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Motivations to Return to a Gang After Severe Physical Victimization

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Abstract

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Gang violence is a social concern because of the risks of victimization among gang members and their communities. Many gang members have been victims of gang violence, and some choose to remain involved with their gang even after being victimized. Researchers have explored why people join gangs, but less is known regarding the gang–victimization link, which is the focus of this study. Social bond theory guided the study's research question on the motivation of gang members to rejoin their gang after severe physical victimization. A multiple case study design was employed with a purposeful sample of six English-speaking men, ages 20–50 years, who identified as current or former gang members and who experienced severe physical victimization in the gang. Semistructured interviews were conducted to gain a better understanding of study participants' motivation for returning to their gangs after severe physical victimization. Thematic content analysis was employed to identify patterns and emerging themes in the data. Key findings were that behaviors and beliefs of gang violence victims are similar to those of domestic violence victims, and the importance of the bond among members is greater than the importance of the victimization. The study findings and implications are far reaching as this knowledge can serve as the staging point for interventions by social work practitioners, policy makers, and activists as they seek to develop effective programs for gang members. Study results contribute to positive social change by providing a better understanding of gang members' thinking and motivation and helping to inform efforts to discourage gang members from returning to gang life.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Gang membership is increasing across the United States, with an estimated

33,000 violent street gangs, motorcycle gangs, and prison gangs leading to about

1,400,000 members criminally active in the United States and Puerto Rico (Federal

Bureau of Investigation [FBI], 2015). Gangs differ in composition and focus, but they all

have similar elements: three or more members, typical age range of 12–24 years, and a

shared identity, often linked to a name and other symbols (U.S. Department of Justice

[DOJ], n.d.). In addition, members view themselves as a gang, and others recognize them

as a gang. There is also some permanence and a degree of organization as well as an

elevated level of criminal activity (National Gang Center, 2011).

Many factors can contribute to gang involvement, including unemployment,

poverty, social isolation, lack of parental supervision, problems at school, and negative

peer networks (Gangfree.org, 2008). Protection from violence is another key motivation

for joining a gang, but some research has shown that gang members are more likely to

suffer physical victimization at the hands of other gang members than nonmembers

(Kerig, Chaplo, Bennett, & Modrowski, 2016; Melde & Esbensen, 2013; Wu & Pyrooz,

2015). Thus, many gang members have themselves been victims of gang violence, but

many of these gang members continue their involvement after recovering from their

injuries (Decker, Melde, & Pyrooz, 2013; Fox, 2013; Pyrooz & Decker, 2011). Returning

to a gang even after being injured has negative implications for these victims as it can

affect their self-esteem and their relationships with their families and others they care

about outside of the gang. It can also lead to further personal risk. The implications of returning to a gang after victimization do not stop with the individual and the individual's surroundings; they also affect society in terms of increased costs related to law enforcement and medical treatment (Sam Houston State University, 2014).

In Chapter 1, I provide an overview of the study. I begin with a brief examination of the history of gang membership research, followed with a problem statement and a statement of purpose. I next discuss theoretical issues and the theoretical framework for this study, and I present the research questions. This is followed by a summary of this study's methodology, including research design, assumptions, scope, and limitations. I conclude with a discussion of the study's academic and social significance.

Background

Various aspects of gangs and gang membership have been well researched. A key focus of this research has been on the risk factors for joining a gang. Age is a leading risk factor. Adolescents are more likely to be involved in gangs than are young adults or adults (Pyrooz, 2014). The life course theory is often applied to gang membership. This theory holds that adolescents and young adults are more likely to engage in criminal or deviant activity (Pyrooz, 2014). Yet, although experts disagree with age range for gang membership, some suggesting that it peaks at 14–15 years of age, others stating 15–19 years of age (Baldwin & Zeira, 2017). Adolescents are not the only gang members, and some adults willingly join gangs (Peterson, Taylor, & Esbensen, 2004; Pyrooz, 2014; Pyrooz & Decker, 2011).

Adolescents who feel isolated from family and other sources of socialization may view gang membership as having a surrogate family. On the other hand, having family members involved in gangs can also lead to an increased likelihood of gang membership (Berg & DeLisi, 2006; DeLisi, Spruill, & Peters, 2013). This underscores the role of family and others in supporting individual's decision to join and remain in the gang. Furthermore, it suggests that the decision to return to one's gang after violence leading to victimization may result from the individual's social support as centered in the gang (Decker & Van Winkle, 1996). Social bond theory, which this ongoing involvement also reflects, suggests that social bonds are the fabric that holds gangs together (Melde & Esbensen, 2013; Peterson et al., 2004; Wu & Pyrooz, 2015). Additionally, lacking bonds with one's family can also strongly influence gang membership (Melde & Ebsensen, 2013; Peterson et al., 2004; Wu & Pyrooz, 2015). Peterson et al. (2004) also noted that gang members are more likely to join a gang out of a deficiency in family bonding as opposed to being motivated to find more safety with a gang.

The desire for protection from gang violence is another commonly cited reason for gang membership. Some people who live in areas where gang activity is prevalent may feel that joining a gang will protect them from other gangs (Kerig et al., 2016). However, there is little evidence to support this belief. Researchers have found that gang members are more likely to be the victims of gang violence than are nonmembers (Jacques & Rennison, 2013; Katz, Webb, Fox, & Shaffer, 2011; Kerig et al., 2016). Thus, gangs are not only harmful to society at large, with gang membership correlated with increased likelihood of criminal activity (Shap, 2014), but gang membership can cause

harm to members. Regardless, many gang members who suffer physical violence as a result of their gang affiliation ultimately return to the gang (Fox, 2013; Jacques & Rennison, 2013; Katz et al., 2011).

The link between gang membership and gang victimization is not well understood. As such, the link between gang violence and victimization needs further exploration (Gilman, Howell, Hipwell, & Stepp, 2016). Questions regarding the link between gang violence and victimization also relate to a larger scholarly discussion on gang membership and efforts to dissuade youth from joining gangs (Fox, 2013; Jacques & Rennison, 2013; Katz et al., 2011). I further explore this issue in Chapter 2.

Interventions that prevent adolescents from joining gangs have been the focus of some research (Decker & Pyrooz, 2015), but little attention has been paid to investigating the effectiveness of interventions meant to convince gang members to leave their gangs. While evaluating the effectiveness of such interventions was not a focus in this study, examining the reasons for gang members choosing to stay with their gangs should result in meaningful contributions to scholarly dialogue on this issue and contribute to discussions on the relationship between victimization and gang membership.

Also of issue is a lack of validity in existing research on the topic of gang membership (Fox, 2013). Prior researchers have taken macrolevel approaches and focused on sociocultural and organizational reasons of gang membership and gang victimization in their separate realms (Decker et al., 2012). In the present study, I explored the link between gang membership and gang victimization by interviewing former and current gang members about their experiences in their gangs. Validity was

addressed by the research design I employed and was monitored throughout for quality. Using thematic techniques in analyzing multiple case studies allowed for data validity and for strengthening findings (Maxwell, 2013; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013).

Problem Statement

The specific problem that I address in my project is that gang membership persists for many gang members even after they have been victimized by other gang members, though little is known about their motivation for doing so. As previously noted, returning to a gang even after being severely injured has negative implications for these victims as it can affect their self-esteem, their relationships with family members who are not in gangs, and their relationships with others they may care about outside of the gang. It can also lead to further personal risk. The implications of returning to a gang after being victimized do not stop with the individual and the individual's surroundings; they also affect society, and they perpetuate the existence of gangs in general (Centers for Disease Control & Prevention [CDC], 2012; U.S. Department of Justice, 2016).

While there are some ideas about the affiliations that gang members have with their gangs, the close social bond after victimization has yet to be explored. According to Hirschi's (1969a) social bond theory, the social norms people encounter in society play a large role in determining what they consider acceptable behavior. Social bond theory includes attachment to family, friend, or the community; commitment to an individual's future, career, success, or personal goals; involvement with activities, organizations, religious groups and social clubs; and personal beliefs such as honesty, morality, and patriotism (Siegel, 2010). The bonds that gang membership present may be a key reason

why some members return to their gangs after being victimized, but there may be other reasons that have not yet been explored. Knowing what they are could lead to viable interventions for gang members who have been victimized.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore the experiences of a select sample of gang members to gain a better understanding of their motivation for returning to their gangs after severe physical victimization. For this study's purpose, gang membership was loosely defined as an individual's identification as a gang member (Z. Yin, Valdez, Mata, & Kaplan, 2016), while victimization as a result of gang membership was defined as physical victimization and or assault that participants identify as having resulted from their gang participation (Kerig et al., 2016). A fuller understanding of why gang members return to their gangs after they have been assaulted may lead to better interventions to prevent gang membership.

Research Question

I developed the following research question to guide the exploration of the perspectives and motivations of gang members who return to their gangs after suffering severe physical victimization. The research question was: what motivates gang members to rejoin their gang after severe physical victimization?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical underpinnings for this study are in social bond theory (Hirschi, 1969b). Social bond theory, also known as social control theory, is a theory of human development and social norms (Hirschi, 1969b). Hirschi (1969b) first proposed Social

bond theory to explain how individuals develop their notions of what is socially acceptable. In the social bond model of human development, socialization and social context play an important role in determining what an individual considers acceptable or unacceptable (Zuberi, Patterson, & Stewart, 2015). Thus, in this model, it is the social norms and expectations individuals are socialized with or have encountered that predominantly determine what actions they are willing to take. Under normal socialization, interpersonal crimes have strongly negative associations (Zuberi et al., 2015). When individuals have social bonds to other individuals, they receive negative feedback for socially inappropriate actions, and this serves as a strong deterrent to unacceptable activities, especially if the social bonds reflect dependencies on others (Hirschi, 1969a).

However, individuals such as gang members may become cut off from these social bonds, thus creating an incentive for criminal activity as they are no longer bound to individuals who would disapprove or censure them for participating in such socially unacceptable activities (Zuberi et al., 2015). Many gang members turn to gangs because they already face social isolation (Shap, 2014), and the gang provides a new social niche. However, the social norms in this niche are different. As such, the same social bonds that normally inhibit criminal activity may instead encourage it due to gang members expressing disapproval of other members' unwillingness to participate in such activities. Thus, social bond theory is an appropriate theoretical framework for understanding the reasons why gang members return to their gangs even after suffering severe physical victimization. As such, social bond theory serves as a powerful lens for interpreting gang

members' beliefs, perceptions, expectations, and actions. I further address this theory in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

This was a qualitative study. Qualitative research is descriptive and appropriate for exploring topics that are either not fully developed in existing research (Lee, 2014) or are issues that may be difficult to quantify. Not only are issues related to why individuals might choose to rejoin gangs after victimization difficult to quantify, there has been little research on this topic or on how gang members might be convinced to leave their gangs (Kinnear, 2010). As such, both topics were well-suited to an exploratory qualitative study. By contrast, quantitative studies use well-established concepts and large sample sizes to create statistical power and examine the relationships between variables (Lee, 2014).

The specific research design was multiple case study. Case study research allows a researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of phenomena deeply rooted in their contexts (Baxter & Jack, 2008), and existing research has demonstrated that issues of gang membership are often highly contextual (e.g., Pyrooz, 2014). A multiple case study allows the researcher to compare results not only in any of the specific cases considered but also across cases, providing a greater depth of analysis in situations where multiple cases might be rooted in differing contexts (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Other qualitative approaches such as grounded theory and phenomenology were deemed less appropriate as grounded theory works best without an established theoretical landscape (Allan, 2003) and phenomenology is concerned more with the commonalities in the participants'

experiences (Abebrese, 2014) than on trying to create a more general understanding of the situation.

The problem under study was gang members who return to their gangs even after suffering severe physical victimization when the victimization is related to gang membership. The inclusion criteria for participation in this study were English-speaking men ages 20–50 years who identify as current or ex-gang members and who have experienced severe physical victimization by other gang members. The present study was best served by targeting male gang members ages 20–50 years and by using a small sample size that allowed me to investigate more closely into the nature of criminal victimization. Specifically, I sought information regarding the motivation to remain in a gang after victimization had occurred, and the views gang participants have of their experiences with criminal victimization in hindsight (Pyrooz, Moule, & Decker, 2014).

I collected data through semistructured interviews using an interview guide. Using qualitative structural analysis, I identified patterns in the data (Osborne, 2008; Saldaña, 2013). In Chapter 3, I detail this study's methodology and research design.

Definition of Terms

Terms used in this study included the following and are defined here for the reader's convenience:

Gangs are groups of repeatedly associating individuals with a clear internal leadership structure that claim control of territory in a community and/or engage in illegal activity (FBI, 2014).

Gang membership is a loosely defined concept that is often unclear even to gang members (Z. Yin et al., 2016). For the purposes of this study, gang membership is defined primarily by gang members' self-identifications.

Physical victimization is bodily harm suffered as a result of gang violence (Decker et al., 2013).

Social bonds are the social relationships between people that connect and bind them to the social norms of those groups to which they ate strongly connected (Hirschi, 1969a).

Violent victimization includes crimes such as murder, rape, sexual assault, robbery, and assault (Bureau of Justice Statistics [BJS], 2015). Similar to violent crimes, violent victimization can occur in different forms. The type of weapon the attacker used, the method of attacking, and the overall intentions of the attacker/gang member are all factors that affect violent victimization (BJS, 2015).

Severe violent victimization is defined as any type of physical attack that produced life-threatening injuries or life-altering injuries (long-standing physical disabilities) to the gang member (BJS, 2015).

Modes of attack, although there are different modes of attacking individuals (e.g., guns, stabbing, blunt-force weapons, fighting), this study's focus was on the attack's effects on the individual's life such as short- or long-term disabilities, near-death experience, and functionality.

Assumptions

The assumptions made in this study were primarily methodological. There is a common assumption in qualitative research that reality is a multifaceted, complex, and ever-changing construct, and thus that observable phenomena are not readily available for observation at leisure (Yazan, 2015). In addition, it was assumed that participants would answer the interview questions. Other assumptions included that gang members could provide meaningful insight into their own motivations and choices—without this assumption, the very basis of this study collapses—and that current or former gang members would come forward and communicate their experiences to me.

Scope and Delimitations

This study's specific scope was the question of why gang members who have suffered severe physical victimization return to their gangs. Given this, the reasons for gang participation by members who have not suffered physical victimization or why some gang members do not return to their gangs after suffering victimization were not included in this study. This study's specific focus was on gangs in a large city in the western United States. While this geographic area has many gangs and gang members, which speaks to a broad demographic range among the gangs and their members, study results may not be generalizable to gangs in general. I noted whether there was any reason to believe that the study results were specific to the area that was the focus of this study or whether they might be considered more general conclusions. The study was qualitative. Therefore, neither the representative statistical power of a quantitative study nor generalizability could be claimed.

Limitations

That the study population displays antisocial behavior (Bebbington et al., 2013; Brezina, Agnew, Cullen, & Wright, 2004; Gordon et al., 2004) could have been a significant limitation as it may have resulted in difficulties accessing the population as well as incomplete or inconsistent participant accounts. While this limitation was reported in other studies, it was not a limitation for the present study. The relatively small sample size may not have been adequate for fully exploring the themes and provide saturation. However, saturation was achieved through the depth of the interviews with each participant as they talked about their experiences as many of them addressed the same topics.

Significance

Results from this study provided meaningful academic, practical, and social benefits. Academically, study results helped to address a gap in the existing literature as further research on gang-related issues has been called for. In particular, study results helped to answer the call for research on how to prevent adolescents from rejoining gangs (Decker & Pyrooz, 2015) as rejoining a gang after severe physical victimization can be seen as choosing to join the gang a second time. Additionally, there have been multiple calls for better understanding of the relationship between gang membership and victimization (Fox, 2013) and of the gang–victimization link (Howell, 2010). I contributed to the literature by examining how being victimized by gang members influences members who have suffered such assaults and by exploring the converse relationship of gang membership and the increased likelihood of suffering physical

victimization from other gang members. My findings suggest a dangerous cycle in which victimization and gang membership influence one another if members remain in the gang after victimization.

Study findings may provide social workers and medical workers with a better understanding of the mentality and motivations of gang members. Understanding why gang members return to their gangs even after suffering victimization may facilitate better prevention by social workers and may help the medical personnel who treat these gang members better understand their patients and potentially help to discourage their return to gang life. Thus, study results may contribute to meaningful social change by decreasing the number of gang members and providing information that can be used to encourage gang members who have been victimized not to return to their gangs, where they may not only hurt others but also be at greater risk for further victimization themselves.

<p align="center">**Summary**</p>

While it is theorized that gang membership is a way to protect oneself from harm, there is little evidence to support this belief (Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Fox, 2013; Katz et al., 2011; Jacques & Rennison, 2013; Pyrooz et al., 2014; T. J. Taylor, Peterson, & Esbensen, 2010). Some findings point to gang members being more likely to suffer harm at the hands of other members. Still, suffering such victimization appears to have little effect on gang membership as a number of members return to their gangs even after being severely victimized.

I found little information about the gang–victimization connection, and even less is known about why gang members would return to their gangs even after being physically harmed. Thus, I examined why gang members rejoin their gangs even after suffering severe gang-related physical victimization. The study methodology was a multiple case study of current or former male gang members ages 20–50 years in a large city in the western United States. Chapter 1 was an overview of the problem driving the study, the study's purpose, and theoretical underpinning. I also discussed was the research question developed to guide the study; the study methodology; and assumptions, limitations, and delimitations. In Chapter 2, I review the existing literature on gang violence, theories on gang membership, and interventions targeted at reducing gang membership.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Research has shown that the probability of physical victimization is greater among gang members than individuals not affiliated with gangs (Pyrooz, 2011). Further, gang members who are physically victimized by other gang members will often return to their gangs (Katz et al., 2011; Pyrooz et al., 2014). While several researchers have demonstrated the rationale for gang members deciding to join a gang, including the belief that they are advancing personal safety (Pyrooz, 2014; Fox, 2013; Jacques & Rennison, 2013; Katz et al., 2011), I did not find any studies on the role of victimization on gang loyalty and the decision to rejoin a gang after victimization.

The present study's focus was on exploring the experiences of gang members to develop a better understanding of their motivation for returning to their gangs after suffering severe gang-related physical victimization. By better understanding their motives for doing so, formulating interventions that encourage them to make healthier lifestyle decisions may be possible. More specifically, I explored the beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions of current and former male gang members ages 20–50 years in a large city in the western United States who returned to the gang lifestyle after suffering severe physical victimization by other gang members.

Literature Search Strategy

The databases used for this literature review included PsycARTICLES, PsycBOOKS, PsycCRITIQUES, PsycEXTRA, and PsycINFO. I also used Academic Search Complete, ProQuest Central, ProQuest Criminal Justice, SAGE Premier, and ScienceDirect. I reviewed several criminal justice periodicals as well as dissertations in

the Walden University library. The following keywords were used in these searches: *gangs, gang violence, gang victimization, social bond theory, male gang members, push and pull factors, physical victimization, intervention,* and *criminal justice policy.* Eighty-five percent of the studies included in the following review were published from 2012 to 2016 while 15% were published earlier than 2012. In the next section, I discuss this study's theoretical foundation.

Theoretical Foundation

Social bond theory (Hirschi, 1969b) was the framework I used for analyzing gang members' experiences to better understand motivations for returning to their gangs after suffering gang-related physical victimization. Hirschi (1969b) developed social bond theory, also called social control theory. This theory holds that the socialization process and forming personal relationships are crucial elements of human development that inhibit socially unacceptable activities, including interpersonal crimes (Chriss, 2007; Zuberi et al., 2015). The theory also states that people recognize their dependence on others due to the force of empathy and the simple acceptance that criminal acts have negative consequences. Another tenet of social bond theory is that victims and criminals are both at risk since the criminal might also be a victim of a crime.

Social bond theory postulates that there are causes for criminal behavior and that policies can be enacted to discourage criminal behavior among social delinquents (Peterson et al., 2004). Social bond theory has four elements that could help in understanding reasons individuals engage in criminal behavior: *attachment*, *commitment*, *involvement*, and *beliefs*. Attachment sensitivity or concern about the opinion of others

could make individuals avoid negative behavior and crime (Hirschi, 1969a). Commitment is a person's investment in a conventional activity and the awareness that deviant behavior would risk this investment (Hirschi, 1969a). Involvement is time and energy devoted to activities that result in individuals having less time for delinquent behavior (Hirschi, 1969a). Beliefs are a society's common value system and whether an individual accepts this system.

Sociologists and criminologists use social bond theory to explain why some individuals might engage in certain criminal behaviors (Klemp-North, 2007; Zuberi et al., 2015). The theory emphasizes specific functions of the social bond that might be used to facilitate gang loyalty (Cardwell, 2013; Chriss, 2007). Therefore, it is appropriate to apply social bond theory to social issues such as gangs, gang membership, and gang violence.

Not having a solid emotional connection with important others can increase the likelihood of delinquency over time (Chui & Chan, 2012; Klemp-North, 2007). The basic premise that might be considered in applying social bond theory to social issues such as gangs, gang membership, and gang violence is that when gang members perceive that they have nothing to lose and are not safe in any situation, they tend to create the perception of safety in numbers. Gang members also ignore social rules of behavior because they believe they are outside of societal control (Sutherland, 1924).

Push and Pull Factors of Gangs

Many factors can influence an individual's decision to join a gang as well as the decision to leave a gang. In this section, I discuss research findings on gang membership.

I also discuss significant factors that can influence gang members' decisions to remain in their gang.

Socioeconomic Factors

Tapia (2012) explored the relationship between socioeconomic status and a gang member's arrest frequency. The traditional assumption is that gang members from a low socioeconomic background are more likely to get arrested, remain with their gang, and commit criminal acts. However, Tapia found that gang membership increases the frequency of a gang member's arrests regardless of socioeconomic background. Gang membership, regardless of the individual resources, may also increase the individual's involvement in deviant and sometimes criminal actions (Tapia, 2012). In contrast, Decker, Pyrooz, and Sweeten (2014) concluded that socioeconomic background was associated with young individuals' decisions to join a gang. Pyrooz (2014) found that affluence lessened the chance of gang membership

Ethnicity

E. R. Taylor (2012) explored the historical aspects of African American culture that led to the formation of street gangs. According to E. R. Taylor, the earliest accounts of African Americans in the United States do not provide a sound theoretical basis for explaining the rise of street gangs. However, the discrimination African Americans faced during the 17th century led to the formation of street gangs in the 20th century (Taylor, 2012). The historical aspects of street gangs in the African American community help to demonstrate what factors may influence an individual's decision to remain with a gang. Furthermore, Taylor (2012) posited that the historical legacy of discrimination may

provide an in-depth understanding of what influences the individual's initial decision to join a gang.

Aggression

Forster, Grisby, Unger, and Sussman (2015) explored the relationship between aggression, violence, and self-control in adolescent youth. In exploring previous research, Forster et al. argued that exposure to violence, deviant peers, and family processes can all influence an adolescent's behavior. According to Forster et al., an adolescent's decision to engage in deviant behaviors (including gang membership) may be attributed to social learning theory.

Forster et al. (2015) studied 164 seventh- and eighth-grade students at a Los Angeles school. Participants were administered a survey with questions regarding their social self-control, family members' involvement in a gang, peer gang membership, previous exposure to violence, and interpersonal aggression. The researchers used a Likert-type scale to assess the extent to which each participant agreed or disagreed with a question. Approximately 45% of the participants acknowledged having family members with gang affiliations (Forster et al., 2015). Forty-three percent reported having friends in a gang. Regarding violence, 46% of study participants reported having a family member or friend who had been attacked. Twenty percent reported having witnessed gun violence.

Approximately 32% of students reported they feared neighborhood violence, and 23% reported hiding due to gun activity in their community (Forster et al., 2015). Moreover, the exposure to community violence, or fear of being victimized, increased aggression in adolescents. Forster et al.'s (2015) results further demonstrated that

multiple factors influence aggression in adolescents and that higher aggression levels in adolescents were positively correlated with an increased likelihood of committing deviant acts in the future. Research by Ang, Huan, Chan, Cheong, and Leaw (2015) supported Forster et al.'s conclusions. In a sample of 1,027 Singaporean adolescents, Ang et al. found that delinquency, proactive aggression, and behavioral school engagement were risk factors for youth gang membership.

Age

Tigri, Reid, and Turner (2015) explored the relationship between gang membership and carrying a gun. They also found a relationship between age and gang membership. All data used in Tigri et al.'s study were collected through the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 (NLSY97). Of the 8,984 participants, approximately 2,473 identified as African American or Hispanic (Tigri et al., 2015). All participants in the sample were asked if they had carried a gun over the past year and the responses varied. Tigri et al. also found that younger adolescents were more likely to report being in a gang. In contrast, older adolescents (up to age 18 years) were less likely to report being in a gang. These findings suggest that age may be a strong factor in influencing an individual's decision to join a gang, which in turn influences the likelihood that the individual carries a gun (Tigri et al., 2015).

Pyrooz (2014) found that gang membership peaked between ages 14 to 15 years. As individuals aged, fewer individuals reported being involved in a gang. This finding supports the life course paradigm in suggesting that deviant behaviors are more common in adolescents and young adults. In exploring the role of demographics in an individual's

choice to join or exit a gang, Pyrooz had mixed findings. Although Pyrooz determined that many gang members leave their gangs as they age, the study results also indicated that some adults willingly enter a gang. This finding conflicted with previous research suggesting that adolescents are more likely to engage in deviant acts. Despite this finding, Pyrooz demonstrated that many adolescents do follow the life course paradigm.

Cohesion

The trust developed between gang members often leads gang members to exhibit a strong level of cohesion. Fagan (1989) argued that this level of cohesion and trust may be a necessary part of survival for gang members. Densley, Cai, and Hilal (2014) also concluded that trust and loyalty are important factors in gangs.

According to Fagan (1989), gang members often engage in illicit activities such as dealing drugs. Because of these activities, rival gangs and law enforcement personnel often target gang members. Although threats from each faction pose a different risk to gang members (incarceration or violence), both can potentially eliminate the gang. From this perspective, cohesion is a critical element in ensuring a gang's long-term survival.

Cohesion is an important element in ensuring a gang's long-term functionality, and it can also play a role in fulfilling the gang members' needs. According to Sutherland (1974), like other professional criminals, gang members "find some consolation in the social life of [their] own group but must conceal [their] behaviors from the larger society" (p. 231). From this perspective, Sutherland argued that a gang member can be his true self when he is with members of his gang. However, Cloward and Ohlin (1960) argued that society offers diverse opportunity structures affecting youth involvement in gangs

and that many gang members experience similar problems prior to and after joining a gang. These problems are initially rooted in the need to survive and fostering their involvement in gangs (Cloward & Ohlin, 1960).

W. B. Miller (1958) provided a similar assessment in arguing that prior to joining a gang, many impoverished adolescents living in urban areas often come from families that cannot meet their basic needs. Furthermore, W. B. Miller noted that in some cases, broken families or family conflicts may be more prevalent in these areas. Cloward and Ohlin (1960) concurred with W. B. Miller's assessment in arguing that gang membership can help adolescents struggling with these issues to feel as though they have a family that cares about their well-being. From this perspective, gang cohesion may be the result of external factors influencing individual gang members.

Decker et al. (2014) explored the role of self-nomination in gang embeddedness. According to Decker et al., the extent to which gang members identify with their gangs falls into two main categories: individuals who identify as gang members but are emotionally and socially disconnected from the gang and individuals who no longer identify as gang members but who remain emotionally and socially connected with the gang. Decker et al. studied 621 individuals to assess their current level of gang embeddedness. Findings showed that individuals who recently joined the gang or who wanted to remain active in the gang exhibited higher levels of self-nomination (Decker et al., 2014). In contrast, the role of self-nomination in leaving the gang was less defined. Decker et al. (2014) noted that "The disengagement process is less black and white than it is shades of gray and has been described as a 'teeter-totter' as individuals move back and

forth between gang membership and a new non-gang identity" (p. 581). Study results also indicated that former gang members maintained strong social and emotional ties to the gang, suggesting that the individual's relationship with his or her gang persists even after leaving the gang. Self-nomination may be used as a measure of determining the individual's gang embeddedness (Decker et al., 2014).

Similar to Tigri et al. (2014), Pyrooz (2014) used data from NLSY97. Using data collected in this survey allowed Pyrooz to explore gang membership using longitudinal data as well as to explore demographic factors that may influence an individual's decision to join or exit a gang. Approximately 8,984 individuals participated in NLSY97. Of them, 2,236 reported being African American or Hispanic (Pyrooz, 2014). In exploring descriptive statistics from the survey, Pyrooz found that gang membership was less common among individuals from two-parent households and among individuals who had foreign-born parents. Family affluence lessened the likelihood of joining a gang (Pyrooz, 2014).

Pyrooz and Decker (2011) studied the motivations and methods involved in leaving a gang to advance the knowledge on why young people join, persist, and cease their involvement in gangs. From a sample of 84 arrested juveniles in Arizona who had discontinued their gang membership, Pyrooz and Decker found that internal and external factors can influence leaving a gang while the methods for leaving could be hostile or nonhostile irrespective of motive. Most gang members were motivated to leave the gang due to internal factors such as seeking to avoid the trouble associated with gang membership (Pyrooz & Decker, 2011). Other study participants were prompted to leave

because of external factors such as employment, family, and relocation, among others. While it is not unusual for the gang members to suffer hostility when leaving a gang, many study participants said they left the gang without any incident (Pyrooz & Decker, 2011). Pyrooz and Decker found that the motive for departing a gang was an important aspect to doing so as the members who left because of elements internal to gang membership were more likely to face ritual violence during their exit. A critical finding was the relationship between retaining gang ties and victimization. Former gang members who retained ties to their gangs were twice as likely to face violent victimization compared to those who completely cut their ties irrespective of the mode of departure (Pyrooz & Decker, 2011).

Berger, Abu-Raiva, Heineberg, and Zimbardo (2016) expanded what is known about why individuals join gangs and assessed the reasons why individuals quit being actively involved in gang activities. Their emphasis was on core gang leaders and the factors that lead to their choice to desist from the gang. Berger et al. also wanted to explain the process of quitting a gang. To gather deeper qualitative insights, Berger et al. interviewed 39 former gang members in Los Angeles and San Francisco. Eighty percent of study participants were male; 20% were female. The average length of involvement among the participants was approximately 12 years.

Berger et al. (2016) found that the reasons for gang desistance were largely bound to unacceptable internal gang pressures as well as an external support network's encouragement to leave the gang. The reasons why a gang member would be pushed away from the gang included incidents of violent victimization, burnout on the lifestyle,

and realizing former disillusionment with the gang lifestyle. The external reasons why a gang member would leave a gang included new family priorities, parenthood, and religious awakening.

These findings are powerful because they provide a very rich explanation of the internal and external factors that can lead to gang desistance (Battin, Hill, Abbott, Catalano, & Hawkins, 1998). The implications for social work practitioners are significant as they can use this information to help encourage gang members to leave their gangs prior to becoming victims of violence (Braga, Kennedy, & Tita, 2002).

The main strength in Pyrooz and Decker's 2011 study is the aspect of generalizability. Although the sample was racially mixed, the study was on juvenile offenders who had recently been arrested. The majority of participants had been arrested for a serious offense and had reported a recent physical victimization. However, the study's main weakness is that Pyrooz and Decker did not determine if all study participants were from the same gang. Even though the results indicated that pull factors were not associated with an adverse effect when leaving the gang, it is possible that certain conditions or street gangs may require gang members to engage in a formal exit process. Furthermore, it is unknown if gang members who were formally victimized as a way of exiting their gangs remained in social contact with their formal gang members. These would be important factors to study as doing so may shed light on whether or not physical victimization by one's own gang can influence a gang member's decision to remain in contact with the gang or return to the gang lifestyle.

Another limitation of this study was the theoretical framework employed. Based on the life course framework, Pyrooz and Decker (2011) assumed that certain life events would influence the adolescent's decision to remain in or leave his gang. The results indicated that certain factors did influence study participants' decisions to exit the gang. However, whether the factors that influenced the decision to leave remained present as the individual's life progressed is not known. Furthermore, among individuals who remained friendly with their gangs, Pyrooz and Decker did not determine whether they eventually returned to the gang lifestyle.

Pyrooz and Decker's (2011) research question focused on the factors that influence adolescent gang members' decisions to leave their gang. Identifying factors that contribute to adolescents' decisions to leave their gang could lead to new intervention methods for convincing adolescent gang members to leave their gangs. In exploring this topic, Pyrooz and Decker hypothesized that the adolescents' motives for leaving their gangs would influence the way they influenced their gangs. However, study results disproved this hypothesis. Despite this, Pyrooz and Decker found that certain factors did influence the adolescents' decisions to officially exit their gangs.

Perceptions and Beliefs of Gang Members

Determining the best interventions for gang activity requires a better understanding of gang membership (Decker et al., 2013). This means that the best intervention will inevitably reflect the motivations, beliefs, experiences, and values of current and former gang members. The following discussion focuses on perceptions and beliefs among adult male gang members.

Many researchers have conducted qualitative studies on gang members and their perceptions and beliefs. The perceptions and beliefs of gang members as they relate to joining the gang have also been the focus of many studies (Matsuda, Melde, Taylor, Freng, & Esbensen, 2013; Weerman, Lovegrove, & Thornberry, 2015). There is consensus that young people are at the greatest risk for joining a gang (Gilman, 2014; Hennigan, Maxson, Sloane, Kolnick, & Vindel, 2014; Pyrooz & Sweeten, 2015). This consensus has led to many researchers focusing on youth to share perceptions and beliefs about their experiences in joining a gang (Gilman, 2014; Hennigan et al., 2014; Pyrooz & Sweeten, 2015).

Alonso (1999) found that young people join gangs for several key reasons, including that they perceive gang membership as a means of advancing one's own identity or improving social recognition. Battin et al. (1998) argued that improving safety through protection is another major reason gang members give for joining a gang. The perception is that joining a gang will offer more protection as the youth who join gangs often live in areas with high crime rates. However, many researchers, including Peterson et al. (2004), have shown that gang membership does not equate to decreased victimization and that joining a gang can actually increase the risk of victimization. Findings like these show that youth who join gangs might decide to do so based on faulty perceptions.

Other researchers (Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Fox, 2013; Jacques & Rennison, 2013; Katz et al., 2011; Pyrooz et al., 2014; T. J. Taylor et al., 2010) have argued that joining a gang is a social response when youth lack family home life or adequate support

from immediate family. This argument suggests that youth join gangs in search of a pseudofamily and to access the social fellowship and brotherhood that humans inherently desire. These gang members have stated that the gang functions as their families (Fox, 2013; Jacques & Rennison, 2013). Gang members perceive their gang peers as being the equivalent of brothers and sisters, and many gang members have biological brothers and sisters who also actively participate in the gang lifestyle (Katz et al., 2011).

Many researchers have also targeted the conflict between the belief that joining a gang enhances security or protection and data showing that joining a gang actually increased incidents of victimization among gang members (Gilman, 2014; Hennigan et al., 2014; Pyrooz & Sweeten, 2015). In short, researchers are interested in determining why young gang members say they join gangs for protection when joining a gang clearly increases the risk of becoming a victim of violence (Gilman, 2014; Hennigan et al., 2014; Pyrooz & Sweeten, 2015). Better understanding of the motivation for joining a gang is crucial as developing the best interventions for at-risk juveniles requires a deeper understanding of the perceptions and beliefs of these youth.

Predictors of gang membership have also been explored to determine the biggest indicators of future gang activity among juveniles (Joe & Chesney-Lind, 1995). Researchers have found that the strongest predictor of gang membership is associating with peers who are already engaged in delinquency (Battin et al., 1998). This means that close friends play a pivotal role in whether an individual chooses to become a gang member or not. The perception often reported is that young gang members view joining

the gang as rendering additional benefits such as improving exposure to girls, gaining better access to drugs, or making money (Pyrooz, 2011).

In determining the best interventions to prevent gang membership, researchers have asked gang members if they believed anything could have stopped them from joining a gang. In Del Carmen et al.'s 2009 study, gang members said there was little that would have preventing them from joining a gang. Many gang members said they had older siblings who attempted to stop them from joining a gang; however, the attempts were dismissed or unsuccessful. However, Del Carmen et al. also found that supportive family, stability, and access to resources were strong barriers to gang involvement.

In a 2014 study, Shap sought to explore how gang culture conflicts with social norms and how society externalizes the gang problem. In exploring elements of gang culture, Shap stated that previous findings have suggested that feeling isolated may lead some individuals to join a gang. From this perspective, if an individual does not feel connected to the community, or society, he or she may be more likely to become involved in a gang. In this sense, identifying the conflicting roles between gang culture and societal norms is increasingly important in understanding why individuals join gangs and how to reduce the gang problem. However, externalization of the problem is also important in understanding how society and gang members perceive their actions. In understanding these elements, Shap argued that society can develop a better understanding of how to prevent individuals from joining gangs.

According to Shap (2014), the formation of gang identity was a prominent theme that emerged in his study. Specifically, Shap (2014) found "the formation of gang

identity accounted for 34 percent of the total code involving direct conflicts with society, which was actualized in the form of shootings, murder, and violence" (p. 88). Shap also found that retaliation and revenge were common themes in the gang lifestyle. These themes are further influenced through the gang initiation process, as many individuals are required to commit deviant acts in order to enter the gang (Shap, 2014).

Shap's (2014) results indicated that gang culture strongly contrasts societal norms. However, when asked about their perceptions of their actions, law enforcement and gang members said they were doing what they were told to do. This suggests that the conflicting norms between gang members and society play a strong role in influencing gang members' actions.

Victimization of Gang Members

Victimization is common among gangs. However, irregularities in the research on the gang–victimization link are problems in gang research (Fox, 2013; Gilman et al., 2016). Fox (2013) identified the irregularities as a fundamental problem in developing a coherent theory on the correlation, which could inspire action from relevant policy makers. In determining victimization of gang members, Fox (2013) identified the need to measure the different types of victimization, the number of times they occur, and the reliability and legitimacy of victimization measures. However, one of the main challenges to this literature is the gap in validity tests, which are critical to reflect the accuracy of the victimization measures (Fox, 2013; Gilman et al., 2016). Fox (2013) also observed that none of the studies on the correlation between gang membership and victimization have presented official validity tests.

Decker et al. (2012) assessed the existing information on gang operations and proposed a guideline for future studies on the subject. Using individual, group, and macrolevel analyses, Decker et al. focused on individual risk factors, dynamic social interactions, and processes in gangs as well as collective structures and activities of gangs in specific locations.

Decker et al. (2012) stated that it is difficult to develop concrete factors that can help differentiate high- and low-risk individuals given that research on gang risk factors is unclear on proper risk measurements. As one of the clear objectives of gang membership is to alter other people's perceptions and treatment of individual members, Decker et al. acknowledged that their understanding of the outcomes of this identity transformation at the personal level was lacking. However, while there are substantial studies on gang membership, the researchers who conducted these studies did not discover the extent to which physical victimization plays a role in influencing gang membership. As such, a research gap exists regarding why gang members who initially join a gang for safety reasons choose to remain in a gang after being victimized, which is exactly the concern driving the motivation for joining the gang in the first place (Decker et al., 2012).

Barnes, Boutwell, and Fox (2013) investigated the correlations between genetic and environmental influences and gang membership, victimization, and the impact that gang membership can have on victimization incidents by analyzing data from the National Longitudinal Studies on Adolescent Health. The DeFries-Fulker and ACE models of genetic behavioral modeling informed the analysis for the study. Both models

explain how personal preferences and behaviors can be deeply influenced by environmental and genetic influences (Barnes, Beaver, & Boutwell, 2011). In short, the argument is that gang activity and victimization are strongly driven by environmental factors. However, Barnes et al. (2011) expanded the explanation to include genetic predispositions that contribute to an individual's involvement in gangs and victimization incidents as a consequence. As such, Barnes et al. (2011) posited that gang affiliation is strongly influenced by environmental as well as genetic factors and that individuals experience both factors uniquely.

It is known that gang members are much more likely to engage in high-risk behaviors that are associated with a psychiatric diagnosis. Coid et al. (2013) investigated the relationships among violent behavior, gang membership, psychiatric diagnoses, and the application of mental health services to at-risk juveniles. Coid et al. studied 4,664 males between ages 18 and 34 years. Gang members demonstrated very high levels of psychiatric diagnoses, which could be useful in terms of advancing the debate over the link between violence and victimization as it relates to mental illness.

Kerig et al. (2016) found that psychiatric service use among gang members was driven by incidents of traumatization as well as the fear associated with future incidents of violent victimization. This has far-reaching implications for social work practitioners as it is recommended that gang members be assessed when they present for psychiatric services in health service regions with high levels of gang activity and consequential incidents of violence. This means that health care professionals can play a critical role in

advancing the agenda of desistence among gang members who wish to remove themselves from gang membership and the gang's at-risk activities (Kerig et al., 2016).

Fox (2013) noted that victimization of gang members occurs in the following ways: by their own gang or rival gangs; by their families, for instance, some gang members are raised in physically, emotionally and sexually abusive homes; and through their own participation in risky behaviors. She concluded that perceptions of gang members as offenders and not victims have led to unresponsiveness from policy makers. Fox further analyzed key studies on gang membership and victimization to establish the possibility of a correlation between the two aspects. She found that the link between gang membership and criminality had long been established by an extensive body of research and that studies on the gang–victimization link were severely lacking.

Jacques and Rennison (2013) explored how victims responded to severe forms of victimization. The authors acknowledged that victims tended to exhibit mixed results in their responses. In exploring these responses, Jacques and Rennison found that the emotional distance between the victim and the perpetrator directly related to how the victim responded. Specifically, individuals who had been victimized by others who were close to them were more likely to exhibit higher levels of anger (Jacques & Rennison, 2013). The emotional relationship a gang member has with his or her gang and with the individual who victimized the gang member may impact the decision to return to the gang.

Fox (2013) also described a complex cycle in which many gang members, despite being victimized, return to the gang lifestyle. Fox traced some evidence of researchers

attempting to establish this connection to the 1990s when, as an example, Decker and

Van Winkle observed a larger extent of domestic and neighborhood violence in a study of

active male gang members. Decker et al. (2013) also referred to studies from the early

1990s regarding the criminal activity of individual gang members. Fox noted that Joe and

Chesney-Lind carried out interviews with youth gang members and established that 55%

of the young men and 75% of the young women had faced physical assault while 62% of

the girls had been victims of sexual assault.

Other qualitative researchers have identified victimization of young female gang

members through physical and sexual abuse from inside their gangs as well as exposure

to aggression from rival gangs. J. Miller and Decker (2001) established that about 96% of

female gang members had witnessed gun violence based on interviews with a sample

group from St. Louis, Missouri, and official homicide data from the city. From the same

study, 74% of the women had witnessed murder, 48% had directly faced physical abuse,

44% had been sexually assaulted, and 41% had been stabbed while 59% had been

threatened with a weapon (Miller & Decker, 2001). In contrast, findings from other

quantitative studies have cast doubt on the gang–victimization link; for instance, while

gang members were more prone to victimization, nongang youth also experienced

victimization but the victimization was less severe (Decker et al., 2014; Kinnear, 2010).

Fox (2013) clearly established that the irregularity in the research on the gang–

victimization link is a fundamental problem in developing a coherent theory on the

correlation, which could inspire action from policy makers. In determining victimization

of gang members, Fox emphasized the need to measure the different types of

victimization, their frequency, and the reliability and legitimacy of victimization measures. However, one of the main challenges in the studies Fox reviewed was a lack of validity tests, which are critical for reflecting the accuracy of the victimization measures. Fox observed that none of the studies on the correlation between gang membership and victimization had presented official validity tests.

In a pivotal study, Decker and Van Winkle (1996) found that having friends and family members in a gang directly increased the likelihood that an individual will pledge alliance to the gang lifestyle. Familial and social supports influence the individual's decision to join and remain his or her gang (Decker & Van Winkle, 1996). The decision to return to one's gang after violence victimization may be in part attributed to the fact that the individual's social supports are widely involved in the gang (Decker & Van Winkle, 1996).

Physical victimization is common among gang members (Katz et al., 2011). Katz et al. (2011) examined the relationship between violent victimization and gang membership and found that individuals who were involved with a gang had higher victimization levels as they either victimized others or were victims themselves. Katz et al. also found that gang membership positively correlated with higher levels of severe physical victimization.

Gibson, Swatt, Miller, Jennings, and Gover (2012) examined the correlation between an individual's decision to join a gang and consequential incidents of violent victimization. The researchers used a quantitative methodology to assess the state of the field's quantitative research regarding the relationship between gang membership and

violent victimization occurrences. Common mistakes in previous study designs were found to generate a number of unfavorable outcomes, including failed attempts to create temporal order, a lack of sensitivity analyses to calculate measurable treatment impacts, the application of wrongful methods under propensity scoring analysis, mistaken units of measure for violent victimization reporting, and the lack of corrective action for drug dependence in matching samples of nongang versus gang members (Gibson et al., 2012).

In a similar study, Joe-Laidler and Hunt (2012) evaluated the methodological and conceptual progresses that have been made in gang research since the early 1990s. Data were collected from approximately 2,000 interviews with former and current juvenile gang members. Joe-Laidler and Hunt found several competing interests when analyzing drug activities and gang dynamics and that research conclusions pointed to drug-dealing behaviors being very complex as individual gang members deal drugs for a wide variety of reasons that extend beyond addiction, including generating more income.

Joe-Laidler and Hunt (2012) reported several findings that are beneficial for social work practitioners. First, they reported that gang member violence is less correlated with drug dealing than previously thought and is more strongly correlated with competition or conflicts associated with honor and respect. However, drugs do play a role in such violence as they are often consumed prior to the conflict. Drug use was also found as a way to realize short-term pleasure in a lifestyle that gang members often consider mundane. Drug dealing was also reported as a way for individual gang members to make money, which contradicts beliefs that entire gangs are involved in drug dealing as an aggregate enterprise (Joe-Laidler & Hunt, 2012).

Rufino, Fox, Cramer, and Kercher (2013) also used a qualitative methodology to determine whether gang members were more likely to become victims of violence when compared to nongang members, whether victimization was correlated with perceptions of social disorganization, and whether measuring inmate offending behaviors mediated the correlation among victimization and social disorganization. Rufino et al. found that becoming actively involved in gang activities increased the potential of becoming a victim of violence and that gang members were much more likely to become victims of violence when compared to nongang members living in the same community. This is an important finding as it contradicts the belief that joining a gang will provide protection, defined by a reduction in the prevalence of victimization among gang members. The truth is that joining a gang provides no such protections and, in fact, actually increases the probability of becoming a victim of violence (Pyrooz et al., 2014; Rufino et al., 2013).

Rufino et al.'s (2013) findings also showed that perceived social disorganization only explained the probability of gang members being victimized by violence. Lastly, the findings showed that criminal behavior was a powerful influence on the relationship between social disorganization and victimization among gang members (Rufino et al., 2013). These findings offer a strong contribution to the criminal justice field by advancing the knowledge of factors that contribute to gang victimization. Rufino et al. noted that their study was the first to target prison inmates as research participants for examining gang membership, criminalistic behaviors, and the likelihood of becoming a victim of violence. The implications are far-reaching for social work practitioners as well as friends and family members of at-risk juveniles (Rufino et al., 2013) as the findings

demonstrated specific differences between gang members and nongang members. Through advancing the knowledge in the field, research findings such as these can help policy makers and social workers design intervention programs that can enhance safety in neighborhoods with gang activity through antigang prevention efforts (Rufino et al., 2013).

Bolden (2012) used in-depth interviews with previous gang members to challenge existing conceptualizations of gang members such as the absolute necessity of "beating in" and "beating out" gang members as they enter or exit the gang lifestyle. In general, Bolden found that gang members lacked a definition of gang membership that guided the process of determining who was in the gang and who was more appropriate for a classification as an external associate or affiliate. Secondly, Bolden found that many gang members also had extended gang networks that included other gangs. This means that cliques can emerge in the social fabric of gangs that concentrate individual members of multiple gangs into a smaller clique. Initiating a gang member into a gang is a very arbitrary process as there is no single definition of membership (Yin et al., 2016) that gang members use to determine membership (Gilman et al., 2014). Gang participation levels can differentiate between external gang involvement categories such as being able to identify who is an affiliate versus an actual member (Decker et al., 2014).

Lane and Fox (2012) examined adult offenders and their feelings related to property damage, gang crime, and personal safety. The researchers posed five questions that assessed fear levels related to crime to 2,414 jailed offenders. Inmates are not generally afraid of crime (Fox, Rufino, & Kercher, 2012; Lane & Fox, 2012). Although

Lane and Fox found that gang member inmates felt they were much more likely to become victims, they reported far less fear when compared to nongang members. Criminal behavior that included perpetration had no influence on how inmates perceived fear. However, having less experience with personal victimization predicted more fear of gangs and personal crime among nongang participants (Lane & Fox, 2012). Social disorganization models are helpful for explaining such fears among nongang members when compared to current and former gang members (Lane & Fox, 2012).

Katz et al. (2011) stated that data from existing studies have not fully explained the exact factors that contribute to victimization once an individual joins a gang. Katz et al. explored the precipitating factors that influenced gang members' risk of victimization and noted that few researchers had studied the internal factors in gangs that can increase the prevalence of victimization. Using a quantitative approach, Katz et al. collected data from approximately 900 interviews with juvenile gang members who had been arrested as part of the Arizona Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring Program. Katz et al. found a number of factors that increased gang members' risk for victimization. First, gang activity as well as the involvement in risky lifestyle choices, such as theft, increased the risks associated with victimization. Second, individuals involved in gang activities were much more likely to be victimized through violent aggression. Third, the presence of a rival gang also correlated with violent incidents of victimization (Katz et al., 2011). Katz et al.'s findings were similar to those in Scott and Maxson's 2016 study on gangs in correctional facilities.

Katz et al. (2011) also found that the presence of a rival gang correlated with violent incidents of victimization. Katz et al.'s conclusions have implications for practitioners as well as other social stakeholders such as police and parents of juveniles in high-risk gang areas. Conclusions such as these threaten the belief that gang membership is the sole factor that increases the risk of violent victimization (Katz et al., 2011; Scott & Maxson, 2016). The implications of these findings are far reaching as there are other factors that drive victimization outcomes. These factors are largely attributed to behaviors chosen after joining the gang and not necessarily tied to the fact that the individual joined a gang (Webb, Katz, & Decker, 2006). This means that while joining a gang remains a high-risk decision in terms of preventing incidents of victimization, the behavior after joining the gang also correlates with incidents of violence (Battin et al., 1998).

Interventions for Gang Members

Rehabilitation services offered through human services departments play a critical role in reducing the likelihood that gang members will return to their gangs after being victims of severe physical violence. However, the focus of these interventions tends to vary (Gideon & Sung, 2010). Some intervention programs targeting gang members who have been severely injured focus on exploring the initial reasons why these individuals joined the gang. As noted by Gideon and Sung (2010), many gang members join gangs as a way of fulfilling their basic needs. The inability to access basic resources necessary for one's survival directly influences an individual's decision to join the gang. However, Gideon and Sung (2010) also argued that this logic still holds after a gang member has suffered severe physical victimization. The inability to access food and housing, fulfill

one's safety needs, and find employment that will sustain one's life are all reasons for

deciding to return to a gang. Spano, Freilich, and Bollan (2008) also found that minority

adolescents who live in extreme poverty are significantly more likely to become involved

in a gang. Yet, the impoverishment these adolescents face, even after victimization, may

lead them to believe that they have few other viable options in meeting their basic needs.

Impoverishment clearly plays a direct role in whether or not a gang member returns to his

or her gang after being victimized.

Other researchers have explored the role of self-control in determining why gang

members who have been victimized return to their gangs. A number of researchers have

found that many gang members, even after being victimized, return to their gangs. Yet, in

determining why these individuals decide to return to their gangs, study findings have

shown that self-control plays a vital role in influencing these individuals and how they

perceive victimization (Fox, 2013; Turanvoic & Pratt, 2014). Meacham and Stokes

(2008) found that most interventions targeting self-control and aggression occurred

during secondary school, when the individual may have already joined a gang. Not

focusing interventions on older populations (adolescents, young adults, etc.) is

problematic as these individuals likely have already joined a gang. Furthermore, when

conducting interventions, not emphasizing the need for self-control in gang members who

have suffered severe physical victimization may further explain why many gang

members return to their gangs after being victimized (Meacham and Stokes (2008).

Although human services may play a vital role in preventing gang members from

returning to their gangs, the effectiveness of existing intervention programs has not been

established. Since gang members often engage in criminal activity, the prospect of perceiving a gang member as a victim, even after the gang member suffers severe physical victimization, is often minimal. As such, policy makers and human service agencies often have a difficult time perceiving gang members as victims, which may impede the effectiveness of interventions used to prevent gang members from returning to their gangs.

In a 2017 study, Cheng explored how social organizations aimed at eliminating violence by targeting individuals for enrollment in their programs. Cheng questioned why social organizations aimed at preventing violence often focus on individuals who are ready to embrace change. In isolating individuals to target, Cheng found that many social service agencies work directly with law enforcement officials for potential recruits. However, Cheng (2017) also found that there was a direct need for organizations to minimize their contact with law enforcement agencies, as they may "lose credibility from the community which harbors distrust toward law enforcement, and police will expect a mutual or two-way sharing of information" (pp. 46–47), which compromises the individual's autonomy and willingness to embrace change. Yet, similar to the challenges law enforcement officials endure when working with gang members, social organizations often encounter a high level of resistance among potential recruits.

Antigang parenting classes, which can be court mandated for parents of children or adolescents who have committed a gang-related offense, take a different approach to the gang problem as their focus is on holding the parents responsible for their offspring's actions (Ordonez, 2008). The philosophy behind these classes is that the parents and the

amount of supervision they give their children play a critical role in influencing delinquency. Teaching parents how to supervise their children, deal with stressors, and find prosocial resources is believed to decrease the likelihood of the child or adolescent committing another gang-related offense.

Although educating both the minor and the parents about gang-related dangers is important, program participation requires meeting certain prerequisites. According to Ordonez (2008), the minor must have committed a gang-related offense. The minor must also be a first-time offender, and the minor's parents must retain custody (Ordonez, 2008). Ordonez stated that guardians may also be ordered into these programs. These requirements ensure that the adolescent is not a repeat offender and is young enough to embrace change, that the adolescent's parents are willing to work with their child, and that the parents will place a stronger emphasis on supervising their minor child (Ordonez, 2008).

The benefits of ordering parents into antigang parenting classes include educating the parents on reducing the likelihood that their children will be involved in future gang activity. Results from several studies have shown that a lack of parental involvement or parental supervision directly contributes to the likelihood of children and adolescents engaging in deviant behavior and that in inner-city neighborhoods such behavior often results in gang activity (Ordonez, 2008). Kinnear (2010) stated that strengthening parents' bonds with their children and learning to provide adequate supervision can decrease delinquency rates. Brandt, Sidway, Dvorsky, and Weist (2013) also concluded

that parenting classes are effective for preventing adolescents from engaging in deviant behavior.

Another benefit of antigang parenting classes is their emphasis on first-time offenders. According to Ordonez (2008), helping parents learn to address their adolescents' deviant behaviors can prevent these youth from becoming career criminals. Furthermore, parents can develop a better understanding of what behaviors may be associated with gang-related activity. In identifying these behaviors, parents can take an active role in helping adolescents reform and reduce the likelihood of their committing another offense.

Although antigang parenting classes have multiple benefits, not all parents with adolescent offenders are ordered into these classes. Ordonez (2008) noted that judges have a strong level of discretion in their decisions to hold adolescents' parents accountable. However, this increased level of judicial discretion makes it difficult to determine who will be ordered into antigang parenting classes. Despite the benefits of such programs in deterring crime, the inability to set guidelines makes it difficult to determine whether these programs are an effective means for reducing gang membership (Ordonez, 2008).

Another limitation of antigang parenting classes is that they begin after the adolescent has committed a gang-related crime. Effective prevention programs often begin before the adolescent becomes involved in a gang (Siegel & Welsh, 2015). Siegel and Welsh (2015) further noted that the effectiveness of preventative programs partially relates to the difficulty of leaving a gang once one has joined. Kinnear (2009) stated that

when thinking about leaving a gang, some gang members fear physical violence or retaliation. As the National Gang Center (n.d.-a) noted, once a person joins a gang, he or she might never get out—reflecting the so-called "blood-in, blood-out" assertion. The National Gang Center further noted that studies involving physical victimization when leaving a gang are in their infancy, and more information is needed to determine the prevalence of gang members who are physically victimized based on their decision to leave their gangs. That said, the fear of physical victimization may be enough to keep gang members actively involved in their gangs even if their parents are enrolled in antigang parenting classes (National Gang Center, n.d.-b). In this sense, it could be argued that even though parenting classes can be helpful in increasing supervision, other factors may influence whether or not the adolescent commits another gang-related crime.

Lack of Research About Effective Intervention Programs

Although prevention programs have been widely shown to reduce the likelihood of at-risk youth joining gangs, the effectiveness of intervention programs targeting adolescents who are already involved in gangs is largely unknown (Kinnear, 2010; Ordonez, 2008). Howell (2010) argued that early intervention programs tend to be more effective than gang suppression programs. However, Howell further stated that multiple variables affect an individual's decision to enter and remain with his or her gang. Yet, few researchers have assessed the role each variable plays in influencing the likelihood of adolescents remaining with their gangs. The lack of such knowledge is problematic as the decision to remain with one's gang is believed to be a multifaceted decision influenced by multiple variables.

The factors that influence a gang member's decision to leave the gang are also largely unknown. Although Ordonez (2008) acknowledged that leaving a gang is a process, little is known about the factors influencing this process or how long this process lasts. Furthermore, Kinnear (2010) stated that many former gang members keep close ties with their former gang associates. This contradicts the belief that former gang members sever their ties with gang members. Little is also known about how these relationships influence former gang members who decide to stay away from their previous gangs. Kinnear argued that peer relationships may become less influential as the former gang member ages and settles into life. Despite this argument, additional research is needed to determine what factors cause a gang member to leave his or her gang and remain out of the gang.

Antigang parenting classes are an initiative aimed at gang prevention. These efforts differ from others as they focus on the parents or guardians of individuals who have already committed gang-related offenses. Yet, despite these initiatives, little is known about why some gang members decide to leave their gangs. Little is also known about the effectiveness of gang intervention and suppression programs. As a result, there is a strong need to bridge this knowledge gap and investigate the variables that may influence gang members' actions. Addressing these gaps may also lead to new gang intervention or suppression programs.

Summary and Conclusions

Researchers have identified various reasons why individuals join gangs and a tacit belief that gang affiliation provides an increased level of security (Pyrooz, 2011). Despite

this belief, Pyrooz (2011) found that gang members are significantly more likely to be physically victimized than nongang peers. Despite being physically victimized, many gang members return to their gangs after recovering from their injuries (Pyrooz, 2011). Although researchers have identified multiple factors that initially influence the individual's decision to join a gang, I did not find studies on physical victimization among gang members and its influence on an individual's decision to remain affiliated with the gang. However, when researchers have explored severe victimization among gang members, findings have shown that gang members often believe in retaliating against the opposing gang (T. L. Taylor et al., 2010; Vasquez, Lickel, and Hennigan, 2010). Yet, the prospect of retaliating against an opposing gang for the injuries an individual received is only one factor that may lead the individual to rejoin the gang after physical victimization (Pyrooz et al., 2010). Instead, the bonds gang members have with friends in the gang, lack of opportunities (housing, education, employment, etc.), having family members in the gang, and lack of prosocial bonds with the community may all play a role in the individual's decision to rejoin the gang (Jacques & Rennison, 2013). In the next chapter, the research methodology is discussed.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

Individuals who join gangs often do so as protection from victimization (Fox, 2013; Peterson et al., 2004). However, Decker et al. (2014) found that gang members die from gang victimization at 100 times the rate of people in the general population. Fox (2013) noted that attempts to explain the gang–victimization link have revealed mixed results and that qualitative inquiries into the motivating factors for rejoining a gang after victimization have been few. As such, this study's purpose was to investigate why some gang members decide to rejoin a gang after being severely victimized. The specific focus was on gang members in a large city in the western United States.

Gang membership is often explained in terms of adolescent indoctrination that carries over into adulthood and that emphasizes entry into gangs during adolescence and antisocial behaviors associated with gang entry (Fox, 2016; Pyrooz, 2014). However, Pyrooz (2014) cautioned against limiting gang research to adolescents as doing so paints only a partial picture of gang membership. Pyrooz asserted that gang membership is age graded and that researchers should focus on the entire life course in order to completely understand the reasons for gang membership. Therefore, the cases of interest for the present study involved the perspectives and experiences of adult gang members. A greater understanding of the factors related to gang membership and victimization may offer approaches for developing interventions for individuals identified at risk for gang membership.

In this chapter, I begin with a discussion of the research design and methodology. I also include explanations of the participant selection method; the materials and instruments used for data collection; and data collection, processing, and analysis. I discuss validity and reliability of the sample and address methodological assumptions, limitations, and delimitations. I conclude with a section on ethical concerns and a summary.

Research Design and Methodology

A multiple case study approach was used for exploring gang members' motivations for returning to their gangs after severe physical victimization. The multiple case study design transcends the boundaries of traditional research paradigms by using multiple cases, several methodologies, and various theoretical paradigms to answer the how and why of certain occurrences (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Saldaña, 2013; Yazan, 2015). I developed one research question to guide the exploration of perspectives and motivations of gang members who return to their gangs after suffering severe physical victimization. This research question was: What motivates gang members to rejoin their gang after severe physical victimization?

There are two predominant methodological approaches for conducting case studies: Yin's and Stake's (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yazan, 2015). Yin's approach emphasizes quality control throughout the entire research process to ensure data validity and reliability. Yin identified case studies as either explanatory, exploratory, or descriptive (Baxter & Jack, 2008). In an explanatory case study, the researcher's objective is to explain the effects of real-life interventions that are too complex for

traditional quantitative methods. An exploratory case study approach is warranted when the researcher aims to investigate interventions that have no defined outcomes. Finally, a descriptive case study design is appropriate when the researcher's only objective is to describe a specific phenomenon in context (Baxter & Jack, 2008)

In contrast to Yin's structured approach to case study design, Stake argued for flexibility in case study design and for allowing for alterations from design to research (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yazan, 2015). Stake's perspective calls for viewing a case as an integrated bounded system with individual working parts whereby the researcher focuses on the case as an object instead of a process (Yazan, 2015). How Stake categorized cases was also starkly different from Yin's terminology, with Stake classifying cases as either intrinsic or instrumental (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Stake recommended that researchers should use an intrinsic approach only if the purpose is to gain a better understanding of the case rather than to build theory (Baxter & Jack, 2008). However, if the researcher aims to build theory, then an instrumental case study design is appropriate. Although Stake did not designate a specific point for beginning data collection, he did highlight the importance of having two or three initial research questions to serve as guides for structuring the research process (Yazan, 2015).

Despite the contrasting methodological characteristics of Yin's and Stake's approaches to case study design, both are grounded in the belief that reality is a social construct that can only be understood through the perspectives of those involved with the case of interest (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Historically, while case studies have focused on one particular case, both Yin and Stake addressed the value of a multiple case study

design that allows comparing similar cases from varying perspectives in context (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Ritchie & Lewis, 2013). According to Yin, a multiple case study approach allows the researcher to investigate differences between and within cases, with the goal of identifying similar traits across cases that can be replicated (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

The overall advantage of a multiple case design is that it produces data considered to be robust and reliable. However, a multiple case study design can be difficult to conduct and can be time consuming. Nevertheless, since my objective was not only on identifying why gang members return to gangs after severe physical victimization but also interventions that could prevent them from returning to their gangs, implementing a combination of Yin's systematic approach to case study design and analysis and Stake's emphasis on qualitative data collection methods offered a rigorous case study design that was appropriate for this multiple case study.

Participants

This multiple case study consisted of six cases. This sample size was selected based on guidance from Osborne (2008) and Patton (2015) that small sample sizes in qualitative research enable researchers to delve deeply into topics of interest. Small sample sizes are warranted in terms of deriving meaningful results (Osborne, 2008; Saldaña, 2013).

Following approval by Walden University's institutional review board (IRB; approval #05-12-17-0489965), I used purposive sampling to select the participants. This approach helped ensure homogeneous and meaningful perspectives regarding the case of interest among the sample (Emerson, 2015). The inclusion criteria for study participation

were English-speaking men ages 20–50 years who identify as current or former gang members and who have experienced severe physical victimization by other gang members. Limiting the sample to only gang members who speak English eliminated needing a translator when conducting interviews and eliminated potential issues with inaccurate translations.

Establishing the age range as 20–50 years reflects research by Pyrooz (2014), who cautioned against adolescent-limited gang research and argued that adolescent entrance into gangs only paints a partial picture. Data also show that more than three of every five gang members are adults (National Gang Center, n.d.-c). According to the National Gang Center (n.d.-c), law enforcement agencies report a higher percentage of adult gang members than juveniles under age 18 years. Limiting the sample to only males reflected data showing that gang membership is predominantly male (National Gang Center, n.d.-c). Very little data are available on the numbers of female gang members, implying that female gang membership is not a significant problem for law enforcement (National Gang Center, n.d.-c).

While race or ethnicity were not inclusion criteria for this study, law enforcement agencies have reported that African American/Black and/or Hispanic/Latino individuals dominate documented gang members and that gang membership is lowest among Whites (National Gang Center, n.d.-c). As such, I anticipated that the sample for this study would reflect these gang member demographics.

To recruit participants, I posted flyers via social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The flyers explained the study and contained my contact information so

that interested individuals could get in touch with me about participation (see Appendix

A). Once gang members contacted me and expressed interest, interviews were arranged.

My safety as well as that of the current or former gang members was best ensured

by conducting interviews in a private, secure location. I rented a temporary office in a

building where there are multiple offices to avoid any possible suspicion or curiosity

from others. To further ensure participant protection, I assigned each participant a code

name to present when they arrived for their interviews. With this added safeguard, even

the receptionist did not know their true identities. Interviews were scheduled on different

days to ensure that gang members did not encounter each other.

Data Collection

Stake and Yin both emphasize the importance of gathering data from multiple

sources to encapsulate the case study in context. However, while Yin advocates

incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods, Stake suggests

exclusively using qualitative methods to collect information (Yazan, 2015). Yin

identified six sources from which data should be collected: documentation, interviews,

archival records, participant observation, direct observation, and physical artifacts

(Yazan, 2015). Given this study's sensitive nature, semistructured interviews were the

only data source. I determined this approach was most appropriate as data from sources

such as hospital records, police records, and medical records would not be easily

obtainable. Direct observation could pose too many safety risks for both myself and study

participants. Participant observation could pose the same risks. However, there were

items such as artifacts (tattoos, scars) that study participants shared during their

interviews. These items were noted in the discussion of study findings as they added richness to the data.

Semistructured interviews are useful for gaining context and insight into a given topic and permits respondents to explain what they consider important. They typically contain key questions that are structured to help define the areas or aspects to be explored (Olsen, 2012). Guided interviews help maintain consistency not only within but across each case, which allows for gathering detailed information that facilitates theme finding and that has the potential to be generalized (Osborne, 2008; Saldaña, 2013).

Semistructured interviews were appropriate for this study because they provide a set guideline for the interviews while allowing probing for more information (Bernard, 2006). Probing is useful for obtaining data saturation, which occurs when enough information has been acquired to flesh out themes for theory development (Laverty, 2003). Saturation can be accomplished not only through probes but also by conducting more interviews. For example, in the event initial analysis reveals a few themes that are not fully developed, more interviews would be necessary to ensure theoretical saturation (Bernard, 2006).

Using a semistructured approach following an interview guide I developed (see Appendix B) allowed me and the interviewee to deviate from the prepared questions should the interview lead us in a different direction and to pursue responses or ideas in more detail. I allowed the participants to take as much time as they need to give in-depth explanations of what was meaningful to them about the topic, in their own words (Miles et al., 2013).

Data collected from interviews also depend on the interviewer's skills in eliciting information. It is imperative that the researcher is properly trained in how to conduct interviews (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Saldaña, 2013; Yazan, 2015). Proper preparation ensures that the interviewer asks questions that collect information representing the participant's perspective rather than the interviewer's (Yazan, 2015). Researchers often face major decisions regarding how to gather the highest quality data when engaged in qualitative interviewing (Saldaña, 2013).

To prepare myself for conducting these interviews, I followed guidance from King and Horrocks (2011), who noted that researchers should first familiarize themselves with the topics being investigated. This can be accomplished through reviewing recent literature and research findings. This review also helps to ensure that there are no biases in the questions that may limit the study's reliability or validity.

Although familiarizing oneself with previous data is an important part of the research process, Tufford and Newman (2012) recommended that researchers also rely on bracketing prior to conducting a study. According to Tufford and Newman, bracketing helps mitigate preconceptions that can influence the research process. Bracketing involves the researcher eliminating preconceived perceptions as to how questions will be answered and on themes that may be present in the study (Fisher, 2009). Journal writing can be helpful in the bracketing process and is also helpful when conducting case studies involving multiple participants (Janesick, 2011). The journal can be used to support the researcher's perceptions of the participants' experiences and allow for comparing the researcher's perceptions with the participants'. In comparing the two, the researcher may

find that his or her experience of the research study differs completely from what the participant experienced (Hatch, 2010).

Journaling can also help researchers develop an awareness of themselves, which is important for bracketing. In developing an awareness of one's self, the researcher can channel his or her creative processes and explore potential biases he or she may have as a researcher (Conway, 2015). Janesick (2011) stated that qualitative research is inherently creative and intuitive. In this sense, researchers need to have a strong understanding of both themselves and others. Furthermore, in reviewing previous journals that the researcher has kept, he or she may be able to develop an understanding as to how his or her perceptions may have changed over time.

How the interviews will be conducted is another consideration in interview preparation (King & Horrocks, 2011). King and Horrocks (2011) recommended that researchers consider such aspects as strategies for bringing participants back on topic. Although open-ended interviews allow gathering a wealth of information based on the participant's perception, King and Horrocks (2011) argued that one of the main limitations of this method is the inability to refocus the participant's attention should it wander. In addressing this limitation, I listened to what the participant said and thought of ways to relate their comments back to the interview questions.

Putting interviewees at ease is another important step in conducting interviews. The interview space must be comfortable, free of noise and other distractions (Janesick, 2011). As the interviewer, I was courteous, respectful, and professional by explaining the interview process to study participants (Janesick, 2011). I made it clear to the participants

that they could discuss the interview answers to ensure that the responses accurately reflected what they had to say. This was important, as it helped me gather rich data and ensured that the study has a high level of validity (Miles et al., 2013). During the interview process, I remained objective and was aware of my own personal feelings or thoughts. I kept time and was considerate of when participants might get fatigued by taking periodic breaks and asking them if they wished to continue (Janesick, 2011).

The technology I used to record the interviews was another important consideration as it can be a key aspect in deriving themes. Rubin and Rubin (2013) noted that the decision to use an audio or visual recording device can be difficult. Using just an audio recorder allows replaying the interviews but may not capture all the nuances in them. Video recording can capture the participant's expressions as well as other nonverbal communication. Study participants may feel uncomfortable in the presence of either device, and the lack of comfort associated with the participant's behavior may influence the type of information shared (King & Horrocks, 2011).

To ensure that the data were analyzed in context, the interviews were recorded with participant approval, which was indicated on the informed consent forms that all participants were required to read and sign. I also took notes during the interviews. Interviews were audio recorded. This allowed me to listen to participants when reviewing the interviews.

Data Processing and Analysis

The two primary types of analysis employed in case studies are reflective analysis and structural analysis (Saldaña, 2013). Reflective analysis relies on the researcher's

individual judgment and intuition when interpreting the data instead of procedures for classifying the data (Saldaña, 2013). Conversely, structural analysis is when the researcher approaches analysis specifically to identify patterns. As identifying patterns was the goal of this study, the latter approach was employed for data analysis.

The recorded interviews were replayed and transcribed for thematic analysis, which involved analyzing the transcripts, coding the data, and making notes (R. K. Yin, 2015). In replaying the interviews, Saldaña (2013) recommended taking the time to note any preliminary words or phrases that can aid theme formulation.

The next phase of thematic analysis consists of cross-case comparisons to identify emerging themes that can be generalized (Saldaña, 2013). I accomplished this by entering the transcriptions into the NVivo qualitative software program. Data were analyzed and coded for themes by inputting the text files into NVivo. Using this software allowed me to employ a conceptual map in order to identify different themes and determine whether or not there were certain connections present in the research. These important connections can be identified and drawn up in NVivo (Bergin, 2011; Hoover & Koerber, 2011).

I used the framework method (Gale et al., 2013) to derive themes. Using this approach allowed me to develop a matrix based on emerging themes. A matrix for this study may have reflected such themes as the gang lifestyle, the influence of social factors, victimization, and fear of the unknown. Identifying these themes facilitated better understanding of which factors led the individual to join a gang and how these factors

continue to influence the individual's decision to remain in a gang or leave it. Table 1

illustrates the framework method followed in this study.

The framework method is useful in thematic analysis. According to Saldaña,

(2013), a theme differs from other forms of data as researchers are required to identify its

underlying meaning. Yet, how a theme manifests in the data may vary. "A theme may be

identified at the manifest level (directly observable in the information) or at the latent

level (underlying the phenomenon)" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 41).

Table 1

Illustration of Framework Method for Identifying Themes

Gang member's statement	Researcher's interpretation
I decided to join a gang after working at McDonalds. My friends hassled me about the decision and didn't understand why I would want a job.	• Economic struggles • Peer pressure

Thematic content analysis as a strategy allows identifying themes that emerge

from common subthemes present in the data. Cultural considerations are also a part of

thematic analysis. Miles et al. (2013) noted that some themes are apparent and culturally

amenable whereas others are more elusive, even symbolic, and idiosyncratic. It is

therefore important to consider how cultural heritage defines each participant. This

analysis helped to determine whether specific themes were common among all gang

members. For example, themes may have differed based on gang affiliation. Because of

this, I considered cultural values among individual gang members and how these values

can influence the decision to stay in the gang or return after being physically abused.

Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability are concerns in all research. However, unlike in

quantitative research where reliability and validity are addressed separately, qualitative

researchers use terms such as credibility, trustworthiness, and transferability, which

encompass both validity and reliability (Maxwell, 2013; Saldaña, 2013). Ensuring a case

study's overall quality and trustworthiness can be accomplished by incorporating the

following key elements into the research process: clearly stated research questions,

systematic data collection that is appropriately managed, using a purposive sampling

method, and ensuring that data analysis is performed correctly (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

The research question developed for this study was clearly stated. Purposive sampling,

described as homogenous sampling in which similar cases are selected to study common

characteristics in a population (Saldaña, 2013), was used. I collected data systematically

and managed it appropriately by using NVivo for organizing, categorizing, and analyzing

the data. I ensured that data analysis was performed correctly by using reflective analysis

and structural analysis (Saldaña, 2013).

This study's multiple case study design, in which the data were compared within

and across cases, enhanced its overall quality and trustworthiness. Semistructured, face-

to-face interviews were used for this study because this approach provides flexibility.

This technique, instead of an unstructured technique, suited this study as it allowed me to

guide the interviews by asking both semistructured and open-ended questions to gain a

better understanding of the interviewees' experiences. This interview method also allowed me to produce an explicit summary of the participants' common experiences and to identify themes that emerged during the interview process (Saldaña, 2013). While follow-up interviews are often conducted for member checking, they were not possible given the nature of this study as I only had one chance to interview the participants. Participants were invited to review my interpretations and analysis, but I did not anticipate them doing so. As such, I used a more informal approach for member checking by providing quick interpretations of various comments during the interviews, which allowed participants to weigh in on my interpretations and correct them if necessary. Study results will be summarized into a brief report following the completion of this study and posted to a website created for this purpose.

Credibility in qualitative studies is the equivalent term for internal validity in quantitative measures (Miles et al., 2013). To ensure credibility, researchers must demonstrate that a realistic picture of the cases being studied is presented. This necessitates limiting researcher bias as the researcher is the instrument in qualitative studies (Maxwell, 2013). The best way to limit researcher bias during this study was for me to be conscious of aspects in my background and experiences that might affect my interpretation of information gathered during participant interviews (Miles et al., 2013). It was important that I provided enough detail on the fieldwork's context so that the audience can determine if the same data can be generated under similar circumstances (Maxwell, 2013; Miles et al., 2013). Increasing transferability also calls for explaining that not all study findings will be applicable to other studies or communities.

Methodological Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

One of the primary underlying assumptions of qualitative research involves the nature of reality. Accordingly, most qualitative researchers assume that reality is an ever-changing multidimensional construct and that the research's observable aspects are not stagnant and merely waiting to be explored and measured (Yazan, 2015). I addressed this assumption by providing detailed explanations of the findings and showing that my assumptions make sense, thereby increasing the credibility of my interpretations. An additional assumption was that the participants would answer the interview questions. This was the case in this study as no participants declined to answer any questions.

Since violent victimization of gang members has been linked with high levels of antisocial behavior and psychosis (Bebbington et al., 2013), this study's limitations primarily related to unknown conditions and factors that might affect participants' abilities to answer the questions. These antisocial behaviors were not encountered during the study, and gaining access to the population was not difficult. Delimitations of this study included the following: participants' mental health was not included in the study, and gang members who had not been severely physically victimized were not considered for this study. The target population was delimited to males as research has shown that gang membership is predominantly male (National Gang Center, n.d.-c). I chose not to use phenomenology or ethnography as a multiple case study design has a wider scope. A case study provides a broader ethnographic examination of a subculture or a group. Phenomenology, which seeks to understand peoples' shared experiences (Saldaña, 2013)

was not appropriate for this study as I did not investigate a specific experience but rather sought information on gang members' victimization experiences on a case-by-case basis.

Ethical Assurances

The ethical implications of conducting research involving human subjects were an important consideration for this study. The main element in the treatment of human subjects is to ensure no physical, emotional, or mental harm from study participation (Walden University, 2014). Ensuring anonymity was also of key concern; this was done by removing all identifying information from study documents and assigning pseudonyms to study participants. These ethical doctrines are also supported by the Belmont Report's principle of research confidentiality and respect for persons as well as the principle of beneficence, or do no harm (Office for Human Research Protections, 1979).

Another ethical consideration involves ensuring that study participants understand the purpose of the research and their role in it. Potential participants were given clear explanations of the study purpose and objectives as well as how the findings would be used and disseminated (Ritchie & Lewis, 2013). Participants were asked to read and sign informed consent forms that detailed the aforementioned points and that also explained participants' right to refuse to participate in the study at any point during the research process, their right to confidentiality, and their right to anonymity. In the event a participant decided to withdraw from the study during or after the interview, all documents associated with the participant would have been destroyed. No participants withdrew from the study.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to add to the extant literature on gangs and gang membership by offering insights into the motivating factors informing gang members' decisions to rejoin a gang after severe physical victimization. I investigated the beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions of gang members in a large city in the western United States. Chapter 3 began by establishing the study's design and methodological approach. A multiple case study design was selected for this study due to the flexibility and rigor this approach offers, which allows for comparing data within and across cases.

The research design and methodology section was followed by an explanation of the merits of using a purposive sampling method to select potential participants. Next, the instrumentation for data collection was identified as semistructured interviews using an interview guide. Following this section was a discussion on data collection, processing, and analysis. This was followed with details on how issues regarding validity and reliability were addressed and a section on assumptions, limitations, and delimitations. Ethical considerations and assurances were addressed next, followed by a summary.

Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore the experiences of gang members to gain a better understanding of their motivation for returning to their gangs after severe physical victimization. The research question developed to guide this exploration was what motivates gang members to rejoin their gang after severe physical victimization? Six current or former gang members participated in the study. In Chapter 4, I review the six cases and then provide analyses of these cases.

Setting

I conducted interviews in June and July 2017. The study setting was a private office in a secure location in a large city in the western United States. The interview location was a building with multiple offices and a reception desk. To maintain participant privacy, I gave interviewees code names to present when they arrived and asked for me. Through this added safeguard, even the receptionist did not know who they were. Each interview was scheduled on a day when no other interviews were held so there was no chance of any study participants encountering other participants.

Participant Demographics

Of the six participants, all were former or current male gang members ages 20 to 50 years. Five participants claimed Black ancestry; one claimed Hispanic descent. They had similar educational levels, mostly some high school education. One was a high school graduate.

All study participants were volunteers. They all encountered physical victimization while in the gang, and three have permanent disabilities that are remnants

of their victimization incidents. They all went back to the gang following victimization, and four claimed to be current gang members. The following are demographic overviews on each participant. All demographic details are presented as current at the time of the study.

Participant 1

Participant 1 is a 47-year-old male and former gang member. He entered the gang at 13 years of age, and he went to high school part time but did not graduate. He comes from a large family; his parents were hard-working immigrants. Participant 1's father was the disciplinarian, and since his parents did not speak English, he took advantage of their lack of English by often missing school.

Gang life was something Participant 1 was interested in ever since he can remember. While the other kids dreamed about becoming a firefighter or a police officer, he always wanted to be a gangster. Participant 1 looked up to and admired the older kids who were part of the gang. He has been victimized and has witnessed victimization in the gang on multiple occasions. He has witnessed people being shot and killed; he himself has been severely beaten and, on several occasions, gunshots were aimed at him.

Participant 2

Participant 2 is a 29-year-old male and a current gang member. He entered the gang at age 13 years. He went to high school but ended up getting in trouble "a lot," so he was sent to camps and juvenile hall. "My school years was like incarceration basically and then I wasn't . . . Again, when I did come to school, I wasn't going to." Participant 2 is living in the same neighborhood where he grew up and was victimized in, and he has

no intention of leaving. He was shot and paralyzed in this neighborhood. He is still in the heart of gang violence. "It all began here, violence, drugs, crackheads, smokers, and even prostitution." When he was shot, his life changed, not only because he became paralyzed, but his best friend also died. This was very difficult on Participant 2 and took a toll on him, but he is committed to remaining in the gang for life. For him, a job is not possible, and making a living is difficult.

Participant 3

Participant 3 is a 40-year-old male. He still lives in the neighborhood where he grew up and considers himself part of the gang but is no longer "doing stuff on the streets." He went to high school and was a good student; he was drawn to art, such as drawing, but dropped out of school to join the gang at about 15 years of age. Participant 3's brother was also involved in the gang. His parents were not together, so even though he saw his father on a regular basis he lived with his single mother, who was working hard and keeping busy trying to make a living. Participant 3 was victimized on several occasions. The last altercation left him with a permanent injury to his left arm when a rival gang member pulled a knife on one of his mates and he stepped in to fight the rival member. He was stabbed in the arm, severing the main nerves, and was left for dead. However, he remained in the gang after the incident. He is pursuing a music career.

Participant 4

Participant 4 is a 27-year-old male and a current gang member. He has been around the gang all his life as his father and other family members were also gang members. He went to high school, where he was a good student and was also active in

sports, but his school career ended when he was drafted into the neighborhood gang at age 13 years.

Participant 4 served a prison sentence for a crime he committed and is still on probation. He stated that getting a real job is out of the question. He has been victimized on several occasions. The last incident, a drive-by shooting in which he was the target, left him blind. He was hit in the temple, and his optic nerve was severed. The incident changed his life because his mobility is limited, and he finds it difficult if not impossible to go places when he wants to. Getting a job is also not possible considering his background and condition. Despite all of this, Participant 4 never gave up gang life. He said he is still in the neighborhood, doing what he needs to do.

Participant 5

Participant 5 is a 30-year-old male. He was a young boy when his father died following gang violence in which he was gunned down in the neighborhood. He has considered himself part of the gang for as long as he can remember. His mother was also in the gang, so gang life was all he knew growing up. Participant 5 dropped out of high school and was homeschooled for a time. He was kicked out of homeschooling because of gang problems. His uncle (mother's brother) was also a gang member and had a significant influence on him by exposing him to the lifestyle as a young boy.

Participant 5 was victimized on multiple occasions. The last incident, in which he was shot five times in a drive-by shooting in his neighborhood, left him paralyzed. He is wheelchair bound. Participant 5 views himself as a gang member for life; he stated that

he will not turn his back on the neighborhood or his homeboys and homegirls. He is interested in improving his life and is currently pursuing a music career.

Participant 6

Participant 6 is a 30-year-old male who is still in the gang. He is a high school graduate and participated in sports while in school. Participant 6 entered the gang at about age 11 or 12 years. His father and cousin were also in the gang. He was victimized several times by rival gang members who shot him. A shootout incident with rival gang members left him severely injured. There is a bullet embedded in his body as a reminder of his victimization. He served time in prison, and he is on probation for the same shootout that nearly killed him.

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Data Collection

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Semistructured interviews using an interview protocol were used to collect data. The interview protocol (see Appendix B) was developed based on the literature reviewed for this study and reflected the research question developed for this study: What motivates gang members to rejoin their gang after severe physical victimization? The protocol provided consistency across the interviews and allowed for flexibility in participant responses. After informed consent was obtained from the participants, they were asked for their permission to be audio recorded. The interviews began when authorization was provided. Each interview lasted approximately 1 hr. At the end of each interview, the participants were thanked for their time and given a $5 coupon for a meal at a local fast-food restaurant. I transcribed the interviews verbatim and saved the transcriptions in a password-protected file on my computer.

Data Analysis

The intent of qualitative investigators is to assess, interpret, and explain social phenomena (Miles et al., 2013). As the researcher, I was the instrument in this qualitative study. I limited researcher bias by following Miles et al.'s (2013) guidance by remaining conscious of aspects in my background and experiences that might affect interpretation of information gathered during participant interviews. Furthermore, it was important that I provided enough detail on the fieldwork's context so others can determine if the same data can be generated under similar circumstances (Maxwell, 2013; Miles et al., 2013).

I analyzed the transcripts of the semistructured interviews with NVivo 11. NVivo facilitates data manipulation and organization as well as searching through immense amounts of data to find specifics in the information (Miles et al., 2013). This process allowed me to explore how gang members' beliefs may have influenced their behaviors and their overall perceptions of victimization and rejoining after victimization.

NVivo is designed to organize and explore textual content. I imported interviews into the NVivo software program as Microsoft Word documents. Nodes are either parent nodes, which reflect general topics, or child nodes, which reflect more specific topics (Hoover & Koerber, 2011). Three parent node titles, based on the interview protocol, were created in advance of coding. The parent nodes were titled background, gang membership and involvement, and returning to gang after injury. Each imported interview was read line by line, and text was selected and coded to the appropriate parent nodes. A fourth parent node titled other was created for content not directly pertaining to the three interview protocol nodes.

The next coding phase involved refining the coding within each of the four parent nodes. Descriptive words and phrases were chosen for subcategory titles. This continued within each subcategory as several node layers were developed. A variety of inductive and deductive coding strategies were used as content was parsed and patterns were explored. The process was cyclical and interpretive. The result was four parent nodes with 25 categories and 88 subcategories. Appendix C details the node listing hierarchy.

Thematic Analysis

I used the framework method (Gale, Heath, & Cameron, 2013) to derive themes. Using this approach allowed me to develop a matrix based on emerging themes. The matrix reflected themes including the gang lifestyle, the influence of social factors, victimization, and camaraderie. Identifying these themes facilitated better understanding of the factors that led study participants to rejoin or stay in the gang after victimization, and how these factors continue to influence their decisions to stay in the gang or leave it.

Thematic content analysis was beneficial for identifying patterns and emerging themes in the data. The major themes I developed were direct answers to my research question as to what motivates gang members to rejoin their gang after severe physical victimization. The NVivo analysis correlated the results with the framework method and supported most of the interviewees' comments in each of the major themes. Table 2 shows the themes and codes that were developed in the analysis conducted for this study.

Table 2

Framework: Codes and Themes

Theme	Codes
1. Social bonds	Family
	Attachment
	Commitment
	Common value system
2. Gang external activity	Incentive
	Motivation
	Perceptions
	Criminal activities
3. Victimization	Feelings about being injured
	Part of the lifestyle
	Recovery status
	Remaining in the gang family
4. Victimology of domestic violence (parallel; emerged as new discovery)	Part of the lifestyle
	Remaining in the family
5. Barriers to lifestyle change	No support
	No choice
	Depression
	Beliefs
6. Thoughts and feelings about retaliation	Confrontation
	Retaliation
	No retaliation

Results and Findings

As shown in Table 2, six themes emerged from the coding process: social bonds, gang external activity, victimization, domestic violence/victimization (parallel; emerged as a new discovery), barriers to lifestyle changes, and thoughts and feelings about retaliation. Each theme is discussed in detail next. The themes reflect to the research question and the theoretical framework.

Theme: 1 Social Bonds

Current literature suggests that when social bonds are lacking in other areas such as family, gang members are more likely to join a gang in search of these bonds instead of joining for safety reasons (Decker et al., 2013; Maxson & Esbensen, 2012). Social bonds are the fabric that holds gangs together and that powerfully influence gang membership. Study findings revealed that the gang serves as a substitute family and provides structure and governance that these members lack. This phenomenon reflects the social bond theory as the gang activity emphasizes the influence of peers and peer groups.

The importance of social bonds was reflected in comments from all study participants. Their explanations again underscored that gang members bond strongly with their gangs, especially when family bonding is deficient. In these individuals, the desire to be a part of a gang's peer bond is powerful because they have not had adequate and healthy family bonding. Study participant comments that reflected the theme of social bonds illustrated their personal experiences, their feelings about the gang lifestyle in retrospect, and values that developed out of these experiences.

Participant 1 said he loved the gang because even though there was violence involved he knew he was loved. Experiencing victimization is the kind of discipline he knew he would go through to be part of his gang family.

I wanted to be a part of that [lifestyle and dynamic], I mean. That we were doing it for us, for protection of other people, but we were doing it for a good reason.

That's what I still think of, and I love that, you know, and it comes with a culture

and it comes with the way of life.

Participant 2 had similar thoughts about participating in the gang and his feelings

of love and devotion for his gang family.

I still do have friendships with . . . with members of the neighborhood. It—it did

[joined and remained in the gang] because you know what? I think nobody judged

you there. Nobody. If you talked and said, most of the time people that were in

the gang thought the same way you did. I really didn't get to make no choice. I

mean, I just, I was just motivated to bang with people.

Participant 3 provided a detailed description of his gang's social aspects as he

reflected on his relationships in the gang and what it means to him to be part of the gang

family.

We look at it kind of like a tribe or a family to whereas, you know what I mean, it

ain't all just all negative shit from what you all see. So it's like a family thing, you

know. We grew up to where we didn't have no money or whatnot, you know what

I mean? There's four or five of us. We're broke, but instead of going to the . . .

instead of going to a McDonalds and going to buy me a Jumbo Jack or a fuckin'

Big Mac and eat it in front of these niggers' faces, nah, man. We're going to go to

the store, get a loaf of fuckin' bread and a package of some fuckin' bologna and

we're going to share that.

Participant 4's comments were similar to those of Participants 1, 2, and 3 but also

reflected the influence of peer motivation and a sense of belonging.

So my dad, even though he's involved with what he was involved with, he's been

with the gang since the beginning of the time, like when it first started. He never

want to be involved with that, but you could only like keep your eye on somebody

for, you know, like so much time, you know what I mean? Maybe I've been

intertwined with the lifestyle for so long, even before you know, family members,

and I've been around it forever. Cause people are going to belong to something

the gang is an alternative.

Participant 5 said he knew early on that his entrenched family involvement in the

gang would only reinforce his feelings for the gang and that his membership was

inevitable.

And my uncle, my mom's brother, he was like really, really into it, you know, on

drugs, super gangbanging, in and out of jail. And I would see him and that was

somebody else, you know, that I looked up to as far as, you know, gangbanging.

And my uncle, my mom's brother, he was like really, really into it, you know, on

drugs, super gangbanging, in and out of jail. And you know, like . . . but my mom,

you know what I'm saying, she was involved and my father was involved and my

father, he was murdered by gang violence when I was like maybe 7 or 8. I'm very

deeply rooted with this so my whole thing.

Theme: 2 Gang External Activity (Criminal Activity)

Social bond theory represents a solid framework sociologists and criminologists

use to explain why individuals might engage in certain criminal behaviors (Klemp-North,

2007). Comments from study participants confirmed that the gang family dynamic is important because the phenomenon is so tightly bound to other criminal activities.

Participant 1 reflected on gang activities that are part of the gang lifestyle. He also commented of the empowerment that he felt when participating in gang activities. The fear and intimidation that exuded as part of his gang persona made him feel powerful.

So it's all about basically making easy money, either pushing drugs or . . . I mean nowadays, that's what . . . yeah. Because I guess a thug is someone that just— they're not bad, they're not a gang member, but a thug is out hustling, trying to make money any way they can.

So that made you feel more empowered and, you know, and I think, too, you know, being in the gang, it makes a lot of people feel, you know, like that— that they have power, you know, that they, you know, that they love the feeling of, you know, making people—making people feel, you know.

Participant 2's comments indicated that victimization in the community also influenced aggression that was positively correlated with an increased likelihood of committing criminal acts. He said the neighborhood he still lives in is a high-crime and poverty-stricken zone where drug dealing is commonplace and part of the community.

Living in the neighborhood, this is the neighborhood, the heart of the gang actually, where gangbanging began, there are drugs, crackheads, smokers, and even prostitution. You just go with it because . . . like I got homies who, you know, moms, you know, are on drugs, heavy, I probably sold drugs to. I've done things with my homeboys. You know, we've done dirt together.

Participant 3 stated that gang members often take part in criminal activities even though the risks such as incarceration or even the possibility of death are inevitable. As a result of being involved with crime such as selling drugs, possession of firearms, getting involved in shootouts and other physical altercations, Participant 3 had his fair share of punishments.

Yeah, I was incarcerated a few times. I've been going to jail, back and forth to jail since juvenile hall. I've been shot at on numerous occasions inside the gang element and outside the gang element. When you start gangbanging, you already got to know you could possibly get killed, you might have to kill somebody, you're going to probably end up going to jail.

Participant 4 echoed the risks of gang life such as participating in criminal activities that members acknowledge as an accepted and common occurrence.

I've been to prison. I got shot. It was basically I was driving in my car and . . . and a car pulled up on the side of me and started shooting and stuff inside my car. And I got shot one time in the temple and I crashed, went to the hospital, and I lost my vision in regards to the whole incident. I have been shot on five different occasions and suffered, have bullet wounds.

Participant 5 talked about being well-versed in crime and being a hustler to make money in dubious ways

And a lot of times when you do go out when you pick that gun up to go out and rob somebody, your intentions aren't to kill him. I wanted to go get some money by all means, whether it was, you know, doing whatever. Whatever I had to do to

make some money, that's what I was going to do. And it starts off with that and you know, once you get your first little large sum of money, you fall in love with it. Now you're just like I'm just going to hustle like, you know, it's a fast dollar.

Theme: 3 Victimization

Every participant, even those with permanent disabilities as a result of their victimization, stated that being victimized was not a reason to quit the gang. Instead, victimization is accepted as part of membership. Many gang members reaffiliate with their gangs after victimization. Despite the physical victimization, they still feel the emotional bond to the gang family and the obligation to stay. The love for the gang and from the gang keeps them with their gang family. The lack of a biological family structure leaves some members with the gang as the only option in their lives, and regardless of the threat of victimization, they do not want to lose their family. Some of the members expressed that the gang was the only family they had and they did not want to sever the relationship even though it is oftentimes an abusive one.

Participant 1 stated that victimization is part of gang life and to be victimized demonstrates a high level of dedication to the gang family. Even though one might get killed due to his gang affiliation, there is an unspoken tenet of loyalty to the family that is ingrained in the mindset of members.

Getting hurt was not . . . well, for me at the time, it wasn't a reason to stop being with the gang. I mean when stuff happens . . . sometimes, as bad as it could be, you just laughed it off. And it was just like it was like no big deal. It was just part of life. Well, I mean, I don't know how much it's really to say, you know, I'm

victimized because, again, I think if you're part of the gang and you're out there, you know, kind of looking for it so you're putting yourself in harm's way.

Participant 1 also detailed his views on what being a victim means to him and how victimization is accepted as part of gang membership.

I believe that, you know, when you're . . . when you're in a gang and if you're out on a street corner, you're obviously waiting for something to happen. You're . . . you're kind of welcoming it to happen and you're putting yourself out there for something to happen. And then when something happens, then, you know, if you didn't get killed and then, you know, a big part of it is to a lot of the guys, I think, it's just like a joke and it's like . . . it's like, you know, then you have a story if you got shot and, you know, you got stabbed.

For Participant 2, quitting the gang never crossed his mind after he was victimized and left a paraplegic, even though he fell into depression and had no social support. He still lives and hangs with his homies in the same neighborhood he grew up in. He also believes that it does not matter where one lives; gangs are everywhere, and once committed to the gang, that loyalty stays within the hearts of members.

Well, my ideas are not planning on leaving the city. I mean if you're interacting with people, I mean most people are gang members nowadays. So . . . I mean people . . . mothers, grandmas and I mean brothers and sisters. So I mean if I'm dealing with anybody or I'm dealing with a female or anything, I mean if I'm not dealing with my gang, I mean her family might be gangbangers. I gave my legs

for the gang, I survived and I am moving on in the same neighborhood but now I

am putting some miles on this wheelchair.

Participant 3 stated that the most important thing for him was being in the gang. If

a gang member gets hurt and stays in the gang, as he did, this is true dedication; it means

that he is being serious about the gang.

Hey, I survived it. Pssh, moving on. Nah, I mean nah. We're not . . . we ain't

running from nobody! We ain't doing none of that! You come over here, we ain't

botherin' nobody, but if you come over here fuckin' with us, we're going to show

you that . . . who the fuck you think you're playin' with. So, basically I'm saying

that to say that just to . . . only the . . . we can sit here and think you're going to

just leave just 'cause some shit happened to you? You a bitch! You know what I

mean? So we . . . shit like that, I mean we got homies that got shot in the back and

paralyzed from the waist down, they still around, you know, so . . . Just 'cause

you get hurt, I mean that's what you signed up for when you chose to become a

gang member. So, to just get injured and just like, "Oh, I'm going to get on with

this shit!" No, nn-nn.

Participant 4 also said he would never leave the gang. His comments reflected a

sense of resignation about what happened to him as well as the theme of victimization

being expected as part of the gang experience.

I got shot and I am blind but leaving, quitting, no, it never . . . it never crossed my

mind. It never crossed my mind. Why I don't know. Maybe I've been intertwined

with the lifestyle for so long, even before you know, family members, and I've

been around it forever. But it ain't ever crossed my mind. I mean I could walk

away at any point, but it seems. . . it's just like if somebody shot me and I lost my

vision . . . I'm not going to sit down and get out the way. It's like they

accomplished what they wanted to accomplish and, you know, I'm not with that.

Participant 5 elaborated on his experience of being victimized, which illustrated

his strong dedication to his gang family.

So in a way, getting injured is also like proving your alliance and your love for

the gang in a way. I gave them my legs for the gang, so it's like, you know, what

more do you really want? That's exactly how your average homeboy would take

it, especially the younger dudes. You get the younger dudes who will hear the

story, like oh, man. A car pulled up on him. And even though he didn't have no

gun, he still bang the 'hood. So . . . and to a young homie, they like he down for

the set, you know what I'm saying? Like I can't just say fuck my homeboys.

Participant 6 brushed off being victimized as just being part of the gang lifestyle,

something expected and also accepted.

It . . . it all depends on the person. You know what I'm saying? Like . . . or where

their mindset is at. You know, just like they say they like call it fight or flight?

I'm just being myself and hang with people who I knew all my life so it's not like

quitting like I'm going to quit my life, you know what I'm saying? I mean it's . . .

like I've been doing it too long to be saying like shit like that.

Theme 4: Victimology of Domestic Violence (Parallel; Emerged as a New Discovery)

While this study was about gang victimization and the phenomenon of remaining in or rejoining the gang following victimization, the findings also shed light on an interesting parallel of the gang family system and other family systems as they relate to victimization. Gang members often accept gang victimization as a result of membership. In the conventional family system; that is, one's own biological or adoptive family, when victimization happens in the form of domestic violence, it can also be accepted as part of the family dynamic. Similarly, gang victimization goes unreported because of the potential consequences of being ousted from the gang family and being labeled as a coward. As Participant 3 stated, victimization is accepted as part of being a gang member. "You're going to just leave just 'cause some shit happened to you? You a bitch! Just 'cause you get hurt, I mean that's what you signed up for when you chose to become a gang member."

Therefore, in addition to the theme of victimization, a parallel of an unexpected finding of domestic violence victimology emerged as there are significant similarities between the victimization of gang members and patterns of victimization in domestic violence. I searched the literature and did not find anything that makes this connection in victimology. This new discovery resulted in a supposition that gangs are parallel systems to substitute families where the behavior of gang violence victims mimics the behavior of domestic violence victims. This new finding is an important contribution to the literature in the area of victimization.

Victims in both domestic violence and gang violence situations respond with similar acceptance of the victimization as being part of the family's system. The victims

accept the abuse as a private family matter and choose to keep it quiet for the family's sake. In both family systems, the victimization patterns are comparable, and the reasons for not leaving are similar as well, mostly reflecting that these individuals have nowhere else to go, they feel shame or guilt and fear for their safety, and they have loyalty and love for their gang family.

Participant 3 said that victimization is not reported to the police because, as he put it, "They can't do nothin' for me. I don't expect you guys to do nothin' for me. Cause I never known the police to do anything I mean but be a negative contribution to my life anyway." This sentiment is also very similar to what domestic violence victims must feel.

Participant 5 explained his perspective on how the police really feel about gang members getting hurt. This is a classic case of blaming the victim and dehumanizing an injured person because he is a gang member.

And again people wonder where a young Black man's hate for the police comes from. And when I got shot, I was laying there bleeding to death, and, you know, it was a police officer that was standing next to me. And I think I started choking, and I grabbed his pants leg, you know, and he snatched his pants leg away and said "I'm getting . . . I'm not going to get any of your, you know, dirty whatever . . . some shit."

Participant 6's comments also indicated that victimization is not reported to the authorities due to the mistrust in the police and that fact that gang members are often viewed as a disposable people deserving of their victimization and their injuries.

Participant 6 said, "I don't have no trust 'cause it's like they could probably come and lie and make it to fit whatever motive they have, you know what I'm saying?"

Participant 5's thoughts about being in the gang family emphasized his unconditional loyalty and devotion despite the risks of victimization that happen as a result of being in the gang.

> Because we all signed up for something and we all were . . . we all knew the rules. We all knew . . . we know the gang. You know, you still want that love. And for me to see that that I still have that love, you know, because I gave my legs for 'em. You know, I got to like urinate through a tube. I got to wear diapers to bed because I don't have bladder control. I gave my legs to the neighborhood, you know, to the set.

Theme 5: Barriers to Lifestyle Change

The study findings suggest that the mentality of gang members almost always reflects the belief that they have no other choice than to join the gang. They live in low-income and high-crime neighborhoods. Many come from broken families with no father figure present. They have family members in the gang, and most of their childhood friends belong to their gang. Their enemies belong to rival gangs. There is no escaping the neighborhood, and they know no other lifestyle.

Gang members often refer to their gang lifestyle as tribal. Many members claim to be deeply rooted in gang life; this is their family, and there is no love or opportunities anywhere else. If they were to want to make changes in their lives and possibly leave the gang, the barriers to doing so are often physical and as a result of their gang involvement.

As an example, three of the study participants have permanent injuries. Two are in wheel chairs, and one is blind.

Other barriers often reflect involvement with the legal system, again as a result of their gang membership. Five of the six study participants have police records and have served time in jail and prison. Some are still on probation, so getting a job is difficult because no one will hire them. However, for others the barriers are more psychological and emotional.

Participant 5 acknowledged that stereotypes of Black males can negatively impact gang members' lives as it affects their abilities to get jobs and be part of mainstream society in a conventional sense. He explained how racial prejudice can be a powerful obstacle that has a bearing on lifestyle changes.

> A lot of people want to know why young Black men rob, you know, and steal. You know, it's because when you get some young Black dude who's like 15 and his mom is a single mother and, you know, he sees his . . . and his breaking point could be him walking in the house and seeing his mom crying because she don't know how she going to feed him and his little sister. You know what I'm saying? So now he's like "Oh, I got to go get a job." So he's going to McDonald's. But they won't hire him because he's Black. You know, so now you have this young Black dude who just got turned down for a month straight from like 18 different jobs, you know. Now he's like okay, well, it starts out with one of my boys sells weed.

Participant 1 echoed the feeling of hopelessness that young gang members experience that oftentimes becomes a barrier to lifestyle changes.

It is just not knowing anything else. You can't do anything else because you don't know anything else. It's being scared inside because there's no . . . there's no other direction, you know, that they know. And I don't think anyone going to change on their own unless somebody really comes and gives them that helping hand to do it.

Participant 2 said that having no education and proper work skills makes gang life more attractive for young members trying to make a living. The life of crime pays dividends and does not require having a real job or going to school.

I had nowhere to go, but I liked gangbanging. I liked it, you know. It was something I was good at. Anyone was good . . . anyone could be good at . . . you could be good at gangbanging in a wheelchair. You know? Because anyone could pull the trigger. You don't have to . . . you don't have to build a wall. You don't have to lay bricks. You know, you don't have to have a skill set to pull a trigger. So I was good at it. I found something I was good at.

Participant 4 talked about the barriers as being an afterthought for him. Like most gang members, he knew that joining a gang would have consequences that would impact his future, but he disregarded those intuitions.

Not saying no to the pros and cons but this gang stuff is not what it's cracked up to be. Of course the females like the bad boys but that isn't worth it; it is not worth it because you'll end up doing time and that door [freedom] won't ever

open up again, no . . . you could get shot, you could die. as to changing directions

it's like a lot of gang members want to do different stuff but it's hard get out, it's

not that easy they all have pasts, backgrounds, gang of ties, past prison terms, and

probation it is difficult to change and find a job.

Participant 6 acknowledged the gang mindset in stating that being in a gang and

participating in gang activities is a barrier to an ordinary lifestyle. Gang members who

commit crimes end up in jail and on probation; getting a job is difficult if not impossible

following release. Participant 6 was incarcerated for a crime, yet he is not willing to

change his ways, even though he knows his unwillingness creates more barriers.

However, one can sense a certain dilemma in Participant 6's comment about the

possibility of change for salient reasons such as having a child.

You've got some people who come around and say like they're not going to do

this no more because . . . they had a kid. A kid could have changed their life. Just

going to jail could have changed my life. It all depends on your situation.

Theme 6: Retaliation

Gang members commonly believe that retaliation is a resolution to problems with

rival gangs (Taylor et al., 2010; Vasquez et al., 2010). Shap (2014) also found that

retaliation and revenge were common themes in the gang lifestyle. However, based on

the present study's findings, retaliation was not necessarily seen as a resolution to

victimization. In response to the question of how they felt about retaliating, some

participant responses reflected the desire to correct some sort of wrongdoing, but in most

cases, and somewhat surprisingly, participant comments reflected that victimization was accepted and dealt with as part of gang membership.

Participant 1's comments reflected that revenge is part of standing up for other gang members as a community.

And a lot of times, it would just be a lot of mad dogging . . . just looking at each other just, you know, the wrong way and just waiting to see if something was going to be said or not. But if somebody had been jumped, then . . . then that's when it came time for retaliation, you know, we're picking up rocks, bricks, anything that we can get our hands on, bats. Later on, people doing drive-bys and, you know . . . or at least, you know, going into a party and all of a sudden flashing their gun or something. And that's when things started getting a little bit more . . . more crazier right there, so . . .

Participant 2 had no interest in retaliation after he was victimized. He felt that life punished the person who victimized him.

I hold no grudges; I know the person who shot me but that guy has his own demons, he's on drugs and all strung out. I don't care to retaliate. No, 'cause the person that I saw that did it, I mean I've seen him a few times. I ain't ever thought about hurting him or anything like that. I have respect for the dude. I mean he's not in the best situation either though. I mean the dude high, got on drugs right now and stuff like that. So I feel like I'm winning this situation anyways. Shit.

Participant 3 stated that his gang family came together and wanted to retaliate after he was violently attacked. However, his attacker escaped and was never seen again.

I guess people in the area, a lot of people in the area that happened to know who I

am or whatnot so around that time, what happened is I was in a lot of . . . I mean I

was kind of known in the area that I was at, where it happened at so other people

told him that basically that you kind of . . . like bro, you kind of made a bad

mistake right there! So I mean, we went around looking for the guy, but he . . .

they say he took a plane ticket to New York or somewhere. He ain't never been

seen or heard from since.

Participant 4 echoed feeling the need for revenge, but showed more of a

philosophy of acceptance of what had happened and leaving it in the past. "Yeah, I felt

revenge. But, you know, like that happened some time ago. And you know, I mean I done

simmered down and, you know, I see things otherwise, you know."

To Participant 5, retaliation is a part of the honor system and standing up for one's

gang brothers and sisters. He commented on his own father being gunned down as a

result of a gang dispute. His feelings were if his father violated the gang code in any way,

he was deserving of death.

And again like I said, I'm very deeply rooted with this so my whole thing is, you

know, even when I tell people, they're kind of like oh, shit. Like he's really with

us. Because I'm like if my dad . . . if I find out that my dad violated something,

meaning he snitched or he did something he wasn't supposed to do, then I can't

really hold no type of resentment or anger towards the guy who took my father's

life. Another way to retaliations is after an injury, what they'll do is they'll send

police to your hospital room, especially once they find out that it's gang related.

That's how a lot of retaliations happen is because a lot of the times, we may not

know who did it, but the police going to come in there and tell you who did it."

Participant 6 acknowledged that some gang members would have the desire to retaliate

but that he had no interest in doing so.

I mean that was a long time ago. Years ago, so people who or whatever might not

even be around no more. There's no telling, you know what I'm saying? Things

change. Yeah, things change. And it might be a different reason. For better or for

worse. You never know.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

I ensured trustworthiness throughout this study by adhering to the research and

interview protocol approved by the IRB. I took rigorous steps to ensure that my role as

researcher remained professional with proper record keeping and reflexivity such as the

use of field journals to capture ideas, connections, methodological notes, etc., related to

the understanding of the phenomenon. I sought advice from my peers and committee

advisors. I further ensured the overall quality and trustworthiness of this study by

incorporating the following key elements into the research process: a clearly stated

research question, systematic data collection that is appropriately managed, using a

purposive sampling method, and ensuring that data analysis is performed correctly

(Baxter & Jack, 2008). The research question developed for this study was clearly stated.

Purposive sampling, described as homogenous sampling in which similar cases are

selected to study common characteristics in a population (Saldaña, 2013), was used. I

collected my data systematically and managed them appropriately. I ensured that data

analysis was performed correctly by using reflective analysis and structural analysis (Saldaña, 2013).

This study's multiple case study design, in which the data were compared within and across cases, enhanced its overall quality and trustworthiness. Ensuring credibility requires presenting a realistic picture of the cases being studied. This necessitates limiting researcher bias as the researcher is the instrument in qualitative studies (Maxwell, 2013). I limited researcher bias by being aware of aspects in my background and experiences that might affect my interpretation of information gathered during participant interviews Researchers must ensure the quality of their research. One of the most important strategies for ensuring quality in qualitative research is to implement systematic data collection and analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). I systematically collected data from the study participants by following a set interview protocol and audio recording each interview. Each interview was then transcribed, and every transcript was then compiled for a thematic analysis to identify themes and trends in the interviews.

Transferability refers to the relevance and soundness of study results (Saldaña, 2013). To ensure transferability, I used rich, thick description derived from the data. The participants selected included sufficient variation or typicalness such as age range and different gang affiliations. To increase transferability, I comprehensively clarified the context of the research study and any suppositions made throughout the study. While not all of the results may be appropriate to other studies or communities, some of the results could be considered as a basis for future studies. To further address transferability, I

thoroughly discussed the steps I took to conduct this study. This paper trail gives other researchers the capability to transfer the conclusions of this analysis to other cases.

The credibility of qualitative findings may be another issue. Bracketing, or setting aside past or previous beliefs, preconceived notions, or knowledge about the phenomenon is one way to safeguard credibility, and I used this approach. Peer review is another good practice as it allows for another set of eyes to verify findings. (Miles et al., 2014). My dissertation chair and committee members provided assistance as peer reviewers. To further ensure credibility, I presented a realistic picture of the case studies by providing enough detail of the fieldwork's context. This allows others to determine whether or not the same data could be generated under similar circumstances (Maxwell, 2005). I addressed dependability by developing a data collection tool that other researchers can use to repeat the research. Lastly, to promote confirmability, I demonstrated through my thematic analysis that the findings emerged from the data and not from my own predispositions.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented an overview of the research setting and participant demographics and detailed the data collection and analysis steps I followed to conduct this study. The study participants revealed their personal experiences and contributed to answering my research question of what motivates gang members to rejoin their gang after severe physical victimization. The study findings provided rich details to address the themes that emerged from the study and indicated that for the study participants victimization was not a reason for leaving the gang. I presented the themes derived from

data analysis and provided excerpts from participant interviews that illustrated these themes. Study results highlighted that violence and victimization are part of the gang culture.

In addition, the parallel between the behavior of victims of gang violence and the behavior of victims of domestic violence emerged as a new discovery. More specifically, this discovery reflects how victims' behaviors in both cases are similar in response to the victimization. This may be an important key to understanding how to help gang members leave gangs because it points to the possibility of using approaches that are employed for helping domestic violence victims leave their abusers.

I concluded the chapter with a discussion of the procedures I followed to ensure the study's trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, and dependability. In Chapter 5, I present a discussion and interpretation of the findings detailed in Chapter 4. I also discuss intervention strategies that reflect the role of victimization in gang-member functioning; specifically highlighting the parallels between the gang system and family systems. I discuss the implications of these similarities and parallel processes and this study's contributions to positive social change.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to identify the beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions of gang members that result in decisions to return to the gang after physical victimization. This was a multiple case study in which semistructured interviews were used to gain insights from participants on their experiences of gang victimization. Study participants were six current and former male gang members between ages 20 to 50 years who were victims of severe gang violence. Many of the participants showed their battle scars and permanent wounds to me to illustrate their personal accounts.

One question guided this study: What motivates gang members to rejoin their gang after severe physical victimization? The key findings in this study reflect themes such as the importance of social bonds, the acceptance of criminal behavior as being part of being in a gang, and various barriers to leaving the gang. These themes parallel findings in other studies on gang violence (Fox, 2013; Jacques & Rennison, 2013; Pyrooz et al., 2010; T. J. Taylor et al., 2010; Turanovic & Pratt, 2014). My study's findings also illustrate aspects of gang membership that go beyond gang victimizations as an accepted occurrence that is part of gang membership. In addition, the findings reveal an interesting parallel with domestic violence victimization that can further be explored in future studies. The findings expose the need for community advocacy and programs to help gang members who have experienced severe physical victimization change their lives, which in turn would help to create positive social change for these individuals and their communities.

Social Bonds

Gangs have many persuasive aspects that draw members to them. One of the most salient aspects is the gang's social bonds. In a seminal study on gang membership, Esbensen and Deschenes (1998) stated that gang members often perceive gang membership as similar to growing up in a family. Other researchers have suggested that the lack of social bonds may lead to joining a gang in search of these bonds instead of joining for safety reasons (Decker et al., 2013; Maxson & Esbensen, 2012).

The need for social bonds, especially familial bonds, was confirmed by many of the current study's participants. Their comments revealed that the ties gang members feel toward their gangs and their gang peers are cemented in a deep need for love and belonging. If they lack a biological family, the gang then serves as the surrogate family. This replacement for the family of origin provides structure and governance that gang members did not experience in their own families. Participant 3 said, "We look at it kind of like a tribe or a family to, whereas, you know what I mean, it ain't all just all negative shit from what you all see." Participant 5's comments echoed the need for family and belonging: "You know, the guys that's on the streets is because they have no love at home. The love that they get is from their homies." As Participant 6 explained, "We don't think of it like no gang. Shit, we think of it like family or like, you know what I'm saying, the people you grew up next door to and had struggles with or whatever."

Gang External Activity

Gang membership is widely associated with criminal behavior (Wooldredge & Steiner, 2013), which poses another concern for gang members who return to their gangs

after being violently victimized. Because gang activity is correlated with other social problems such as drug-related crimes and homicides tied to gang members, social scientists have sought to understand why some individuals participate in gangs regardless of these risks (FBI, 2014).

Forster et al. (2015) found that exposure to violence, deviant peers, and family processes can all influence an individual's behavior. Further, previous social interactions and perceived acceptability of these actions can directly influence whether an individual will engage in deviant behaviors. Forster et al. hypothesized that gang involvement provides exposure to violence that is associated with criminal behavior and raises interpersonal aggression.

Comments from participants in the present study confirmed that gang membership promotes criminal activities such as selling drugs and guns and prostitution and that drive by shootings were a common occurrence and part of gang membership. Such activities surely contribute to and increase the likelihood of a gang member's involvement in the criminal justice system at some point during his life. Most of the present study's participants have been in prison; some more than once.

Wooldredge and Steiner (2013) found that gang members who have been physically victimized were more likely to engage in violent acts. They further concluded that previous victimization increased cynicism toward legal authority and the risk of subsequent criminality. When released back into society, the attitudes these individuals have toward legal authority may have a detrimental effect on society. Wooldredge and Steiner's findings were supported by responses of participants in the present study. Most

spent time in prison and after release returned to the same neighborhood, rejoined their gangs, and resumed the same activities in which they were involved prior to incarceration. Comments such as the following from Participant 3 reflected an acceptance among gang members that criminal activity is part of being in a gang.

> The whole purpose to me was like hey, I'm trying to make a name for myself. But you know, going to jail and all that, that was stuff . . . that's what you signed up for when you started gangbanging. When you start gangbanging, you already got to know you could possibly get killed, you might have to kill somebody, you're going to probably end up going to jail.

Victimization

Gang membership often comes paired with the belief that membership provides protection (Fox, 2013; Jacques & Rennison, 2013; Katz et al., 2011; Pyrooz, Moule, & Decker, 2010). However, the reverse is more the case as the risk of victimization instead increases considerably (Averdijk, 2012; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Fox, 2013; Jacques & Rennison, 2013; Katz et al., 2011; Peterson et al., 2004; Pyrooz et al., 2010; T. J. Taylor et al., 2010). While gang members in the present study may have held the false belief that gang membership would protect them from victimization when they joined their gangs, it was dispelled as each did experience victimization related to their gang membership. Still, their comments reflected loyalty and altruism toward the gang family even if being victimized is a clear and present danger. As Participant 1 put it, "That we were doing it for us for protection of other people, but we were doing it for a good reason." Participant 5 stated, "The groups [gangs]—that's what they were created for was

to protect the neighborhood, you know, and watch out for your own." Participants' comments reflected that being in the gang may provide some protection for members as well as the neighborhood and that they were active participants in providing protection from victimization as it is considered part of what is done when one joins a gang. However, study findings affirmed that gang membership does not equate to protection from victimization.

Parallel Victimology of Gang Victimization and Domestic Violence Victimization

During analysis for this study, a new victimology finding emerged that reflected a parallel between gang violence victims and domestic violence victims. More specifically, I found that some of the attitudes and behaviors of gang violence victims were similar to attitudes and behaviors in domestic violence victims. These similarities largely reflect themes of acceptance, tolerance, and not disclosing the violence outside of the family. These similarities between attitudes and behaviors related to gang violence and those related to domestic violence were not found in the literature reviewed for this study. For gang members, having the gang as a family, even a maladjusted one, is more valuable than not having a family at all. These are feelings and beliefs like those often found among domestic violence victims.

Study participants confirmed other findings regarding gang victimization generally not being reported to law enforcement because of the threat of punishment, such as jail time, or because of possible retaliation from the gang members who victimized them. Gang members often keep their injuries to themselves and patch themselves up if the wounds are not life threatening to avoid exposure. Similarly, Louis

and Johnson (2017) stated that although countless individuals experience domestic violence, only a few report the violence to law enforcement officials because they fear retaliation from the abuser. Mele (2016) also noted that domestic violence victims often do not report abuse to the police, even when they have been assaulted on several occasions, because they feel that they are to blame for the abuse. The syndrome of blaming the victim in domestic violence is an interesting parallel to gang violence as in each, due to circumstances such as being at the wrong place at the wrong time, victims are responsible for their own fate of being victimized (Renner, Cavanaugh, & Easton, 2015).

In domestic violence, victimization is often not reported because there is an implicit agreement that if it is revealed, there will be consequences that might result in the family relationship being strained or even severed (Louis & Johnson, 2017; Mele, 2016). Similarly, gang victimization is dealt with, accepted, and kept inside the gang family because of shame or scandal associated with it being exposed. Keeping victimization incidents in the gang family is part of the gang code as being labeled as a snitch or "nark" can come with severe consequences and even death (Morris, 2010). As Participant 5 explained when talking about his father's murder,

> If I find out that my dad violated something, meaning he snitched, then I can't really hold no type of resentment or anger towards the guy who took my father's life. Because we all knew the rules. We know the gang.

Domestic violence affects millions of people throughout the world (Renner et al., 2015). According to Louis and Johnson (2017), domestic violence is characterized by "an

escalating pattern of abuse where one partner in a relationship controls the other through force, intimidating, and/or the threat of violence" (p. 34). The factors that influence domestic violence victimization are very similar to the patterns of gang victimization. The family, whether it is the gang or the family of origin, holds the locus of control over the members and functions to keep members in the system.

Many researchers view domestic violence or victimization as a complex outcome of personal, situational, and sociocultural factors in which the individual should be viewed in the context of the social environment, which consists of the family, the social system, the relationships between the family and the social system, and social norms or ideologies (Payne & Triplett, 2009). Nonetheless, for domestic violence victims, the decision to remain in an abusive relationship may be in part attributed to the lack of support outside of the family. As a result, the victim becomes socially, emotionally, and economically reliant on the abuser to support basic needs (Louis & Johnson, 2017). Victims often feel that there is no way out of their situation, and they remain in the abusive relationship.

Study participants remarked that law enforcement often expressed open disregard of participants' injuries as deserving because of their gang membership. This narrative echoes the blaming the victim syndrome. There is distrust in law enforcement among gang members because they perceive that they are not considered part of the mainstream social structure. Many of the study participants stated that they have no trust in the police because the police frequently force gang members to confess to crimes that they did not commit. These forced confessions may result from visiting gang members in the hospital

to get them to implicate other gang members. As Participant 5 put it, "Lot of accusations and retaliations happen is because a lot of the times, they may not know who did it, but the police going to come in there and tell who did it." Participant 5 added that "people wonder where a young Black man's hate for the police comes from" and recalled what happened after he was shot as an illustration of how this hate can develop.

> I was laying there bleeding to death, and, you know, it was a police officer that was standing next to me. And I think I started choking, and I grabbed his pants leg, you know, and he snatched his pants leg away and said, "I'm getting—I'm not going to get any of your, you know, dirty whatever—some shit."

> Participant 3 stated that victim blaming is rampant and that he has no trust in law enforcement. "I never known the police to do anything I mean but be a negative contribution to my life anyway. I never had anything—any good experiences with police." Participant 6 also stated that the police often blame gang members for their own actions when they get hurt and added, "I don't have no trust 'cause it's like they could probably come and lie and make it to fit whatever motive they have, you know what I'm saying?

Thoughts and Feelings About Retaliation

Gang members often believe in retaliating against opposing gangs (T. J. Taylor et al., 2010; Vasquez, Lickel, & Hennigan, 2010). Yet, the prospect of retaliating against an opposing gang for the injuries one receives is only one factor that may lead to rejoining a gang after physical victimization (Pyrooz et al., 2010). Study findings did not support what other researchers have observed about retaliation contributing to gang membership.

Although in some cases study participants considered retaliation, after further scrutiny of the participants' responses, it was a just a passing thought for many, and they did not act on it.

Study findings supported the claim that the decision to return to one's gang after being violently victimized increases the likelihood that a civilian will be victimized by gang violence (McCord, 2012). Even though the intended victim may be another gang member, retaliation often leaves innocent bystanders hurt or mortally wounded. Participant 1 lost a best friend as a result of a retaliatory incident and witnessed innocent people getting hurt and killed. Participant 2 lost his best friend as a result of a shooting incident, and his home girl suffered life-threatening gunshot wounds as well. Participant 3 indicated that people sitting with him have been shot simply by being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Participant 5 also relayed a story about innocent bystanders getting injured when he attended a party where a fight broke out and he and his girlfriend were shot.

Barriers to Lifestyle Change

My study's findings affirm that mitigating factors contribute to the inability to alter one's life course and confirm Papachristos, Hureau, and Braga's (2013) statement that "Gangs are seen as both the byproduct of neighborhood social conditions and important forms of neighborhood social organization" (p. 418). Papachristos et al. added that the individual's neighborhood plays an influential role in determining demographic variables (age, socioeconomic status, etc.), and beliefs (perception of gangs, resources, impoverishment, etc.) and that social networks are directly rooted in the environment as

they help to influence the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors the individual will perceive as acceptable.

Mindsets of participants in the current study reflect the belief that they have no other choice than to join the gang. They live in low-income and high-crime neighborhoods. Many come from broken families with no father figure present. They have family members in the gang, and most of their childhood friends belong to their gang. Their enemies belong to rival gangs. Most of the participants reflected on having no opportunities for change as they have criminal records, they are in and out of jail or on probation, and the prospects for an optimistic future are few. Programs are needed to help create opportunities for gang members to transition out of gang life and become productive members of society.

Limitations of the Study

This study had several limitations. The findings were based on a small sample size of six participants. The participants were mostly Black males, with the exception of one Hispanic participant, and there were no White or Asian participants. The gang affiliations were limited to three different gangs. As such, the participants' experiences may not represent those found in other U.S. gangs. All participants were from a large Western city in the United States and may not represent the experiences or beliefs of individuals in other regional gangs in the United States.

Delimitations of this study were the following: participants' mental health status was not included in the study, and gang members who have not been severely physically victimized were not considered for this study. Women were not included in this study.

The target population was delimited to men as gang membership is predominantly male (National Gang Center, n.d.-c).

Recommendations

Future research using the same methodology and research design would allow researchers to continue exploring gang membership and victimization along the lines established in the present study. By focusing on victimization, a new discovery was made regarding the similarities between gang violence victims and domestic violence victims. This new discovery opens the door to future studies to further explore these similarities.

Although human services may play a vital role in preventing gang members from returning to their gangs, the effectiveness of existing programs has not been established. As Fox (2013) stated, since gang members often engage in criminal activity, the prospect of perceiving a gang member as a victim, even after being severely physically victimized, is often minimal. This factor of dehumanizing of gang members creates an environment in which policy makers and human service agencies often have difficulty perceiving gang members as victims, which may impede the establishment and the effectiveness of interventions to prevent gang members from returning to their gangs. Quantitative and qualitative studies on the efficacy of existing interventions may help inform more effective approaches in the future.

Implications

The study of gangs and gang membership is important because gang activity is so tightly bound to criminal activities. Implications from this study regarding positive social change are far reaching because of their potential for establishing a starting point for

meaningful social interventions that address the problems associated with gang membership and gang victimization. The findings may contribute to a progressive societal movement by providing a better understanding of gang members' thinking and motivation regarding their rejoining their gangs or continuing gang membership following victimization incidents.

Rehabilitation services offered through human services departments could play a critical role in reducing the likelihood that gang members will return to their gangs after being the victim of severe physical violence. However, how these interventions focus on reducing the likelihood that gang members return to their gangs tends to vary (Gideon & Sung, 2010). Findings from the present study highlighted key elements that could be incorporated into strategies to lessen the likelihood of gang members who have been victimized returning to their gangs. The new discovery of behaviors of gang violence victims paralleling those of domestic violence victims can be used to determine effective intervention services as well as outreach efforts that would be most successful for gang members. Since gang members who have been victimized respond in a similar manner to victimization as victims of domestic violence, offering treatment to these gang members that is similar to that provided to domestic violence victims might be effective.

The new discovery that emerged in this study of parallels between gang victimization and domestic violence victimization might provide another avenue for interventions with victims of gang violence as the methods and programs that have been developed for helping victims of domestic violence may also be helpful for victims of gang violence. Fox and Shjarback (2016) found that programs that raise awareness about

victimization and help to fulfill victims' needs tend to be successful. Huey, Broll, and Hryniewicz (2014) found that removing victims and placing them into shelters may help them access the resources they need such as therapy, support programs, and job search services. A multilevel approach that brings together all interested parties, including human services and social workers, local churches, and community leaders and advocates, to raise awareness of gang members who have been victimized and develop intervention programs to help victims is needed and supported by findings from the present study.

Payne and Triplett (2009) identified the need for more victimology training among caseworkers at social service organizations. The discovery of the victimology parallel in the present study suggests that providing human services caseworkers with the resources they need to help gang members who have been victimized, such as training and information on local organizations that work with victims of gang violence, may help to break the cycle of gang violence as well. Since study findings point to parallel victimology between gang violence victims and domestic violence victims and similar internal motives among these victims, it is now possible to formulate programs based on successful domestic violence interventions that can encourage this vulnerable population of gang members to make healthier lifestyle decisions.

Some interventions that target gang members who have been severely physically injured focus on exploring the reasons why these individuals join their gangs (Pyrooz, 2014). Many gang members join gangs as a way of fulfilling their basic needs (Gideon & Sung, 2010). The inability to access the basic resources necessary for one's survival

directly influences an individual's decision to join the gang. However, these factors also hold true after gang members are severely physically injured. The inability to access food and housing, to be safe, and to find employment that will sustain one's life are all reasons for gang members deciding to return to their gangs (Papachristos et al., 2013).

Huey et al. (2014) found that victims are often unaware of available services. This finding was confirmed by comments from participants in the present study. Participants often indicated that they were not aware of any help available to them. They also do not believe that anyone is willing to help them meet basic needs such as housing and employment. Findings such as these support developing outreach efforts to gang members that provide information on available resources and emphasize that such help is available to them regardless of their past or current activities.

Developing outreach efforts such as these may help to discourage gang members from returning to gang life as well as dissuade others from joining gangs. Thus, study results may contribute to meaningful social change by decreasing the number of gang members and providing information that can be used to encourage gang members who have been victimized not to return to their gangs, where they may not only hurt others but also be at greater risk for further victimization themselves.

Conclusion

My study's findings extended what is known about gang membership and gang member victimization as they reflect rich qualitative information regarding the experiences of individuals with a history of gang membership and criminal victimization. A single research question guided this multiple case study: What motivates gang

members to rejoin their gang after severe physical victimization? Gaining a better understanding of why gang members decide to return to the gang lifestyle after they have been severely victimized helped to identify possible interventions that could help them seek alternative paths in their lives.

Participants in this study unequivocally indicated that being victimized was not a motivation to quit the gang and acknowledged that being victimized is part of gang membership. Their statements on why they continued their gang activity following victimization reflected that they still feel strong emotional bonds to the gang family and the obligation to stay.

The social bonds theory provided an appropriate framework for understanding the reasons why gang members return to their gangs even after suffering severe physical victimization. The theory served as a powerful lens for understanding and interpreting gang members' motivations, beliefs, and perceptions through their life experiences.

That the victimization of gang members has great similarity to the patterns of domestic violence victims was a new and important finding and a significant contribution to the field of victimology. Data analysis resulted in striking parallels in how victimization is thought of and dealt with in gangs, which substitute for biological families for many gang members, and in families of origin in which domestic violence occurs. This new finding of the parallel between domestic violence and gang victimization is not only an important contribution to the literature in the area of victimology, it is a step toward creating new intervention approaches for gang members that would borrow from interventions developed for domestic abuse victims. This new

finding might be the key to developing effective programs for gang members who are

ready for change and willing to turn their life around.

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Appendix A: Study Flyer

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH STUDY

Invitation to participate in a research study titled
The Motivation and Decision to Return to a Gang after Severe
Physical Victimization

I am conducting interviews as part of a research study on why gang members return to their gangs after they've been victimized by other gang members. If you are a male gang member between age 20 and 50 and are interested in talking about your experience, you may qualify for this study.

Your responses to the questions you'll be asked will be kept confidential. Interviews will be held in a private location and will be recorded. The interview will last approximately 1 hour.

If you are interested in participating, please inquire via Instagram [deleted for privacy] or via mobile phone at [deleted for privacy].

Thank you!

**This study has been reviewed and approved by the
Research Ethics Review Board, Walden University**

Appendix B: Interview Guide

My name is Nora Vlaszof. I am a doctoral student at Walden University, and you have been selected to participate in this interview as part of the research study I am conducting. The purpose of this interview is to discover what motivates gang members who return to their gang after severe victimization. I am exploring the beliefs, attitudes, motivations, and perceptions of gang members regarding the risks and rewards of returning to the gang after being physically injured. I will be interviewing several other individuals in addition to you, and I will ask the same basic questions of all of you. Various follow-up questions may be asked based on your responses. Your responses will be confidential. Only I will review them.

I expect the interview to last for 1 hour. If more time needed, I will ask for an extension. We will start with reviewing the informed consent form, which details the agreement between you as the participant and I as the researcher. We will read it together, and if you have any questions about it, I will answer them. Your consent will be given voluntarily. If you choose to participate in the study, you are free to withdraw at any time.

During the interview, I will use a recorder and take notes. Using a tape recorder will allow me to listen to the interview as often as necessary during my analysis. Your agreeing to the informed consent form indicates your consent to be recorded.

Interview Questions:

- Tell me a little bit about your background.
- What is your age?

- What is your ancestry?

- Did you go to school?

- Tell me about your gang membership and involvement.

- How long have you been in the gang?

- Are you still in the gang?

- Did your family members belong to the gang?

- What is your relationship with other gang members?

- Have you been injured by a member of your gang or another gang?

- Please describe the incident in detail.

- Was this the first time you were injured? Were you in the hospital? If so, for how long? Did you fully recover?

- How do you feel about being injured?

- What strategies do you use to resolve conflicts in the gang?

- How do you feel about retaliation?

  Did you go back to your gang after being injured?

- Please explain a situation in which you were injured and went back to the gang.

- Why did you go back to the gang after being seriously injured?

- Please describe your thoughts about the gang after you were injured.

Appendix C: Nodes Created During Coding Process

Six interviews with appended field notes in Word format were imported into
NVivo 11 qualitative software. Each line was manually read and coded. This process
resulted in four parent nodes: background, gang membership and involvement, returning
to the gang after injury, and other, 25 categories, and 88 subcategories, as shown in this
table.

Node	Categories	Subcategories
Background		
	Age	
	Ancestry (ethnicity)	
	Education	
Gang membership and involvement		
	How long in gang	
	Still in gang	No
		Yes
	Family influences	Other family members
		Parents
	Other influences	
	Injured by gang	Other gang members
		Own gang members
	Details injuries/incidents	Incidents
		Injuries
	First time injured?	First time
		Two or more times
	Hospital details	Did not go to hospital
		Went to hospital (three additional subcategories: Hospital care

		Time in hospital
		Visitors
	Recovery details	Dealing with injury
		Hobbies—interests
		Recovery status
		Support
	Feelings about being injured	Depression
		Distrust
		Life lesson about friends
		Looking ahead
		Resolute
		Revengeful
		Street cred
	Conflict resolution	Avoidance
		Awareness
		Confront
	Feelings about retaliation	No retaliation
		Retaliation
Returning to gang after injury	Situation returned to gang	
	Why did you go back?	Barriers to lifestyle change
		Camaraderie and lifestyle
	Thoughts about gangs after injury	Blame and responsibility (13 additional subcategories in this subcategory: community family—parenting gang culture lifestyle legal system murdered victim music and videos new young generation police racisim

		self
		society
		socioeconomic
		technology
		Changes in gang culture
		Consequences of gang lifestyle
Other	Criminal acts	Drugs
		Guns
		Hustler
		Murder
		Physical altercations
		Prison—probation
		Property damage
		Prostitution
		Stabbings
		Tagging—graffiti
		Theft
		Traffic violations
	Future plans	
	Gift card	
	Secondary trauma	
	Spirituality	
	Suburban life	
	Support	Family
		Friends
		Homies
		SSI