was needed to decrease the numbers of Latinos joining gangs, was that all participants identified micro level interventions as needs. Only about one fourth of the total participants identified macro level interventions needed, even though all of the participants identified macro level issues leading to them joining a gang.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

This qualitative research focused on the perceptions of Latinos who have experienced being in a Latino gang. The data were collected from two groups of Latino inmates: those who joined a gang in the year 2005 or prior, and those who joined a gang after the year 2005. The guiding research questions focused on the recruitment and initiation process, the reasons for joining the gang, and the behaviors and values within the gang. This research examined what is needed to address the issue of Latino youths joining gangs in disproportionately large numbers. The chapter is organized around the findings as they relate to existing literature, the implications of the findings for social work practice and policy, limitations to the research study, and recommendations for future research.

#### **Major Findings as they Relate to the Literature**

The first research question focused on the recruitment and initiation processes of Latino gangs. A major finding of this research was that the most common recruitment tactic being used by Latino gangs was seduction. This is in alignment with Carlie's (2002) identification of seduction as the primary form of recruiting members into a gang. According to this research, the practice was common both prior to 2005 and after. However, after 2005, the form of seduction being used has changed. In contrast to the practice in place over a decade ago, in which gang members were more likely to be seduced by being embraced and provided a sense of

family and belonging, Latino youth are now more likely to be seduced into a gang through the glamorization of the gang lifestyle. The findings suggest that the monetary and status gain are playing a major role in Latinos being seduced into a gang. The glamorization of the gang lifestyle was a technique identified previously, (Carlie, 2002); Latinos who reside in impoverished areas are more greatly impacted by the continual lack of opportunities, and therefore, probably more attracted to the glamorization and the possibility of making more money faster.

A major finding, in regards to the initiation process, was that a majority of Latino gangs do not have a specific initiation process anymore. Instead, Latino youth first need to associate with the gang and demonstrate that they have “heart”; that they are loyal to the gang and its members. One-fourth of the participants who joined a gang during or prior to 2005 went through a physical altercation in order to gain membership in the gang. None of the participants who joined a gang after 2005, needed to be jumped in or complete any specific task to be initiated as a gang member.

The finding that Latino youth no longer seem to take part in initiation ceremonies is inconsistent with the literature (Carlie, 2002; Blankenstein & Sandoval, 1998). What the literature has considered initiation rituals, such as thefts, drive-bys, and beatings (Carlie, 2002), are still activities that are expected of individuals involved in a gang, but these were not described in the current study as being part of an initiation process. This study identified that loyalty seems to be tested throughout gang members’ active years, instead of being based of one job done solely when they

are being initiated. It also needs to be noted that all the past studies discussed here were conducted prior to 2005, which is also consistent with the findings of this research, where some participants who joined prior to 2005 did share being involved in an initiation ceremony. What might have contributed to the difference between the two groups is that it appears that, after 2005 fewer initiation ceremonies are taking place because more Latinos are being 'blessed' into the gang by family members. One-fourth of those who joined during or prior to 2005, were blessed in by family members, versus two-thirds of those who joined after 2005.

The second research question focused on the reasons that contribute to Latino youth joining gangs. A major finding with regard to why Latinos join gangs is that the environment continues to be the greatest influencer in this decision. Both groups identified the neighborhood as a major factor in their decision to join a gang. Residing in neighborhoods with drugs, gangs, and poverty, increased the chances of the youth, from the community, joining a gang. Although both groups described the environment as playing a major role in their decision to join a gang, there were slight differences in how much each factor of the environment played a role. Both groups agreed with the high impact that neighborhood gang activity, poverty, and lack of opportunities had on their choice to join a gang. Both groups also identified lack of supervision and drugs in the neighborhood as influencing factors. However, the two groups differed in the numbers. Of those who joined a gang prior to 2005, 87% reported a lack of parental supervision while 50% of those who joined a gang after 2005 identified it as a major factor. From the first group, 50% of the participants

identified drugs in the neighborhood as a factor, versus 100% of the participants from the second group cited drugs as a major factor. Based on the responses of the participants, there appears to be an increase in the role drugs play in influencing Latinos to join gangs. The findings are consistent with the literature, which recognizes the environment as a possible risk factor or a protective factor, depending on the given neighborhood. Low-income neighborhoods, neighborhoods with gang activity, neighborhoods with drugs, and neighborhoods with high violence all greatly increase the chances of Latinos joining a gang (Fernandez, 2011; Persily, 1998; Vigil, 1988). Also, it seems that these neighborhood or macro level factors are not really being addressed through practice and policy efforts as youth who joined gangs before 2005 as well as during or after 2005 echoed the same concerns about the neighborhood. Additionally, past research from 1988 as well as 2011 have emphasized the same roles played by the environment in Latino youth joining gangs.

A second major finding with regard to the reason for joining was that those who joined a gang in 2005 or prior were more likely to join for the “betterment of la raza” or in search of acceptance, while those who joined a gang after 2005 were more likely to do so for entertainment. The literature has identified both of these as factors contributing to Latinos joining gangs. The literature identifies the “betterment of la raza” as the primary reason for the creation of Latino prison gangs, specifically the Nuestra Familia gang (Skarbek, 2014). Previous studies have also identified the need for Latinos to unite to advance themselves as a reason for the creation of Latino street gangs, and as a reason for Latino youths to join a gang (Sasone, 2011). The need to



belong and be accepted has been found to be a major factor in a variety of studies (Vigil, 1988; Sasone, 2011). This factor further exemplifies the oppressed environments Latino youth, who join gangs, live in and the discrimination, judgments, and isolation they face that almost pushes them to join gangs. If macro level factors are not addressed in conjunction with the micro and mezzo foci, the discrimination that Latinos face can continue influencing them to join a gang.

Joining a gang for entertainment has also been identified by various studies (Carlie, 2002; Sasone, 2011), and it has led to the implementation of more extracurricular activities in impoverished areas. However, Latinos need to play a vital role in the decision-making about the programs and activities implemented, as the problem persists in part because Latinos join gangs seeking entertainment as an effort to meet some unmet needs, which these activities might not be fulfilling.

The third research question focused on the behaviors and values found in Latino gangs and if they have changed over time. A major behavior identified by the participants in this study as being germane to gang membership has been violence and activities involving drugs, either dealing them or consuming them. Both groups of participants cited the major role violence played when they were active in a gang and several of them mentioned an increase in violence in gangs, which is consistent with the literature. According to Axelrod (2015), despite an overall decrease in violence in the United States, gang violence is increasing. Howell from the National Gang Center explains, “In the past five years we’ve seen an 8% increase in number of gangs, an 11% increase in members and a 23% increase in gang-related homicides”

(as cited in Axelrod, 2015). The participants believe the increase in violence is in part, due to more guns on the streets, more distinct drug use among the Latino youth, and disorganization within gang structures.

Participants also shared that there is more violence related to gangs inside jails and prisons. One member specifically stated that AB109 has brought more violence into the jail setting, because those in prisons have brought a more violent structure into county jails. This finding is consistent with literature claiming that AB109 has brought more violence to county jails for reasons such as overcrowding, but also because inmates from prison are more sophisticated and they brought gang ties and violence in the jail settings (Wadsworth 2014). County of Santa Clara in California, has been keeping track of violence in their facilities. Their reports (as cited in Wadsworth 2014) indicate an increase in gang members in the institution, and a 281% increase in violent gang related assaults from 2011 to 2013, after the AB109 reform.

The third research question found that the values that are promoted within the gang seem to have stayed consistent over time. Both groups equally stated that Latino gangs tried to promote loyalty and respect for each other and for the gang. This finding is congruent with Kinnear's (2009) study, which acknowledges that promotion of respect and loyalty is valued in Latino gangs. However, this research found that the respect and loyalty claimed in Latino gangs are no longer real.

A major difference in the perceived values promoted between the two groups, was that participants from group 1 were more likely to have joined a gang with the

perception that the gang promoted a positive purpose, versus those who joined the gang after 2005, who were unaware of any purpose of the gang. The responses provided by those who joined a gang over a decade ago, are consistent with the existing research. Looking at the history of Latino gangs, many started as a form of unity, socialization, and protection, with the purpose of advancing Latino power, the community, and its members (Hoover, 1999). The results of this study imply that in the last decade Latino gangs possibly shifted their focus away from promoting a purpose and unity, possibly leading to the decrease of respect and loyalty perceived from most of the participants. It is also possible that the perception that purpose, respect and loyalty are no longer part of the Latino gang culture might be influenced by the participants' biases, since the majority are ex-gang members, and thus their view of the gang might be skewed to the negative side.

In regard to the fourth research question, both groups identified multiple approaches to address the issue of Latinos joining gangs. Both groups focused on micro level approaches, and the most common answer was to educate parents on how to discipline and monitor their children. Even though both groups recognized macro level factors, such as poverty and discrimination, in their decision to join gangs, when asked about possible solutions, they focused on what their parents could have done differently to change the outcome. As Freire (2012) theorizes, Latinos, as the oppressed, are submerged in reality, and are unable to clearly perceive the self-image they have internalized. As Freire further states, "Self-deception is another characteristic of the oppressed, which derives from their internalization of the opinion

of the oppressors have of them” (p.63). Even though there are macro level concerns that need to be addressed, the answer for several of the participants was to bring the responsibility back home. A few of the participants did recognize the need to address and battle bigger issues, such as addiction, poverty, and discrimination.

Other common recommendations were the need to provide engaging extracurricular activities, engage youth in religion, and encourage former gang members to share their experiences. Having more options available in the community, such as extracurricular activities and employment, have demonstrated a decrease in the chances of youth joining gangs (Spergel, 2007). In Illinois, having former gang members interact with communities, through the Cure Violence Health Model, have demonstrated great success in decreasing violence (Webster et al., 2012).

### **Implications for Social Practice and Policy**

This research recognizes several implications for social work practice. Firstly, with research continuing to demonstrate that environment as the main influencing factor in Latinos joining gangs, a healthier environment needs to be provided to Latino youth. As Malec, 2003, states, “Gang delinquent behavior is a response to the structural violence of the society in which they live.” The violence Latinos face from society, and the injustices and the risk factors they are exposed to increases their probability of joining a gang. Poverty, drugs, violence, lack of opportunities and discrimination are issues that need to be addressed in order to tackle the issue of increasing Latino youth gang membership. Social workers can play a vital role in guiding individuals from oppressed communities to reflect, voice their concerns, and

collaborate to take action to combat the issues that are occurring in their communities. Strong community development and social action need to be facilitated by social workers working with communities and grassroots organizations in order to strive towards social justice. As Freire's work implies, social workers need to dialogue and play the role of critical educators for change and liberation to happen. There are very limited programs that have demonstrated to be effective in helping Latinos refrain from joining gangs. The programs and policies created to battle gangs are created with none to very limited input of those who face the struggles leading to gang involvement. As Freire (2012) reinforces, "Leaders who do not act dialogically, but insist on imposing their decisions, do not organize the people--they manipulate them. They do not liberate, nor are they liberated: they oppress." (p. 178) Many of the approaches created to decrease gang involvement, have let this oppression continue, by further hurting this population by imposing on them the solutions, incarcerating them, alienating them, and further limiting their opportunities.

Latino youth as a population continue to be disadvantaged, which increases their likelihood of joining a gang. Social workers need to take a preventative approach by being aware of the risk factors and using interventions that are created in collaboration with individuals who are the experts on their lives and have lived through these struggles. Interventions, such as parenting classes, extracurricular activities, and education programs exist already, but without the input of the ones affected, the programs will demonstrate none to minimal success.

Additionally, the literature on effective practice, identifies the change factors that contribute to clients' success in making positive changes. The change factors identify that 40% of the change is driven by the clients' strengths, resources, environment and world view (Hubble, 1999). If the ones living under this circumstances are not included in program planning and implementation, social workers and social service agencies will continue practicing models that do not work or work minimally or even just promote compliance versus change.

There is also a need to create and expand more on the programs that have demonstrated success; programs and models like the ones developed by Homeboy Industries, which provide a positive environment, support, and opportunities to former gang members. Gangs exist currently to meet the needs of many Latino youth, and thus cannot simply be eliminated; they need to be replaced by something positive that satisfies the same needs, i.e. a place of belonging, economic opportunities, pride, and protection.

This research further identified the increase in the formation of dropout gangs, where those who have decided to leave a gang come together to create new gangs for their own safety and protection. This suggests that social workers need to continue providing services to Latinos after they decide to dropout from a gang, because being put back in the same environment leads to the same unmet needs. Again, until the environmental factors, such as the economic gap and discrimination, are addressed, the youth will continue to respond in familiar ways for dealing with these factors, which for them has been to join a gang, where they find unity, protection, and

alliance. These findings really implore for the need for macro level interventions and community building at its rudimentary level.

However, there are micro level interventions that can be addressed immediately, while macro level factors get figured out. These micro level interventions do need to take place with Latino youth and former Latino gang members as alliances. One is the need for more outreach to the Latino communities and parents of Latino youth. Social workers can play the role of critical educators, and support parents to become a protective factor. Social workers can also outreach to schools in disadvantaged communities and train educators on how their positive interactions and their encouragement to continue getting an education can assist in the prevention of Latino youth joining gangs. Schools can also partner with social workers and Latino youth to develop programs that can help address the needs for unity, entertainment, and purpose that youth have identified as missing in their lives. Latino youth also need economic opportunities; more employment needs to be available in these communities.

This research calls for changes in policy. The war on drugs, crime, and terror target the marginalized communities. This 'war' has greatly target gangs. Gang activity is currently being fought through criminalization of gang behavior. All participants in the study were incarcerated. However, they either still associated with a gang inside, or were creating their own gangs. This raises questions about the goals of incarceration, the war on crime, and their effectiveness. Latino youth are being incarcerated and their behavior is being addressed with approaches such as gang

enhancements and gang injunctions. While the researcher was attempting to recruit participants for the research, several claimed they were not part of a gang, but wanted to share their concerns about gang enhancements. Several inmates shared that gang enhancement constitute an “attack against Latino youth.” They claimed that they were given gang enhancement solely for being in a certain part of the neighborhood, for wearing certain colors, or for having a family member or a friend in a gang. Thus, policy changes need to occur where Latinos are not criminalized for no fault of their own. Gang enhancements and gang injunctions are not preventative measures. As Delgado and Schiff (2007) state, “We cannot arrest our way out of this problem.”

Instead of solely using a criminal approach when dealing with gangs, policies need to be utilized to combat the root problems. A clear major factor influencing the creation of Latino gangs, is the economic disparity that exists. There is the need for macroeconomic policies to focus on the income distribution. There is also the need for human capital policies, which focus on the improvement of skills and knowledge of those who are the most disadvantaged, through delivering better education and training in the impoverished communities (Jargowsky, 1997). There is further need for regulation of economic and housing policies, which are contributing to discrimination and segregation. Policies further need to focus on being able to bring jobs to low-income communities. As research has demonstrated, if Latino youth do not have ways to make money, and continue being discriminated against, they are more likely to be driven towards joining a gang.



### **Limitations of the Study**

A major limitation of this study was the recruitment of potential participants; recruitment proved difficult. In the jail setting, individuals were constantly being released or transferred to prison. Additionally, some of the individuals felt hesitant about sharing their experiences while they were incarcerated. Also, as part of the guidelines of the Latino prison gangs, active gang members are not allowed to speak to mental health or other staff while incarcerated, so it greatly narrowed the population and the researcher could only interview youth who had dropped out of gangs.

The researcher had a list of those classified as gang dropouts. However, several of those classified as dropouts reported not being involved with gangs at all. A few claimed they were asked if they were “active” or “dropouts”, and they reported being dropouts because they did not want to be involved with gang activity but that they had actually never belonged to a gang. Others claimed they were charged with gang enhancement, charges that they claimed were false, and that they were hoping being classified as a gang dropout would help with their case. Additionally, being incarcerated, the participants might not have been completely honest with their answers, for fear of sanctions.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

There is very limited research on the topic of Latino gangs, particularly with regard to changes that have occurred in the last decade and the contributing factors for the increase in Latino gangs; therefore, there are several implications for future

research. During this research, the topic of the rise of gangs within the Latino gang dropout population came up. Participants who have dropped out of gangs now fear for their own safety and the protection of their family and friends. Some also continue to seek a place of belonging, especially those who were removed. Therefore, Latino gang dropouts are forming their own gangs. Thus, the issue of new gangs being created by those who are attempting to leave the gang life behind needs to be further studied. The rise of gang creation is a new area that needs to be explored.

Grounded theory can be a way to approach this topic, in which new patterns are identified, comparisons are made, and hypotheses are created. Grounded theory will allow the researcher to do multiple rounds of interviews and the responses from each interview would help in the development of the next set of questions. This would allow the researcher to deconstruct some of the dominant paradigm responses shared by the participants and see what influenced their responses. For example, while they talked extensively about the role of the macro environment, the recommendations went to the micro level of parental supervision. A grounded theory approach would allow the researcher to go back and explore questions around why parental supervision was needed to begin with for 15-17-year-old youth. It could lead to the recognition that the impoverished and unsafe environment led to the need of supervision. It might also shed light on the fact that economic disparity is why the supervision is not occurring. Many Latino parents do recognize the importance of parental involvement, however when their basic needs are not being met, this does not become a priority.

Several participants mentioned that incarceration played a role in their decision to join a gang; the dynamics within institutions and their effect on Latinos is a topic of exploration that can raise awareness about how to combat gang membership among youth who have been incarcerated. Case studies with rich qualitative data can point to the direction of clarifying what role incarceration is playing in Latino youths' lives.

A majority of the participants shared that former gang members have much to contribute to their communities and that youth tend to listen to those who have previously been incarcerated. The impact of programs that allow former gang members reaching out to Latino youth should be further studied to evaluate their effectiveness. Programs with this approach exist already, but their effectiveness is unclear. One program in Illinois works with former gang members, and it has proven success, but it also has a different model. There are several other programs that exist, but their effectiveness is unclear. This researcher recommends for future research to collaborate with programs with this approach and possibly use a static-group comparison design. This design has only a posttest comparing two groups in which only one of the groups received the intervention.

It was hard to recruit participants, and this researcher only focused on an incarcerated population. One of the research methodologies that seem to be the best fit with oppressed populations is participatory action research. This approach is recommended to be used in the future, as it is more appropriate in the attempt to explore this topic from an anti-oppressive paradigm of research. Participatory action

research focuses on working with oppressed communities and emphasizes the need for collaboration between the participants and researcher. This research stresses the importance of all stakeholders taking the role of co-researchers throughout the research process. The purpose of the research is to explore and develop knowledge, to serve as an education opportunity, provide an opportunity for reflection, and to promote action (Rubin & Babbie, 2014). This approach takes into consideration what Freire, 2012, described as necessary in order for change to occur (p. 69):

Teachers and students (leadership and people), co-intent on reality, are both Subjects, not only in the task of unveiling that reality, and thereby coming to know it critically, but in the task of re-creating that knowledge. As they attain this knowledge of reality through common reflection and action, they discover themselves as its permanent re-creators.

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## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

## INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

**Interview questions for participants who joined a gang within the last decade:**

Remember you can skip any question you do not feel comfortable or safe answering:

1. Can you share some of your background?
  - Participant's education level?
  - Who did you grow up? How involved were your parents in your life?
  - How many siblings? Were they active gang members?
  - In what neighborhood did you grow up?
  - Who were your role models growing up? Describe them.
2. Can you tell me what being part of a gang means to you?
3. When and how did you become aware of the existence of gangs?
4. What influenced your decision to join a gang? What role did your environment play-where you lived, school, friends etc...
5. What is the current recruitment process? What was the recruitment process you went through?
6. What are the rules/guidelines/codes that you have as members of a gang?
7. What values do you consider are part of your gang?
8. What behaviors do you find yourself involved in when acting within the gang?
9. What do you think is influencing Latino youth today to join gangs?

**Interview questions for participants who joined a gang over a decade ago:**

Remember you can skip any question you do not feel comfortable or safe answering:

1. Can you share some of your background?
  - Participant's education level?
  - Who did you grow up? How involved were your parents in your life?
  - How many siblings? Were they active gang members?
  - In what neighborhood did you grow up?
  - Who were your role models growing up? Describe them.
2. Can you tell me what being part of a gang means to you?
3. When and how did you become aware of the existence of gangs?
4. What influenced your decision to join a gang? What role did your environment play-where you lived, school, friends etc...
5. What is the current recruitment process? What was the recruitment process you went through?
6. What are the rules/guidelines/codes that you have as members of a gang?
7. What values do you consider are part of your gang?
8. What behaviors do you find yourself involved in when acting within the gang?
9. What do you think is influencing Latino youth today to join gangs?
10. Can you identify any differences between the incoming gang members vs. those who joined over a decade ago?
  - The reasons why they join?
  - The recruitment process?



- Their way of behaving and/or thinking?

**Questions for participants who have dropped out of a gang:**

Remember you can skip any question you do not feel comfortable or safe answering:

1. Can you share some of your background?
  - Participant's education level?
  - Who did you grow up? How involved were your parents in your life?
  - How many siblings? Were they active gang members?
  - In what neighborhood did you grow up?
  - Who were your role models growing up? Describe them.
2. Can you tell me what being part of a gang means to you?
3. When and how did you become aware of the existence of gangs?
4. What influenced your decision to join a gang? What role did your environment play-where you lived, school, friends etc...
5. What is the current recruitment process? What was the recruitment process you went through?
6. What are the rules/guidelines/codes that you had as members of a gang?
7. What values do you consider were part of your gang?
8. What behaviors did you find yourself involved in when acting within the gang?
9. What influenced your decision to leave the gang? What/who helped you in the process?
10. What do you think is influencing Latino youth today to join gangs?

11. What do you think is needed order to address the increase in gang membership that is occurring? Is there a role social workers can play? If so, what is it?
12. *Question only for those who joined over a decade ago:* Can you identify any differences between the incoming gang members vs. those who joined over a decade ago?
- The reasons why they join?
  - The recruitment process?
  - Their way of behaving and/or thinking?

## APPENDIX B

### INFORMED CONSENT

#### Informed Consent

I, Maria Gamino, am a Masters student in the Master of Social Work Program at California State University, Stanislaus and am doing a research study for my Master's thesis. You are being asked to participate in a study with the purpose of learning about your life experiences as a Latino gang member. If you decide to volunteer you will be asked a series of questions, which are attached, with the purpose of encouraging you to discuss your experiences as thoroughly as you find fit for the interview. Interviews are expected to be between one to two hours in length. Your willingness to participate or not, will not be shared with the correctional facility staff.

You and others may benefit by utilizing your life experiences as a way to serve the Latino community. The information collected will be protected from all inappropriate disclosure under the law. What you share will be kept confidential, however, if you share that you have plans on hurting yourself or others, I will have to report to the facility. I will take notes to accurately capture your responses, with your permission. When taking notes, I will connect your responses with a number, and not with your name. All data collected will be maintained for three years after the completion of the study when all notes and transcripts will be shredded. When I report the findings of the study I will not mention any identifying information, such as your names or connect your name to your response.

There is no cost to you beyond the time and effort required to complete the procedure described above. Your participation is voluntary. Your consent to participate will not provide you with any additional benefits or incentives, and will not be used as recommendation for probation nor parole. If you decide not to participate in this study or choose to withdraw at any time, there will be no penalty. You can also choose to not answer any question you do not want to answer. If you agree to participate, please indicate by signing below.

If you have any questions about this research project please contact the researcher, me, by putting in a sick call requesting to speak to Maria Gamino, or by sending an email to mariagamino2012@gmail.com. You can also request to speak to my thesis chair, Shradha Tibrewal, at (209) 667- 3951. If you have any questions regarding your rights and participation as a research subject, please contact Campus Compliance by phone (209) 667-3794 or by writing University Institutional Review Board California State University Stanislaus One University Circle Turlock, California 95382.

If you experience any discomfort as a result of participating in this interview and talking about your personal experiences, you can request counseling services in the correctional free of charge. If you are going to be released soon, you can contact

Friends Outside at (209) 955- 0701. Thank you for considering to participate in this study. Your time and input is appreciated.

By signing below, you consent to participate. Additionally, you acknowledge the receipt of the interview questions. You also acknowledge having reviewed the consent form with the researcher, and that you were allotted time to ask any questions you have.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_