

borhood men and women to the gang. Outside gangs provide threats that "push" neighborhood men and women into the gang, seeking protection. Threats from rival gangs escalate violence and weaponry. Both the social and instrumental benefits of membership serve to isolate gang members from social institutions such as the family, school, and labor market. Thus, as a consequence of threat, gang members become segregated from social institutions, adults, and peers, increasing the probability of violence.

### Research Questions

This review leads us to a number of questions that frame our analysis. We are concerned with determining the *origins* of gangs and gang membership, the activities gang members engage in, and their *relationships*, both individually and collectively, with social institutions. We will focus first on membership issues, exploring the way gangs originated, as well as the motivations for joining gangs. In addition, we will describe the social processes that keep gangs together and enhance their growth. We will then move to an examination of the activities gang members engage in, both legal and illegal. This will be followed by an analysis of the relationships between gangs (and gang members) and a number of social institutions, including the school, neighborhood, social agencies, and the criminal justice system. We then devote separate attention to the views of gang members toward their family and the views of families toward gang members. The book concludes with a series of policy recommendations.

## "Are You Claiming?" Methods of Study

### The Research Strategy

A SINGLE PREMISE guided our study: the best information about gangs and gang activity would come from gang members contacted directly in the field. We chose to contact gang members directly, without the intervention of social service or criminal justice agencies, for two reasons. First, we were concerned that individuals referred by agencies may be different from those contacted on the street. Social service agencies may be more likely to see tangential gang members, those who were on the fringe of gangs and gang activity. Thus referrals from such sources may not provide us with contacts with older individuals more deeply involved in gang activity. In addition, we refrained from using police contacts because of a concern that our study might be identified with law enforcement. This too would have inhibited our ability to reach leaders or hardcore gang members. The second reason we chose to use field-based techniques to contact gang members can be traced to our concern that the answers we received may be colored by the process through which subjects were recruited for the study. We recognize, however, that each method of contacting respondents carries its own liabilities. Simply because gang members were contacted by an experienced field ethnographer respected by individuals in the neighborhood is no guarantee that they were honest with us. The issues of response validity and reliability are important, and we pay close attention to them throughout the study.

A sample of gang members recruited from the street without official agency contacts may miss certain key groups or types of individuals.

However, we concur with Hagedorn (1991) that the most effective way to integrate the perspective of individual gang members into a study of their activities is by contacting them in their natural environment, the streets and neighborhoods where they live. Our initial conviction was that we should make direct contact with gang members and their families and let them tell their stories to us in their own words. We remained true to this conviction, though there were times during the study that we were tempted to abandon this approach to increase our sample size.

The use of fieldwork techniques to study gangs is one of the oldest traditions in criminology. Frederick Thrasher used a field-based strategy to carry out his classic study of gangs in Chicago. Since that time, this approach has been adapted for research on gangs in a variety of cities. Whyte's (1943) field work with "streetcorner boys" illuminated the potent forces that led boys to congregate on the corner in an ethnic slum. Hagedorn (1988) spent considerable time interviewing the "people and folks" of gangs in Milwaukee. Vigil's study of Hispanic gangs in Los Angeles (1988), Padilla's work with Puerto Rican gangs in Chicago (1992), and Sanchez-Jankowski's work with gangs in three cities (1991) all used fieldwork approaches. This tradition enjoys its longest standing application in Los Angeles, where Joan Moore has spent over two decades studying the "homeboys" of the Hispanic barrios (1978; 1991). The fieldwork approach employed in all of these studies (and our own) is characterized by three distinct features (Emerson 1983). First, it requires researchers to be present in the community and neighborhood where gangs under study operate. It is not enough to conduct interviews with individuals *outside* of their neighborhoods. Rather, frequent contact with gang members on their own turf is essential to this approach. A second requirement is to take account of the actor's perspective. Thus, understanding the view of the world (or neighborhood) held by those in the gang must become the primary goal of the study. From this perspective, we tried to understand the meaning that activities and symbols held for the gang and individual gang members. The third requirement of a field-based approach is that it employs the use of native terms and categories. Since the goal of such work is to let the perspective of those being studied serve as a guide to understanding their actions, the use of native terms and categories is essential. Each of these features also played a central role in our research.

McCall (1978) has identified two methods of data collection within field studies, direct observation and ethnographic interviewing. We employed both of these techniques in our efforts to better understand the activities and relationships of gangs and gang members. The field eth-

nographer was primarily responsible for observational issues. Over a three-year period, he spent the majority of each day "on the streets" observing primary and secondary gang activity (graffiti and other symbols), making field notes of where and why gang members congregated, and so on. To retain a sense of the field, we rode with him throughout the period of study to make observations of gang activity and graffiti. His field notes also reveal a good deal about the process of contacting offenders and gaining their trust. As such, they are an important part of this analysis.

The ethnographic interview, however, was the primary means of data collection. We used a lengthy questionnaire to elicit information about issues of specific interest to us: (1) gang membership, (2) gang activities, (3) relationships between gang members (and gangs) and social institutions, (4) perceptions about ways to leave the gang or stop gangs, and (5) relationships between gang members and their families. The questionnaire was developed from two distinct sources. First, we conducted four preliminary, open-ended interviews with active gang members in order to learn more about their perspective and insure that it was integrated into our questionnaire. Because of his knowledge of the streets, the field ethnographer was present for these interviews and his insights were essential to insure that the gang member's perspective was adequately represented in both the questions we asked and the way they were asked. The second source of information for questionnaire construction came from two gang researchers who shared their instruments with us. Dan Waldorf, who is conducting the "homeboy" study for the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), shared his instrument and grant proposal with us. Jeff Fagan, actively involved in studying gangs, also shared his questionnaire. Both instruments were extremely helpful in arriving at the final version we used. As we sampled two groups — active gang members and family members of gang members — two separate versions of a questionnaire were developed. Each of the questionnaires underwent some change in the early part of the study.

One of the vexing problems in studying gangs is the lack of a clear operational definition of the terms gang and gang member. Indeed, the debate about the proper approach to the definition of gangs and gang members has been the object of considerable discussion in the research literature (Decker and Kempf 1991). Much of this discussion has centered on determining who is and who is not a gang member. These discussions typically have identified levels of gang membership. Thus some distinguish between core and fringe membership, while others talk about active gang members and wannabes (Stephens 1993; Huff 1991).

part of the definition of a gang since crime is one of the variables we seek to explain in an analysis of gangs. Others (Maxson and Klein 1985; Huff 1991; Bursik and Grasmick 1993) include criminal activity as an element in their definition of gangs. These individuals argue that involvement in crime is an essential component of the definition of a gang. Without it, the distinction vanishes between gangs and groups like the American Legion or the Biology Club.

Our review of these issues — coupled with the practical need to determine who is eligible to be interviewed and who is not — led us to a working definition of a gang. Our working definition of a gang is an age-graded peer group that exhibits some permanence, engages in criminal activity, and has some symbolic representation of membership. This definition does not include some of the elements common to other definitions such as turf, though turf is very important to most gangs in St. Louis. The definition also skirts the issue of hierarchy and structure, preferring instead to focus on the permanence of the group. We began our project by using a definition that focused on same-sexed peer groups, quickly to discover that such a definition excluded gangs that had both male and female members. As we soon found gangs that integrated the sexes, we revised our approach. This illustrates the advantage of a field-based approach to studying groups whose rules and behavior undergo changes over time. The adaptive nature of a field study enabled us to reflect the dynamic character of gang membership during the period of our study.

Having defined a gang, we needed an operational definition of who was a gang member. Our approach to determining who was a gang member was somewhat more pragmatic than our definition of gangs. As a first step, individuals had to indicate they were a gang member. Self-identification, often determined by the response to the question, "Are you claiming?" was a key "screen" for us in determining who was eligible to be interviewed as a gang member. This approach was evaluated by the field ethnographer who verified, as often as possible, this self-identification with other gang members. We included only those individuals in our sample who had been members for six months or longer. The distinction between the gang or aggregation and the gang member or individual within that aggregation is one of the "tensions" found throughout the analysis of our data (Short 1985). Ideally, one chooses a level of analysis and works within it. However, it is impossible to study gangs without also looking at individual gang members, and similarly it is impossible to look at individual gang members without considering the importance of the collective. Vigil (1988, 65)

At another level, the debate has been about whether *cities* have a real gang problem or not. This, in Huff's (1991) estimation, is a false dichotomy that has led some cities to deny that they have any gang problem at all. In other cases, some cities have overrepresented the level and nature of gang activity. The breadth of the debate is illustrated by those who argue that the lack of an accepted definition of gangs is a positive thing because it allows for fuller consideration of the variety of activities and structures represented by gangs (Bookin-Weiner and Horowitz 1983).

Much of the debate over the presence of gangs has focused on the extent to which crime can be attributed to gang activity. Since a large proportion of criminal and delinquent acts committed by juveniles (and a substantial portion of criminal acts carried out by adults) are done in groups, drawing these distinctions is an important and often difficult task. Perhaps the best insight into the difficulty of differentiating between gang and nongang acts is provided by Maxson and Klein (1985) who distinguish between classification schemes that use *gang relatedness* as their defining characteristic and those schemes that use *gang motivation* as the defining characteristic. A less stringent set of criteria are required for a crime to be classified as gang related. To fit this designation, a crime must be committed by someone who is a known gang member, is identified as a gang member by a third party, or is suspected of being a gang member. The classification of acts as gang motivated requires that the crime be motivated specifically by gang activity. In this case, only those acts that have a clear link to the gang, such as retaliation or drive-by shootings, can be classified as gang motivated. As Maxson and Klein (1985) have shown, the gang-related definition attributes about twice as many murders to gangs as does the gang-motivated definition. This is more than an academic debate. The groups called upon to respond to gangs often have a very different understanding of what these concepts mean, meanings that shape their recommendations about the nature and extent of the problem and the most effective responses to it.

Two other definitional issues remain. The first concerns the kinds of groups appropriately labelled as gangs. All observers agree that, at a minimum, a gang is comprised of a group of individuals linked (however loosely) by common interests or activities. Many gangs use symbols to communicate identity as a gang member, and for others "turf" or territory is of central importance. The second issue is closely related to the first and concerns the issue of whether criminal activity is a necessary element for the definition of a gang. Hagedorn (1988) and Moore (1978, 1991) both argue that it is tautological to include involvement in crime as

replaced by those of lower socioeconomic status. Thus, these neighborhoods lose important sources of stability at the same time neighbors with fewer resources replace them.

The second condition that preceded the growth of gangs in St. Louis was the decline of the city's industrial base. The St. Louis economy has been heavily dependent upon the manufacturing sector for employment. The auto and aerospace industries have been most critical in generating jobs. These industries have been especially hard hit by the decreased reliance on manufacturing by the American economy. And a large number of people who formerly worked in such jobs — or expected to do so — found themselves without employment prospects. In 1980, 37,460 city residents were employed in manufacturing jobs, a figure that declined to 24,393 in 1990. The loss of such jobs was particularly devastating for individuals who had not advanced their education beyond high school, the very group left behind in the city. As a consequence, the economic circumstances of city residents had changed dramatically for the worse. In 1990 the unemployment rate for the city was 11 percent, nearly double that for the nation and the rest of the St. Louis Metropolitan region. And nearly one in four city residents (24 percent) lived below the poverty level. One result of these changes was a dramatic increase in rates of violent crime. Rates of homicide, serious assault and robbery for St. Louis are now among the highest of all American cities. In 1993 the St. Louis homicide and robbery rates were third highest of all American cities, and the rate of serious assault was second. With the decline of its industrial base, the city found increased demand for social services even as it found revenues decreasing. The ability of the city to respond effectively to new social problems — including gangs — was challenged at the very time such problems increased.

Like most social changes, the impact of depopulation and loss of industrial jobs was not felt equally in all neighborhoods or by all people in the city. Many neighborhoods where residents had struggled to maintain economic viability were unable to hang on to their economic and social gains. The labor market lost the working-class jobs that had sustained city residents economically, and the jobs that remained in the neighborhoods where population loss had been the greatest could no longer sustain families. These conditions produced the growth of an underclass with few resources to combat the deepening poverty that now dominated these neighborhoods. In addition, where population declines were steepest and where the loss of steady, good-paying jobs was the greatest, crime increased at alarming rates. These social conditions had a profound

notes a similar tension in his own work. Indeed, it is one of the common dilemmas found in researching collectives by interviewing individuals.

**The Setting for the Study.** Because they are profoundly affected by their surroundings, gangs cannot be understood apart from the characteristics of the cities and communities in which they are active. Like most American cities, St. Louis has experienced profound social, demographic, and economic changes over the course of the last four decades. The two most significant changes for the city of St. Louis have been its rapid depopulation and the decline of the city's industrial base. These changes are linked and, taken together, provide an important context for understanding the relationship between city characteristics and the growth of gangs.

St. Louis was the eighth largest city in the United States in 1952, with a population over 850,000. By 1993, the population of St. Louis had fallen under 385,000, and the city ranked thirty-fourth of American cities. So precipitous was the population decline, that the city of St. Louis is now the second smallest central city in the nation relative to the size of its metropolitan statistical area. Population loss occurred primarily in the form of middle-class families — black and white — moving to the suburban “collar” counties, particularly St. Louis and St. Charles counties. The racial distribution of the city's population remained unchanged from 1980 to 1990, being almost equally split between blacks and whites; the percentage of blacks increasing from 45 percent in 1980 to 47 percent in 1990, and the percent white population decreasing slightly from 53 percent to 51 percent. However, the black and white populations had very different age compositions, with the black population being considerably younger than their white counterparts. In addition, racial segregation in the city increased, as a majority of black city residents lived in census tracts whose population was 90 percent (or more) black.

The loss of middle-class residents is of concern to any city; such residents typically invest the most in their neighborhoods. These residents are involved in the kind of neighborhood activities that generate crime control; forming neighborhood groups, participating in school activities, and showing concern for their property and well-being. In short, such families often act to provide an increased sense of community and guardianship in their neighborhoods. The loss of these residents has a profound effect on the crime rate of a city. However, their loss is crucial for another reason. When such middle-class families leave a neighborhood behind, they tend either not to be replaced by new families or to be



impact on, among other things, the growth of gangs in the city. Our study focused on gangs in five distinct areas, each affected by the social changes described above. The five areas include four city neighborhoods (the Fairgrounds/O'Fallon Park area, Walnut Park area, Midtown area, Dutchtown North and South) and one that straddles city and county borders (Wells-Goodfellow/Pine Lawn).

We have selected a number of demographic and social indicators for each of the five areas from which gang members were recruited, as well as those for the city of St. Louis. These variables include a measure of racial isolation (the percent of the population that is black), a measure of the level of supervision generally available in a neighborhood (the percent of female-headed households with children), the male unemployment rate in that area, the percentage of the area's population living below the poverty level, the percentage of housing units in the area that are vacant, and the rate of serious assaults.

The similarities shared by four of the areas are quite striking. These areas are much alike on the measures of racial composition, female-headed households with children, male unemployment rate, percent poor, and rates of serious assault. And in each case, these neighborhoods exceed overall city levels on these measures, results that are consistent with the argument that many St. Louis neighborhoods have developed an urban underclass. The existence of racial isolation combined with high levels of male unemployment, poverty, and low levels of family formation are variables typically included in depictions of the urban underclass (Wilson 1987; Anderson 1994). These conditions have been credited by some (Hagedorn 1988; Jackson 1991) for spawning the increase in gangs observed across American cities in the 1980s and 1990s. The first four areas included in Table 2.1 certainly conform to the expectation of these researchers about the effect of the underclass. However, the Dutchtown area exhibits characteristics greatly different from these neighborhoods, characteristics not at all consistent with the presence of an urban underclass. Indeed, on each measure, the Dutchtown area has more favorable conditions than does the city of St. Louis as a whole. This challenges the view that links the underclass to the growth of gangs. The Dutchtown area has a large recreation center (Marquette), cheap rental property, and close proximity to the Midtown area. Several large public housing projects in Midtown had closed over the last decade (Laclede Town and the Vaughan Housing Project most prominently), and many residents of these developments sought "safer" areas in which to raise their children. As a consequence, many of the near north-side and

Table 2.1 Demographic and social indicators of neighborhoods used for gang recruitment

Area	Racial Isolation	% Fem HH w/child	% Male unemployment	% Poor	% Vacant	Asslt rate
Fairground	98%	25%	21%	32%	17%	3,320
O'Fallon Park area	99%	24%	25%	35%	20%	3,817
Wells-Goodfellow and Pine Lawn	96%	19%	19%	26%	10%	2,948
Walnut Park area (includes Walnut Park East and West, North Point, and Mark Twain)	89%	21%	25%	50%	28%	3,150
Midtown Area (includes Carr Square, Vandevanter, St. Louis Place, and Midtown)	9%	9%	10%	20%	13%	1,492
Dutchtown North and South	47%	12%	14%	24%	15%	2,231

Note: Demographic and Social indicators were drawn from Neighborhood Demographic Profiles, Community Development Agency, City of St. Louis, 1993. Crime data come from the Uniform Crime Reports. All data are for the year 1990.

Thrasher noted that most of these gangs could trace their origins to the river district neighborhoods north of the downtown area. During the mid-1920s, a gang war erupted between the two largest and best organized gangs in St. Louis, the Rats and the Jellyrolls. During this period, the Rats accounted for as many as twenty-three murders and dozens of robberies. Other St. Louis gangs included the Cuckoos, White House Gang, McCandles Gang, the Pirate Crew, and the Bottoms Gang. The ethnic composition of these gangs was primarily Irish and German; members of recently arrived immigrant groups. Most of the violence took the form of drive-by shootings and was reciprocal in nature. That is, the violent acts of one gang led to retaliation by another, raising the level of violence. While these gangs were older, more organized, and politically connected, they nevertheless shared much in common with the St. Louis gangs that were to follow them in the 1950s.

Gangs emerged in St. Louis following the end of World War II, in part as a consequence of the rapid changes in size of the population, its ethnic composition, and the economy. While many gangs were comprised of whites, African American gangs emerged for the first time during this period. These gangs had their origins in neighborhoods just north of downtown, where their European predecessors had begun in the late nineteenth century and the 1920s. However, black gangs also were found in the city's western and northwestern neighborhoods. Neighborhood identification was strong among these gangs, and they engaged in legal as well as illegal activities. Most common among the illegal activities were fights (which seldom involved the use of a gun; fists and knives were more typical), property crimes, and neighborhood peace disturbances. Newspaper accounts record that the activities of these gangs put people on edge and led to concern about the lack of "father images" for many young boys in the community. Among others, these gangs included the Barracudas, the Counts, the Turks, the Compton Hill Gang, and the Alston Gang. Felt hats were worn to identify gang members; the most popular colors were blue, brown, and burgundy. Like earlier gangs in St. Louis, these gangs eventually faded from the St. Louis scene.

**Finding the Subjects.** Snowball or chain referral sampling is a common technique in field studies (Birnacki and Waldorf 1981, 143; Dunlap et al. 1990; Wright et al. 1992). This procedure begins by initiating contacts with individuals close to the issue being studied and "snowballing" out from these initial contacts to include others in their social circle. In theory, this technique should provide a sample that increases proportionately

midtown gangs migrated southward toward Dutchtown, an area currently in considerable transition. Thus, the social conditions did not spawn new gangs but provided a new location for existing gangs.

It is against this backdrop that our study takes place. However, the social conditions that occurred in St. Louis did not produce gangs by themselves; rather they created conditions in which gangs could originate and expand.

**Gangs in St. Louis.** The generation of gangs we studied is certainly not the first in St. Louis. Like other American cities, the presence of gangs has been cyclical, emerging and fading away over time. In each cycle, the emergence of gangs in St. Louis corresponds with the conditions common to their origins in other cities: economic change, rapid population shifts, and changes in the racial and ethnic composition of the city.

The earliest reference to gangs in St. Louis comes from a book written by two "members of the St. Louis Press" (Dacus and Buel 1878). In journalistic fashion, they documented the effect of various developments on the city of St. Louis, paying particular attention to changes in the ethnic composition of the population and the influence of the economy on city life. They observed that certain parts of the city, particularly that area just north of downtown, seemed to be characterized by more intense social problems, such as poverty and low levels of parental supervision. In these areas, groups of young men and women they referred to as "Street Arabs" (Dacus and Buel 1878, 410) banded together in "tribes" or "clans," and these clans had "the language, the propensity, and the skills" (408) that they passed on to other members. A primary objective of such groups was companionship, and their activities included gathering on the street, disturbing neighbors, and engaging in feuds. The feuds often led to fights and retaliation that would last for lengthy periods of time, perhaps as long as several years. These groups were not labeled gangs by Dacus and Buel but certainly resemble the late-nineteenth-century gangs described by Sheldon and Riis in New York City. The emergence of these groups is clearly related to the immigration and industrial patterns in the city.

Thrasher makes reference to a number of gangs operating in St. Louis during the 1920s (1927, 367, 430). While these gangs included juveniles, they were primarily comprised of adults, and tended to be organized. Many gangs filled the demand for alcohol during Prohibition and as a consequence became involved in the political life of the city. Similar to their counterparts of the late nineteenth century, however,

over the course of the research project and eventually expands into a number of networks. Such a sampling strategy should be particularly useful for studying gangs owing to their alleged cohesive nature and interrelationships. The technique is not without difficulties though. We asked about "hidden" behavior, that is, behavior that is generally hidden from formal and informal authorities. A related problem is presented in using snowball sampling to penetrate gangs. While gang membership *itself* was not illegal in Missouri at the time of our study, a code of silence and protection from outsiders prevails about gang membership. Thus, while we may have been able to contact one gang member, there would be no guarantee that they would identify other gang members or put us in touch with them.

### Implementing the Strategy

**The Sampling Design.** Field-based sampling strategies face several important questions; most basic among them is whether to focus intensively on a single network or to branch out in a more extensive way and interview individuals from several different networks. And as Biernacki and Waldorf (1981, 143) have noted, the sample rarely develops at the pace or in the direction that the textbooks would suggest. In their words, snowball or chain referral sampling is seldom "self-contained" or "self-propelled"; it produces many surprises along the way. Our first commitment was to develop a sample of active gang members, and we sought to initiate this process before undertaking any other fieldwork. As this was to be a study of gang members and gangs, we decided to interview individuals from a number of different gangs. In some instances, we were able to interview only a single individual from the gang; in others we interviewed as many as seventeen different members.

The interview was our primary point of contact with members of our sample. This design, the one-shot interview, has some limitations, including the inability to track change within the life of a gang member and perform reliability checks during repeated contacts. However, we attempted to circumvent these problems in a number of ways. The field ethnographer used the ride to and from the interview site to discuss membership issues and gang activities. We attempted to verify, where possible, our interview results with the conversation held during transit. In addition, gang members often had repeated contacts with our field ethnographer, allowing him to gain a sense of the level of gang involve-

ment of a potential subject, as well as to allow the subject to gain trust in him and, ultimately, our project. Finally, we had multiple contacts with a number of the members of our sample. In these ways, we sought to minimize the design problems that occur with studies that have a single, bounded contact with subjects, such as those established through police or social service auspices.

We chose to include family members in our sample as well. The role of the family in urban America has been the subject of considerable controversy, and we were interested in documenting the views of family members about gang membership. We were unaware of any other study of gangs that had specifically focused on family perceptions and relationships with active gang members, making this a unique feature of our work. We also were interested in studying the relatives of gang members because the family represents perhaps the most important social institution in shaping behavior.

**Contacting Gang Members.** In the course of an earlier fieldwork project (Wright and Decker 1994), we contacted and interviewed 105 active residential burglars. Some of these burglars were quite young and thus we surmised that they might know active gang members. It was with these individuals that our snowball sampling began. In addition, the field ethnographer had developed contacts with several active street criminals engaged in robbery and drug sales. These people were able to give us referrals to active gang members and, equally important, to vouch for our legitimacy. A third line we followed in building the sample was to observe the secondary symbols of gang membership, particularly graffiti. The appearance of graffiti in St. Louis neighborhoods mushroomed during the late 1980s and this provided a trail that the field ethnographer could follow in identifying areas with substantial levels of gang activity.

A fourth way the sample of active members was built occurred quite by accident. We were familiar with a feature writer for the local daily newspaper. In the course of discussions with him about the skyrocketing homicide rate in the city of St. Louis, our conversation turned to gangs. He was anxious to run a story about gang activity but respected our request to remain low key about the details and findings of our study. The reporter suggested instead that he do a story on the field ethnographer, a suggestion we accepted. The field ethnographer had witnessed a shooting ten years earlier and, in turn, was shot by the brother of the man accused of this to keep him from testifying. As a consequence of the

shooting, the field ethnographer was paralyzed and used a wheelchair. The reporter found this a compelling story, one which ran on page one of the Sunday newspaper accompanied by a picture of the field ethnographer (Hernon 1990). The field ethnographer carried copies of the story (including his picture) with him wherever he went in the field and used them to convince gang members that our study was legitimate. Throughout the study, media appearances by the field ethnographer (especially on a local television program targeted at the African American community) proved to be a valuable recruitment tool. This strategy was particularly important in the recruitment of the sample of relatives. In several instances the field ethnographer was recognized by persons in the community based on a recent television appearance. On one occasion, he was shopping for produce at a local grocery store when he was recognized by the store security guard. A conversation ensued, and the guard told the field ethnographer about a produce clerk whose daughter was a gang member. The field ethnographer approached the clerk, who related that his daughter had been heavily involved in gang activity. This contact led to interviews with both parents.

Field research on gangs presents different problems than does field research on other forms of deviance. Because gangs are, by definition, self-contained networks with antagonisms toward other networks, we were not always able to "jump" across groups.<sup>1</sup> This meant that we had to "restart" the snowball sampling procedure many times in order to gain access to a large number of gangs. In addition, there were occasions when the snowball sampling strategy did not lead to additional referrals within gangs. Some members were simply reluctant to introduce us to other members of their gang. We attempted to solve the problem of "restarting" the chain referral process by moving to new neighborhoods or looking for new graffiti. Gang members who would be unable or unwilling to refer us to individuals in rival gangs often provided information about where other gangs may hang out or where their turf was located. In some cases we did get referrals between gangs where brothers were members of rival gangs.

Dealing with the obstacles to snowball sampling within gangs called for patience and persistence. The field ethnographer played an essential role in this process, screening potential interview subjects and eliminating many of them from consideration. Over five hundred contacts were made in achieving our final sample of ninety-nine active gang members. The field ethnographer was able to use earlier respondents to "nominate" other gang members as potential interview subjects, and over time,

we established ourselves as "legitimate." From the gang members' perspective this meant two things: (1) we were interested in their story and did not impose our own preconceptions of gangs on them, and (2) we weren't connected with law enforcement authorities.<sup>2</sup> One subject expressed misgivings about bringing the leader of his gang in for an interview. His concerns reflect those of many individuals.

INT: Could you get the leader up for us?

MALE #012, "Lance," twenty-year-old West Side Mob member: I would have to talk to him. He might be mad cause I'm here, but I'll let him know. Some of them on papers [probation or parole] and shit and might think there be police involved.

The "vouching" that exists in snowball sampling has an important added benefit; it allows the use of earlier respondents to verify the legitimacy of others as "real" gang members. On more than one occasion, a gang member we had interviewed earlier would caution us against interviewing a certain individual because he was simply "perpetrating," that is, acting like a gang member without really belonging to a gang. Indeed, the issue of verifying eligibility is of central importance to field studies. When they were available, we used referrals to other active gang members provided by members of our sample. But we did not depend on such referrals alone. In addition to asking prospective interviewees if they were claiming and what "set" they belonged to, the field ethnographer asked a number of additional screening questions to verify that individuals who said they were active gang members really were involved in gang activity. These questions covered such topics as the awareness of gang members we knew, recent activities in the neighborhood, and our knowledge of the overall orientation of the gang.<sup>3</sup> This rather conservative strategy (some field research on gangs is wholly dependent on the self-reported status of the interviewee to establish gang membership) probably caused us to decline interviews with individuals who actually were gang members. However, this cautious approach did not insure that everyone we began to interview was an active gang member. On two occasions (#062 and #098 on Table 3.1) interviews were terminated (and their data discarded) when it became clear to the interviewer that the individual was not an active gang member.

One of the most difficult issues in snowball sampling is controlling the pace of the study. In its ideal form an initial contact leads to two new contacts, which each leads to two more; these four contacts should produce eight new ones, and so it goes. The pace of our study is illustrated in



its logical end. It was difficult to initiate the first few contacts into any new gang. For some gangs, however, once the first interview was conducted, we were inundated with a large number of members of that gang. This was particularly true of the "Rolling 60's," a Crip set, for which the "snowball" quickly got out of control. We cut off this chain of referrals in order to move on to other gangs.

Another issue in implementing the snowball sampling strategy is meeting quotas for subgroups such as race, sex, or type of gang. We were concerned that our study not simply become a study of adolescent black males. This misgiving was grounded in our knowledge that many gang members were females, that not all gang members were minorities, and that the age distribution of gangs in St. Louis runs into the late twenties. This raises the issues of identifying subgroups (Dunlap et al. 1990) and stimulating alternative chains of referrals. We aggressively pursued leads for female gangs and gang members as well as opportunities to locate older and nonblack gang members. These leads were more difficult to find and often caused us to miss chances to interview other gang members. Despite these "missed opportunities," our sample is strengthened in that it more accurately represents the diverse nature of gangs and gang members in St. Louis.

**Contacting Family Members.** The task of balancing the demands of two different samples proved to be a difficult one. Having successfully initiated the sample of active gang members, we turned our attention to recruiting family members. We hoped to use active gang members to link us to their relatives. In practice, this seldom worked the way we expected. We initially believed that gang members would put us in touch with members of their own families and that we consequently could "pair" the responses. This happened rarely, as most gang members attempted to shield their families from the knowledge of their gang affiliation.<sup>4</sup> This prompted us to adopt a variety of strategies to contact family members. The field ethnographer established relationships with young people at neighborhood centers and recreation complexes. Some of these led to contacts with family members. Other contacts emerged from efforts initiated at places where the family members, especially mothers, were likely to spend time. Laundromats, grocery stores, strip shopping centers, and social service agencies were the primary places we targeted in seeking relatives of gang members. Parents were often reluctant to be interviewed; in general, we found more resistance from relatives than from gang members. Part of this stems from the fact that many parents denied

November 1990 through April 1993

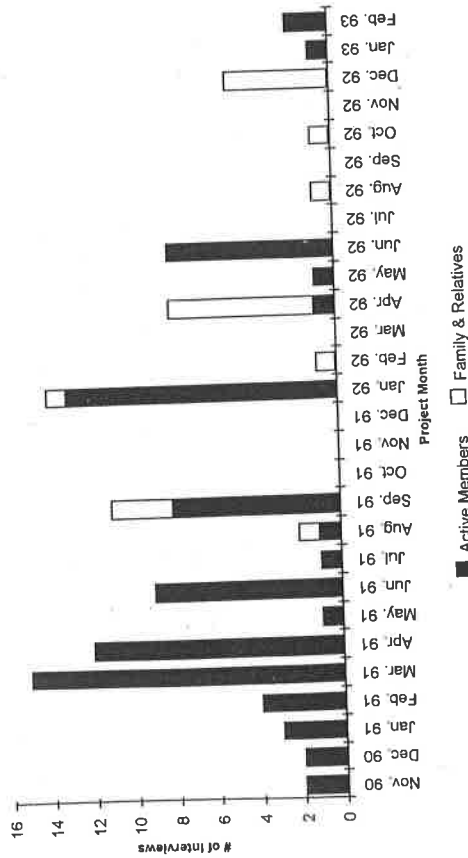


Figure 2.1 Interviews Per Month November 1990 through April 1993

Figure 2.1. This figure makes clear that the pace of our own research was anything but orderly. Indeed, the rate of progress of the study was a series of peaks and valleys. As Wright et al. (1992) have shown, each contact may produce no additional contacts, or it may produce several. Both results produce problems for the pace of a study; one is either restarting the snowball or else dealing with a crush of subjects. Our study was no exception to this pattern. Frequently we were inundated with subjects, while at other times we thought we would never find another gang member regardless of what steps we took.

One development for which we were not prepared occurred during the second year of the study. The project had received some publicity in the media, and we had made several presentations to community groups about gangs in St. Louis. The field-worker gave out business cards printed with his office address and phone numbers to prospective subjects on the streets and to the groups he spoke to in the community. Two young men walked up to our office in the university and announced that they were gang members and wanted to be interviewed for the study. We had determined earlier that contacts had to be initiated through the field-worker, so we referred these individuals to his office to verify their eligibility.

Another problem occurred in following the chain referral process to

44 that their children were involved with a gang; in other instances it reflected their ignorance of any such involvement. Clearly, discussing the illegal and life-threatening activities of relatives is an uncomfortable topic most of us would like to avoid. The field-worker's notes are instructive in this regard:

That pressure can be, I think in a lot of cases we're dealing with people who are going to talk about the criminality within his or her family, we're talking to parents who want to let out of the closet their secret skeletons and this is a very difficult task and it takes time to build each relationship. (November 12, 1992)

Further complicating the process of building this sample is the fact that there are few networks of family members of gang members. While members of the same gang were likely to provide us with referrals to other members of their gang, no such network existed between the family members. Thus in almost every case a family interview was the result of a new search and, as McCall (1978) has noted, the first contact in any network is the most difficult to initiate. The unique nature of the contact chains for parents is illustrated by the process of contacting the parents of a female gang member. This chain began with a presentation made by the principal investigator and field-worker at Children's Hospital in St. Louis. One of the persons present at the talk invited the field-worker to make a presentation to the Barnes Hospital Adolescent unit. A person present at this talk contacted a social worker, who in turn contacted two parents, who contacted the field-worker. Most interviews with relatives involved several intermediaries between the initial contact and the interview. In only three instances were we able to use one family member to refer us to another. Interestingly, in one of these the parent to be interviewed brought along the parent of another active gang member.

The knowledge of gang activity on the part of family members is important to both researchers who would study such relatives and the social service agencies that would provide them with support services. Such information is useful in understanding not only the impact of the family on decisions to join the gang; it lends insights into efforts to reduce gang involvement. Understanding such relationships may place social service agencies in a more advantageous position in designing programs to deal with gangs. Relatives of active gang members who are unaware of that membership are not easily identified for the purposes of a study or interventions.

**Field Relations.** Contacting gang members in the field was only the first task facing our project. Once contacts were established, the job of maintaining field relations assumed greater importance. There are a number of groups and individuals with whom field relationships must be maintained. Doing so effectively often involves balancing the competing demands of confidentiality, trust, and danger that emerge in a field study of individuals actively engaged in offending.

The key to our study was maintaining good field relations with our subjects. A central element to this process was convincing individuals to come in for an interview. As is often the custom in such research, we paid subjects for their participation in our research. However, this was not the only reason we were able to enlist their participation. Over a number of years the field-worker had established a reputation as "solid" in the community and was able to solicit the services of a number of intermediaries to "vouch" for him in neighborhoods where he was not well known. And in turn, he was able to vouch for us as legitimate, an important concern in the eyes of gang members. We also took steps to boost our own credibility in the eyes of our subjects by learning (as much as possible) the distinctive language and customs of gang members. This was accomplished in part by working closely with the field-worker. More importantly, this process was aided by the orienting premise of our study; learning about gangs and gang members can be best accomplished by hearing the gang member's story directly from the individuals involved. Thus, while we had a questionnaire, we allowed for and encouraged elaboration on the part of our subjects. We went to great lengths to insure that each person we interviewed felt they had received the opportunity to "tell their story in their own words." At the conclusion of the interview, each gang member was asked if there was anything else we should know about gangs. Most members added several points they deemed important, and methods of prohibiting gang violence was a central topic.

We were able to maintain good field relations with our subjects by strictly observing our own commitment to the confidentiality of their statements. Since we interviewed many individuals from the same gang, it was often the case that one member would want to know what an earlier participant had told us. We refused to honor such inquiries, reminding them that the same confidentiality that applied to their own answers also covered those of their fellow gang members. We received numerous requests from gang members to sit in on the interview of a fellow member. These requests were declined as well. The strict confi-

and offered us the promise that his officers would not interfere with our work. Such a pledge is important but was never used as we became the subject of only routine traffic enforcement. The lone exception to this occurred when our field-worker became the focus of an undercover investigation by gang and narcotics officers in suburban St. Louis County. The police had received reports that large amounts of cocaine tetra-chloride were being sold by a middle-aged black man in a wheelchair. Our field-worker fit this description and, unbeknownst to us, was placed under surveillance for a period of time. The surveillance was called off when one of the officers recalled seeing his picture in the newspaper. We learned about this during a panel presentation to the St. Louis Pediatric Association made with a member of the surveillance team. On another occasion the field-worker was stopped for a routine traffic violation (making an illegal U-turn) after picking up two gang members for an interview. The officer did not issue the ticket, only a warning, and let him go on his way. This story illustrates that gang members "fit" into the community; their presence in the car with an older man (thirty-four) did not arouse the suspicions of law enforcement officials.

The principal investigator met regularly with members of the gang squad of the police department to discuss general issues about gangs. We never divulged specific information about our study, instead providing the gang squad with access to gang research from other scholars. The police respected this commitment on our part and never pressed us for information. For their part, they provided information about trends in gang activity and potential locations we might use to find gang members. In addition, they furnished us with confidential lists of the names of gangs and their estimated sizes. We found close correspondence between their information and our own.

Parents were another group with whom we had to maintain good field relations. This proved to be a delicate job, requiring us to balance the confidentiality we had promised gang members with our desire to interview members of their family. Further complicating this was the fact that few gang members were willing to provide us with access to a family member we could interview. This created a dilemma for the interview process and field relations. Many parents of gang members engaged in what Huff (1991) identified as denial. That is, they were unwilling to recognize or admit that their child was involved in a gang. This called for a considerable amount of tact on the part of the field-worker as well as the interviewers. A number of family members, especially parents, were reluctant to admit that their sons or daughters were actively involved in a

deniality we were committed to was respected by our subjects, and appeared to enhance our own credibility as "solid" in their eyes.

One of the overriding concerns in our study was violence. In part, gang members were of interest to us because of their involvement in violence. Because of this, we took steps to insure our own safety. One of our guiding principles was to limit the number of people being separately interviewed at the same time and location. In addition, we steadfastly avoided interviewing members of rival gangs at the same time. The field ethnographer carried a portable phone with him at all times, to insure that he could check in with us and we with him. He also checked in with the office on a frequent basis, leaving his current location, intended destination, and an estimated time of arrival. Despite our best efforts, there were occasions when these precautions did not work. The field ethnographer witnessed several drive-by shootings while on the way to pick up interview subjects, and on one occasion, he saw three of our subjects shot while waiting to be picked up for an interview. On another occasion, we were interviewing two gang members, and a member of a rival gang "walked in" to be interviewed. A member of the project steered him out of the building, assuring him that we indeed were interested in talking to him but that it would have to be at a different time. The field ethnographer was frequently identified in the field by gang members when he was transporting another gang member to an interview. Despite entreaties to stop and chat, he never did. And, of course, a cellular phone only works when the battery has been charged or it has been brought along for the day's work; on many occasions the phone simply was not available. Many gang members claimed that they were anxious to show us their willingness to use violence against rival gangs and invited us to be present for a drive-by shooting or to drop them off at a certain location to witness them shooting at rival gang members. We declined all such invitations.<sup>5</sup> Not all exposure to risk of physical danger comes through such obvious means, however. During one interview, when asked whether he owned any guns, a gang member reached into his coat pocket and pulled out a .32 caliber pistol. We assured him that we would have taken his word for it.

While gang members were the primary focus of our research, maintaining good field relations required us to work with a larger circle of groups. Early in the project, we wrote to Colonel Clarence Harmon, chief of police, City of St. Louis, and explained the purpose of our study, asking for his support and a pledge that our study would not be compromised by his officers. Chief Harmon pledged his support for our study

gang. Many interviews with parents began with only grudging acknowledgment that their child was involved in a gang, only to conclude with the revelation of colors, guns, gunshot wounds, large amounts of cash, out-of-town trips, and concerns about the friends their child spent time with. Some of the parents we interviewed provided us with access to other parents, encouraging them to participate because "it would make them feel better to have someone to talk to." The fieldworker likened this to "confession" for many parents:

it seems like confession is good for the soul, once they get a sense that they will be treated with a sense of fair play and know we are doing fair and objective research. And this is the vehicle where parents can probably come and confess their pressures, their stress, not only to their minister or their deacon, but to people who are in the field of understanding crime and then in helping the problem. (December 1, 1992)

The obstacle of denial provided difficulties for subject recruitment. On the one hand, we were committed to respecting both the confidentiality of gang members' stories and the perceptions of parents. On the other hand, it was hard to ignore the objective evidence about the gang involvement many parents were quick to deny. This was made most clear in our attempts to interview the mother of a gang leader who had been slain in a gang-related act of violence. His younger brother was arrested for property destruction; he had spray painted "RIP Darcy" on dozens of locations to memorialize his dead brother's name. Despite the objective evidence to the contrary, their mother denied that either son was ever involved in a gang and was incensed at the suggestion that either son had anything to do with a gang, even though her son's funeral was disrupted by gunfire from rival gang members. The other extreme of this continuum occurred during our interview of a mother whose son had been killed in a drive-by shooting just two weeks before our interview. She admitted that, prior to his killing, she wasn't sure about her son's membership in the gang. However, after his death, several members of his gang confided in her that her son had indeed been a gang member, though he was not the intended target of the shooting. On the way home after the interview, she asked the field-worker to drive her by the site of the killing, as she had yet to see it. When she saw the "RIP" memorializing her son, she told our field worker she felt better about him knowing that his gang members really cared about him. The field-worker reported that there was still blood on the wall of the garage where he had been shot. By a strange twist of fate, we interviewed the step-

mother of the gang member who was the intended victim of this killing two weeks later.

### Conducting the Interviews

Having contacted gang members and verified their eligibility, the next step in the research process was to conduct the interviews. Because many of the individuals we interviewed did not have their own transportation and public transportation would have presented yet another hurdle to participation in the study, the field-worker almost always gave subjects a lift to the interview-site.<sup>6</sup> While doing so, the field-worker had time to explain further the purpose of the study and the logistics of the interview setting and procedure. This served a dual function. On the one hand, it put our subjects at ease and provided a transitional time between the street (their sphere of activity) and the interview setting (ours). More importantly, many of the subjects discussed their gang activities with the field-worker in the car (before and after the interview), providing us with a means of verifying some of what they discussed with us during the interview. This allowed us to control gang "mythologizing," overblown accounts of bravado and violence, as the field-worker set the tone for the interviews, telling subjects that he only wanted, "the real deal, no bullshit." The field-worker also was able to examine neighborhoods and the groups present at the time of pickup and delivery.

The decision about the appropriate location in which to conduct interviews was relatively straightforward. We wanted to find a place that was viewed as "neutral" by gang members and relatives. We had given consideration early in the project to renting an office but decided that finding a space in a part of the city that was seen as neutral by gangs would prove to be difficult, especially as the gang situation in St. Louis was quite dynamic. In the end, we chose to use vacant offices at the university. There was an intuitive appeal to this choice that we did not realize initially. Conducting interviews at the university reinforced in the minds of gang members that this really was a research project, that we were not connected with the police, and that answers would be held in confidence as we had promised. In addition, minorities were well represented on campus, so interview subjects "fit in," appearing to the casual observer to be students or employees.

While ours is a public university with open access, we decided not to leave the subjects alone on campus. In this way, we could effectively counter any claims that they had caused trouble or were the targets of



trouble. This led to a number of unexpected situations; as a consequence of this decision we were required to "baby-sit" subjects on a number of occasions. Frequently a subject only would come for an interview if the person who had referred them agreed to come along. Because we decided not to interview one gang member in the presence of another, we were left with the task of deciding how to handle the person who had made the initial referral and had come along to vouch for us as legitimate. These individuals were "baby-sat" by project staff, and their comments often provided useful insights into their activities as well as those of their partners.

One of the features of field research that has received inadequate attention is controlling the flow of the study. In work such as our own, where the subjects are of interest specifically because of their involvement in violence or their willingness to use violence, controlling the pace of the study assumes critical importance. Initially we had decided that no more than three gang members would be interviewed at the same time and place. It was our belief that this may have posed a danger to the safety of the field ethnographer from rival gangs during the transporting of subjects to the university. In addition, we decided that all interviews had to be scheduled through the field ethnographer. Unless we had a central conduit through which interview scheduling passed, it was possible to have rival gang members in the office at the same time, a situation we were determined to avoid. There were several occasions where our commitment to this principle cost us the opportunity to interview additional subjects, a trade-off we decided to accept. Thus controlling the pace of the study has implications for the quality of the data as well as the safety of the research team.

Early in the project, we attempted to conduct interviews of gang members in groups. While one such interview was successful, we quickly learned that this process was fraught with problems, as the interviewer lost control of the conversation, which drifted toward discussions of social issues. These also proved to be occasions where excess bravado was displayed and discussed. More technically, we could not record answers, and the tape recorded transcript was garbled with the sound of one voice talking over another. A similar problem was reported by Short and Strodbeck (1974) as they attempted to interview twelve gang members at the same time. We abandoned this as an interview strategy but continued to talk with groups of gang members in the field.

Each interview took approximately two hours and, with the permission of each subject, was tape recorded. Seven different individuals con-

ducted interviews over the thirty-nine-month period of study. Three of the interviewers were African Americans, one of whom was a woman. The other four interviewers were white males. We paid careful attention to response bias that may have been introduced as a consequence of the interaction of the race and sex of interviewer and subject to determine whether responses about criminal gang activities, roles, and other gang activities varied by interviewer. In general, few differences on these dimensions were found. In addition, we compared the notes of the field ethnographer to our interview results to determine, as best we could, whether bias had been introduced as a result of this concern. While the possibility exists that such difficulties may have occurred, we are reasonably certain this is not a substantial problem in our data.

**Ethical Concerns.** Most field studies face a variety of ethical dilemmas, and ours was no exception. Subjects were paid for participating in the study, a practice common to field research. Our initial plan was to provide active gang members with a certificate for clothing at one of the stores popular with young people, and each relative with a certificate for food at a grocery store. Several weeks' experience in the field led us to the conclusion that the best motivator for participation was cash. We decided to set the amount of money at twenty dollars for gang members and fifty dollars for relatives. This level of compensation was high enough to generate interest in participation but not high enough to attract wide-scale interest in the community, allowing us to control the pace of the study. We also set the fee low enough that we were confident that it would not have a criminogenic effect. While twenty dollars is not a small amount of money, it is not sufficient to purchase a gun or bankroll a large drug buy. We are sure that some of our subjects used the money for illegal purposes. But, after all, these were individuals who were regularly engaged in criminal and delinquent acts.

Payment was made at the end of each interview. Owing to university regulations, subjects were required to sign a receipt, though we did not ask them to sign their real names. We also initiated what the field ethnographer came to call the "bird dog fee," a nominal amount of money paid to individuals who provided us with a number of referrals. This payment was instrumental in gaining access to individuals at higher levels of gang hierarchy as well as to parents of gang members. As the university required us to obtain the signature of each person paid to participate in the project, we had to take steps to keep this information confidential. To do so, we came up with a creative solution. Each person

them. The police are better equipped for that task. Third, the knowledge gained from this study may lead to policies or programs that have an impact on gang activities, resulting in a net reduction in gang-related crime. Finally, most crime goes unreported to the police. We were learning about things that others knew and could have reported were they so inclined. Despite these justifications, we often were troubled by what we learned. We did, however, decide that we did not want to have foreknowledge of a crime, especially a violent crime, and warned subjects of this fact. When a gang member told us he was planning a drive-by shooting or specific retaliation against a rival gang, we told them that such information was not protected by our pledge of confidentiality and that we did not wish to know about it.

### Analysis Plan

**Data Sources.** The primary data for this book comes from the ethnographic interviews conducted with ninety-nine gang members and twenty-four relatives. These data were used for both quantitative and qualitative analysis. The quantitative analysis is rather straightforward and takes the form of simple frequency distributions. Because transcribed interviews could run up to forty typed pages in length, the analysis required a considerable amount of time. In order to simplify the process of data reduction, we employed GOFER, one of the many qualitative software packages available for such purposes.

The software we used is essentially a text retrieval package and allows the use of boolean operators to retrieve, link, and print various segments of an interview. One of the dilemmas faced in the use of such software is whether to employ a coding scheme within the interviews or simply to leave them as unmarked text. We chose the first alternative, embedding conceptual tags at the appropriate points in the text. An example illustrates this process. One of the activities we were concerned with was drug sales. Our first chore (after a thorough reading of all the transcripts) was to use the software to "isolate" all of the transcript sections dealing with drug sales. One way to do this would be to search the transcripts for every instance in which the word "drugs" was used. However, such a strategy would have the disadvantages of providing information of too general a character while often missing important statements about drugs. Searching on the word "drugs" would have produced a file including every time the word was used, whether it was in reference to drug sales, drug use, or drug availability, clearly more infor-

we interviewed was assigned a project number. For the purposes of local record keeping, we asked each individual to sign a name (any name) on a sheet next to their project number. They then signed a sheet of paper with their real name and project number on it, folded it and placed it in an envelope that was subsequently mailed to a colleague who lives in a country that does not honor subpoenas for such information from the United States. In this way, we maintained the confidentiality of our subjects and satisfied the requirements of the university.

Because this project was funded by a federal agency (the Administration of Children and Families, United States Department of Health and Human Services) through the university, we were required to obtain the approval of the university Human Subjects Committee. This requirement complicated our desire to maintain the confidentiality of our subjects' identity. We developed an informed-consent form designed to describe the research project as well as to advise subjects of their rights. The committee initially wanted us to obtain the permission of the parents of juvenile gang members. This would have violated our commitment to maintain the confidentiality of each subject, not to mention the ethical and practical difficulties of finding and informing each parent. We told the university Human Subjects Committee that we would not, in effect, tell parents that their child was being interviewed because they were an active gang member, knowledge that the parents may not have had. We reached a compromise in which we found an advocate for each juvenile member of our sample; this person — a university employee — was responsible for making sure that the subject understood (1) their rights to refuse or quit the interview at any time without penalty and (2) the confidential nature of the project. All subjects signed the consent form.

A major concern in doing fieldwork with individuals actively involved in offending is learning about crimes that have been committed. We knew from previous work that we were likely to learn about serious crimes for which an arrest had yet to be made. Our commitment to the confidentiality we promised all subjects helped us to resolve the practical issue of what to do with information we gained about past crimes; we simply would not use the information except in aggregate form to describe the activities of gang members. Of course this meant that we would not inform the authorities (or anyone else, like relatives) of the things we learned. We justify this on numerous grounds. First, we had promised confidentiality to all subjects, and had we violated that promise we would have placed the lives of several individuals (including the field-worker) in jeopardy. Second, it was our job to study gang members, not to catch

mation than we were interested in. However, such a search would have failed to find all of the slang used to refer to drugs ("boy" for heroin, "Casper" for crack cocaine) as well as the more common descriptions of drugs, especially rock or crack cocaine. Our solution to this problem was to insert conceptual tags in the text surround by an angle bracket. In this example, the tag < drug sales > was inserted in the text wherever talk of such activity was found. The development of tags was undertaken only after a considerable number (approximately twenty) of interviews had been completed, and the tags correspond closely to items in the questionnaire. This process allowed us to examine all of the statements made by gang members about a single concept, such as drug sales. While this simplified things considerably, further efforts at data reduction were necessary, as many of the tags identified dozens of pages of transcript material.

**Research Issues.** This study was guided by an important premise; that the best information about the gang member's perspective was likely to come from gang members themselves. There was an important corollary to this premise — we were committed to contacting active gang members in the field. Several key questions formed the basis for the questionnaire and thus provided us with information about that perspective. Our study revolved around a number of activities, both gang and nongang related, that our subjects were likely to engage in. First, we were interested in gang membership. In this context, we wished to learn more about the motivations to join gangs, the process of joining the gang, the symbols of gang membership, the strength of associational ties, the structure or hierarchy within the gang, motivations to stay (or leave) the gang, and how this generation of St. Louis gangs began. The second set of issues concerned the activities gang members engaged in. These included such things as turf protection, drug sales and use, and violence, as well as conventional activities. Throughout our interviews, we detected a tension between gang and nongang activities, and we believe that this dichotomy intersects with the distinction between criminal and noncriminal activities. It is important to note that not all criminality engaged in by gang members occurs within the context of the gang. Similarly, not all gang activity is illegal. An accurate picture of gang members must portray both the nature of their gang involvement and the legal status of their activities. Traditional social institutions play an important role in the lives of gang members. Thus we devote considerable attention to

discussing the role of the school, workplace, neighborhood, peers, and criminal justice agencies in the lives of gang members.

A unique feature of our work is its focus on families. There has been little research examining specifically the links between gang members and their family members. For this reason, we have separated the family from our analysis of other social institutions and devote special attention to this relationship. This section of the analysis is facilitated by the interviews conducted with families of gang members and extensive questioning of gang members about the role of their family in relation to the gang. In this context we consider the extent to which gang membership is either encouraged or discouraged by the family, efforts to prevent membership, intergenerational issues in gang transmission, the relative importance of the gang versus the family, and views about gang membership for future generations. Our final section considers the issues of prevention and desistance from gang membership, using the perspective of both active and ex-gang members.

## “I’m Down With the Bloods, What’s Up Cuz?” Membership Issues

I don’t know. Shit man, there wasn’t no joinin’ in it and it was a little neighborhood thang you know, just somethin you know, we just grew up like that. We grew up fightin, we just grew up fightin and everybody hangin around so they decided to call they self somethin since we hung around like that, went out doin things and stuff. (Male #002, “Eric,” sixteen-year-old Thundercat)

Girls and money, you get to flash money. You in a gang and girls like a magnet come to you. You get respect from people. Yeah you get respect, girls, money drive around with your friends in fancy cars, saying stuff that nobody else know about. (Male #015, “Karry,” fifteen-year-old Crenshaw Gangster Blood)

Why do men and women join gangs? Why do gangs grow and spread into new neighborhoods and cities? This chapter addresses issues related to gang membership using the concept of *threat* outlined in the introductory chapter. Here we consider a number of individual decisions and acts involved in becoming a gang member. The duality of individual decisions and group activities raised in the preceding chapters will be quite evident as membership issues are examined within the group process and context of the gang. Here we present how gang members define a gang, the reasons they joined their gang, how they joined it, what they like about belonging to it, and the symbols of membership. In addition, we explore the issues of race and gender in gangs. In the chapter to follow, we explore the history of the gang, its heirarchy, the strength of association, roles in the gang, goals of the gang, relationships with gangs in other cities, and the growth and spread of gangs.

### Individual Issues

**Background Characteristics.** The characteristics of the individual gang members we interviewed are presented in Table 3.1.<sup>1</sup>

The members of our sample were primarily young African American males. The average age of gang members we interviewed was 16.9 years, with the youngest member being 13, and the oldest 29. Seven of our subjects were females, often recruited in groups of two (see #006 and #007 in Table 3.1) or through their boyfriends. Four of our subjects were white; the remainder were black. The racial composition of our sample merits some comment. We are aware of white gangs in the city of St. Louis that have been in existence for several years. However, we were not able to gain access to members of these gangs through our street contacts. In addition, a number of Asian gangs emerged in the city near the end of the study. We also were unable to gain access to members of these gangs. The nature of our sample, therefore, is not strictly representative of gang members in St. Louis; however, we are confident that we have interviewed within the modal category. These gangs consist of predominantly young black males. Using field methods makes it difficult to generalize from the characteristics of our sample to gangs in other cities, or even to all gangs in St. Louis. However, the characteristics of the gang members we interviewed are generally comparable to those reported in a number of other similar investigations of gangs (Hagedorn 1988; Klein 1971; Short and Strodtbeck 1974) and data made available by the St. Louis police department.

Our subjects represented twenty-nine different gangs. Sixteen of the gangs were affiliated with Crips and include sixty-seven of the ninety-nine members of our sample. The remaining thirteen gangs included thirty-two different members and were affiliated with Bloods. There are six different “constellations” of gangs within our sample. By this, we mean smaller gangs that are affiliated with other gangs for reasons of protection or allegiance. Four of these constellations represent Crip gangs, and two represent Blood gangs.

**How Do You Define a Gang?** There is considerable debate about what constitutes a gang and who qualifies as a gang member. Bursik and Grasmick (1993) identify two main approaches to defining gang membership; definitions that focus on gang processes (such as formation, recruitment, evolution, transmission) and those that focus on behavior (especially participation in illegal activities). Clearly, the criteria used to



Table 3.1 Gang member chart

ID #	Gang name	Gang	Race	Age	Sex	Age joined	Drug sales	Other crimes	# Arrests
001	Mike Mike	Thundercats	B	20	M	14	YES	YES	10
002	Eric	Thundercats	B	16	M	13	YES	YES	6
003	Jerry	Thundercats	B	18	M	12	YES	YES	5
004	Anthony	Thundercats	B	17	M	15	YES	YES	0
005	Antonio	6th Street Hoover Crips	B	19	M	16	NO	YES	4
006	Yolanda	23rd Street Hoover Crips	B	19	F	13	YES	YES	25
007	Tina	Hoover Crips	B	14	F	14	NO	NO	0
008	Robert	Compton Gangsters	B	14	M	13	NO	NO	0
009	Martien	Compton Gangsters	B	15	M	13	NO	NO	0
010	Jason C.	Compton Gangsters	B	15	M	13	NO	NO	1
011	Lisa	Compton Gangsters	B	15	F	15	YES	YES	0
012	Lance	West Side Mob	B	20	M	17	YES	YES	2
013	Darryl	Bloods	B	29	M	13	YES	YES	100+
014	D. C.	Disciples	B	16	M	12	YES	YES	1
015	Karry	Crenshaw Gangster Blood	B	15	M	13	YES	YES	7
016	John Doe	Crenshaw Mobster Gang	B	15	M	14	YES	YES	3
017	Billy	North Side Crips	B	21	M	14	YES	YES	1
018	Maurice	107 Hoover Crips	B	20	M	17	YES	NO	2
019	Anthony	Crips	B	22	M	15	YES	YES	6
020	Lil Thug	Gangster Disciples	B	16	M	13	YES	YES	10
021	40 Ounce	107 Hoover Gangster Crips	B	16	M	15	YES	YES	10
022	8 Ball	107 Hoover Gangster Crips	B	15	M	14	YES	YES	1
023	Benz	107 Hoover Gangster Crips	B	15	M	13	YES	YES	4
024	Hamilton	107 Hoover Gangster Crips	B	16	M	13	NO	YES	1

ID #	Gang name	Gang	Race	Age	Sex	Age joined	Drug sales	Other crimes	# Arrests
025	Tony	107 Hoover Gangster Crips	B	17	M	16	NO	YES	4
026	Chill	107 Hoover Gangster Crips	B	15	M	14	YES	YES	3
027	G-Loc	Gangster Disciples	B	15	M	10	YES	YES	15
028	Killa 4 Ren	187 Crips	B	15	M	12	YES	YES	6
029	Randell	Thundercats	B	17	M	13	NO	YES	4
030	Kenneth	Thundercats	B	19	M	12	YES	YES	30+
031	John Doe	Thundercats	B	16	M	12	YES	YES	4
032	Skonton	Thundercats	B	17	M	14	YES	YES	2
033	Larry	Thundercats	B	18	M	14	YES	YES	32
034	Lil Gene Mack	19th Street Rolling 60's	B	18	M	13	YES	YES	3
035	Edward	Hoover Gangster Crips	B	20	M	16	YES	YES	15
036	NA	Compton Gangsters BIC	B	18	M	15	YES	YES	13
037	Big Money	Compton Gangsters	B	22	M	20	NO	NO	30
038	G.O.D.	Compton Gangsters	B	19	M	10	YES	YES	10
039	Kaons "BIC"	Compton Gangsters BIC	B	17	M	7	NO	YES	5
040	Knowledge	Compton Gangsters	B	21	M	12	YES	YES	1
041	C. K.	Bloods	B	22	M	20	YES	YES	15
042	Leroy	Rolling 60's Crips	B	17	M	15	YES	YES	2
043	Lec Roy	Rolling 60's Crips	B	16	M	13	YES	YES	1
044	Paincuzz	Rolling 60's Crips	B	16	M	13	NO	NO	0
045	C-Loc	Rolling 60's Crips	B	17	M	16	NO	YES	0
046	Lady Tee	74 Hoover Crips	B	16	F	13	YES	YES	2
047	Baby	Rolling 60's Crips	B	15	F	14	NO	NO	0
048	Corkey	Rolling 60's Crips	B	16	M	15	YES	YES	1
049	Chris	Rolling 60's Crips	B	17	M	15	NO	NO	0
050	John	Rolling 60's Crips	B	19	M	17	NO	YES	1
051	David	Bloods	B	18	M	14	YES	YES	3

Table 3.1 (cont.)

Table 3.1 (cont.)

ID #	Gang name	Gang	Race	Age	Sex	Age joined	Drug sales	Other crimes	# Arrests
052	Johathan	107 Hoover Crips	B	15	M	14	YES	YES	1
053	Jimmy	107 Hoover Crips	B	18	M	18	YES	YES	50+
054	Cedric	62 Brim Bloods	B	16	M	13	YES	NO	0
055	Chris	Hoover Crips	B	17	M	14	YES	YES	1
056	Tony	19th Street Hoover Crips	B	17	M	15	YES	YES	3
057	Smith & Wesson	Neighborhood Posse	B	15	M	14	YES	YES	7
058	Roach	Bloods	B	15	M	11	YES	YES	25
059	Top Gun	Bloods	B	16	M	14	YES	YES	7
060	Bullet	Ingewood Family Gangster Bloods	B	20	M	14	NO	YES	100+
061	K-Red	Ingewood Family Gangster Bloods	B	15	M	14	YES	YES	15
062	Bobtimes	6 Deuce Bloods	B	16	M	14	YES	YES	3
063	Pump	6 Deuce Bloods	B	14	M	12	YES	YES	4
064	BK Kill	North County Crips	B	19	M	18	YES	YES	15
065	Short Dog	Crenshaw Mob Gangsters	B	15	M	11	YES	YES	2
066	Short Dog	Crenshaw Mob Gangsters	B	15	M	11	YES	YES	2
067	\$hortDog	Ingewood Family Bloods	B	15	M	13	YES	YES	5
068	CK	Piru 104 Bloods	B	16	M	15	YES	YES	16
069	X-Men	Ingewood Family Gangsters	B	14	M	13	NO	YES	3
070	Ill B-Dog	Ingewood Bounty Hunters	B	15	M	14	YES	YES	3
071	B Daddy	Ingewood Family Gangsters	B	17	M	14	YES	YES	4
072	Blood	Swan Park 59 Bloods	B	17	M	14	YES	YES	7
073	C-Love	Crenshaw Mob Gangsters	B	16	M	15	YES	YES	2
074	Shon	Crenshaw Mob Gangsters	B	16	M	13	YES	YES	2
075	Tyrell	Bounty Hunter Bloods	B	16	M	14	YES	YES	3
076	Mickey Mouse	Grape Street Crips	B	17	M	16	YES	NO	0
077	Crazy Drakey	8 Drake Gangster Crips	B	18	M	14	YES	YES	2
078	Tina	Treetop Bloods	B	15	F	15	YES	YES	0
079	Hell Bone	Rolling 60's Crips	B	14	M	11	NO	YES	2
080	Coke Cane	Rolling 60's Crips	B	13	M	13	NO	YES	1
081	Half Pint	B Gangster Disciples	B	14	M	13	YES	YES	4
082	Dough Boy	B Gangster Disciples	B	14	M	13	YES	YES	2
083	Winchester	Rolling 60's Crips	B	14	M	13	YES	YES	0
084	Rolo	Rolling 60's Crips	B	15	M	12	YES	YES	0
085	2-Low	Rolling 60's Crips	B	18	M	15	YES	YES	0
086	Gunn	Rolling 60's Crips	B	19	M	10	YES	YES	0
087	Blue Jay	Rolling 60's Crips	B	18	M	11	YES	YES	50+
088	T-Loc	Grape Street Crips	B	21	M	14	YES	YES	0
089	C-Note	88 Street Mob	B	15	M	15	NO	YES	1
090	Rellol	19th Street Long Beach Crips	B	15	M	13	YES	YES	5
091	Paul	107 Hoover Crips	W	18	M	17	YES	YES	4
092	Derone	Rolling 60's Crips	B	21	M	17	YES	YES	8
093	Lil-P	Crenshaw Mob Gangster Bloods	B	16	M	15	YES	YES	2
094	John Doe	107 Hoover Crips	B	14	M	13	NO	NO	0
095	I-Dog	107 Hoover Crips	B	14	M	14	NO	NO	0
096	L. C.	Ingewood Bounty Hunters	B	23	F	20	YES	YES	1
097	Antwan	Insane Gangster Disciples	W	17	M	14	YES	YES	6
098									
099	Joe L.	Insane Gangster Disciples	W	18	M	15	YES	YES	50+
100	J. Bone	Insane Gangster Disciples	W	19	M	16	YES	YES	2
101	Money Love	Insane Gangster Disciples	B	20	M	17	YES	YES	3

gangs, often by noting the need for protection that the presence of rival gangs created. Indeed, 53 percent of our respondents specifically mentioned the role of threat in defining a gang. Sometimes threat was in the form of "disrespecting" a gang, actions that carried the implicit promise of violence.

Well we call it a gang I guess because we all stick together and stuff and if somebody disrespect us we just come and retaliate. (Male #049, "Chris," seventeen-year-old Rolling 60's Crip)

Bunch of us get together, really down for it. It's just like somebody go pick on him so we go after them, just like that. (Male #053, "Jimmy," eighteen-year-old 107 Hoover Crip)

A large number of people period. Most of the time you with a lot of people you don't gotta worry about getting jumped. (Male #071, "B Daddy," seventeen-year-old Inglewood Family Gangster)

The need for protection took on added importance for those who had been involved in crime, creating enemies as a consequence of their criminal activities.

The most important reason for me is because I have a lot of people behind me. You never have to watch your back. If you have did a lot of dirt in your life, if you have done a lot of wrong things you have to watch your back cause no telling who want you. (Male #034, "Lil Gene Mack," eighteen-year-old 19th Street Rolling 60's Crip)

These quotes highlight that the threat of being beaten up or shot by rival gangs was a consistent theme in most approaches to defining the gang. This was evident in the responses of individuals whose first characterization of the gang was as a "family." Twelve of the thirteen gang members who characterized their gang in this way indicated that the family character of their gang could be found in the willingness of members to look out for them or offer protection against violent threats from rival gangs.

It's more like a family away from home. You with your friends, you all stick together. They ain't going to let nothing happen to you, you ain't going to let nothing happen to them. (Male #031, "John Doe," sixteen-year-old Thundercat)

A gang is something you follow behind the leader. Do different things just like a family. Hang out together, rob, steal cars, fight other gangs like for competition. (Male #017, "Billy," twenty-one-year old North Side Crip)

distinguish gang activity from nongang activity, gang members from nongang members, and gangs from other forms of adolescent organizations are of critical importance. Our own approach to these issues was presented in Chapter 2. In this section of the book, however, we explore what gang members themselves consider to be the definition of a gang. Interestingly, there is as much diversity of opinion about this matter among gang members as there is among academics and criminal justice personnel.

We received no single answer to the question "What is a gang?" from our subjects. Reflecting the categories offered by Bursik and Grasmick (1993), subjects used both group process and participation in illegal behavior as the defining criteria for gangs. The most common element in definitions of a gang referred to its collective nature, an attribute offered by 92 percent of respondents. This underscores the salience of the group for defining a gang.

Cause we all hang around each other and there is more than two or three of us and we stick up and hang in there for each other, do whatever for each other. It's a gang, it's a group of us anyway I think. We ain't doing nothing too positive. (Male #012, "Lance," twenty-year-old West Side Mob member)

A group of individuals who set out to do not necessarily positive things. Just people who didn't do too good in life and are not doing too good now. (Male #042, "Leroy," seventeen-year-old Rolling 60's Crip)

To my knowledge it's a group of fellas. Not just fellas but ones that can depend on each other that's all down for the same thing. Everybody think a gang ain't nothing but just thinking about being violent. Our gang, we think about working. Yeah, we sit in the parking lot and we drink. We try to get jobs and stay off the streets. We don't want to be known. We want to be known but we don't want to be known in no wrong way. We already got that impression now. We already known the wrong way. (Male #037, "Big Money," twenty-two-year-old Compton Gangster)

While most definitions of this nature began by focusing on the more benign aspects of association, the majority (69 percent) acknowledged the negative aspects of gangs, particularly violence. This was made evident by "Roach" (male #058, fifteen-year-old Blood), who first offered that a gang was "a group" and, when pressed, told us that it was "like family" but finally concluded that it was "Violence, it's violence." The role of threat was underscored in many of the definitions offered of

INT: What is a gang?  
 FEMALE #047, "Baby," fifteen-year-old Rolling 60's Crip: Like a family in a way. It's like brothers and sisters, like a family. There is more violence than a family.

Finally, there were those who simply defined a gang in terms of its criminal activities. Seventy-four percent of our respondents indicated that this was a reason to define their group as a gang. While violence was primary among these activities, drug sales and other crimes often were mentioned as well.

INT: So the reason you call it a gang basically is why?

MALE #101, "Money Love," twenty-year-old Insane Gangster Disciple: Because I beat up on folks and shoot them. The last person I shot, I was in jail for five years.

A bunch of thugs doing bad stuff. Some people good but they get in trouble and take it out on somebody else. Cause they devilish. They don't think before they do things, they just do things, they don't think. Regular people think. (Male #015, "Karry," fifteen-year-old Crenshaw Gangster Blood)

INT: What makes you all a gang?

WHITE MALE #091, "Paul," eighteen-year-old 107 Hoover Crip: The things we do. Fighting, shooting, selling drugs.

Many features of the debate about what constitutes a gang can be found in the responses of gang members to this question. However, it is clear that the individuals we interviewed focused on the more tangible issues in the debate, often defining their gang in terms of its role vis-à-vis other gangs. The group nature and cohesive aspects of gangs were consistent aspects of their responses. Regardless of how they initially characterized gangs, most subjects (74 percent) quickly focused on criminal activities — especially violence — as the defining feature of their gang. It is interesting to observe that, consistent with Klein (1971) and Short and Moland (1976), no subjects indicated a political orientation or agenda in defining their gang.

**Pushed or Pulled into Membership.** We now move to consider the reasons offered by gang members for their decision to join the gang. In every instance, joining the gang was the result of a process that evolved over a period of time, typically less than a year. In some cases, the process more closely resembled recruitment, whereby members of a gang would

identify a particular individual and "convince" them to join the gang. This, however, accounted for very few of the individuals in our sample, fourteen out of ninety-nine. For the most part, the process of joining the gang was consistent with the formation of neighborhood friendship groups. Twenty of our respondents specifically mentioned that they had grown up in the same neighborhood as other gang members and had done things with them over a lengthy period of time. For these individuals, their gang evolved from these playgroups into a more formal association, in much the same way Thrasher (1927) described gangs in Chicago.

The process of joining the gang has two elements; the first is a series of "pulls" that attract individuals to the gang, the second are the "pushes" that compel individuals to join the gang. The pull or lure of gangs was an opportunity to make money selling drugs (a response offered by 84 percent of our subjects), to increase one's status in the neighborhood (indicated by 60 percent), or both. The primary factor that pushes individuals into gangs is their perceived need for protection. Again and again, our subjects described in considerable detail the threat they were under from rival gangs in nearby neighborhoods. A number of gang members (84 percent) found it impossible to live without some form of protection, typically finding such protection through their association with a gang. It is our argument that, for most members, both pushes and pulls play a role in the decision to join the gang. Four specific reasons were cited for joining the gang. In declining order of importance, they were: (1) protection, (2) the prompting of friends and/or relatives, (3) the desire to make money through drug sales, and (4) the status associated with being a gang member. The desire for protection is an example of a "push" — an external force compelling gang membership. The efforts of friends or relatives to encourage gang membership also represent a push toward gang membership. The other two reasons, desire for money and status, are clearly "pulls," or forces that attract individuals to gangs.

As noted above, most of the individuals we interviewed felt their physical safety was in jeopardy in their neighborhood; for the majority, moving to a safer neighborhood was simply not a viable option as few had the resources to effect such a move. Given these circumstances, most gang members (eighty-three) chose to align themselves with a gang for "protection."

That is the advantage, protection. There wouldn't be all this stuff if certain people wouldn't try to be tough. So they try to be tough, so now we be



Crips. They stay out of our business. Some cats from the city came over, that's how it all started. Jumped my friend. (Male #022, "8 Ball," fifteen-year-old 107 Hoover Gangster Crip)

I thought about it [protection]; every time I walked somewhere people would try to start stuff. Yeah, like one time I got off my bus and these two dudes tried to double pin me. (Male #010, "Jason C.," fifteen-year-old Compton Gangster)

Few gang members acknowledged the fact that affiliating with a gang increased their risk of victimization. Indeed, some went so far as to state that being in a gang insulated them from fighting.

It keeps people from fucking with me. So I don't have no trouble, no fights out on the street and all that. (Female #011, "Lisa," fifteen-year-old Compton Gangster)

And other gang members recognized the dilemma of not being in a gang yet having friends who lived in a neighborhood identified with a particular gang. "Bullet" decided to join his gang since he was seen as a gang member anyway.

Yeah, all your friends Bloods so you don't want to be the odd ball. Say I didn't become a Blood but I was always down with them and when dudes shot at us they was shooting at me too. Any way it goes, I was going to be a gang member. If dudes ride by shooting or whatever they will see me with them. (Male #060, twenty-year-old Inglewood Family Gangster Blood)

Similarly, "Smith & Wesson" reported that already being identified as a rival gang member also played a role in the decision to join.

I got tired of these Crabs saying what's up Fuz and I'm telling them I ain't in no gang. So I got in the gang. See what they do? (Male #057, fifteen-year-old Neighborhood Posse Blood)

Nearly a third (29 percent) of gang members reported that they joined because of the presence of a relative or friend in the gang. The process of recruiting friends and family members into the gang was seldom coercive; indeed most needed only minor forms of encouragement. Many gang members found their way into the gang through emulating a relative (#036) or friend (#054). One reported that he had joined, "Cause my brother was in it mostly" (#031). And another said, "Cause all my friends become one" (#010). Others indicated that it was a natural part of hanging out with friends in the neighborhood.

I ain't going to say it's going to be my life but it was just something that came up to me where I was staying. I was with the fellas and it just happened that I became one of them. I just got in the same stuff they was in. To me I see it as something to do. I can't put it a more better way than that. (Male #020, "Lil Thug," sixteen-year-old Gangster Disciple)

We have identified drug money and status as two of the factors cited most often as attractive features that "pulled" young men and women into gangs. As we document below, drug sales grew in importance once individuals joined their gang. However, only a small fraction (6 percent) were influenced by the opportunity to sell drugs in making the decision to join their gang. Others were more direct, stating that they found the money attractive or that money had initially attracted them to the gang.

My interest was in getting paid, man, strictly getting paid. I had a job at 13. I sold dope, cocaine, but it wasn't a career thing, it was like for extra money. (Male #040, "Knowledge," twenty-one-year-old Compton Gangster)

Girls are a frequent topic among adolescent males, and the opportunity to impress girls through increased status was cited by 40 percent of our subjects as the reason why they joined the gang. In this sense, their motivations closely resemble those of their adolescent peers who were not involved in gangs.

Yeah, you get respect, girls, money, drive around with your friends in fancy cars, saying stuff that nobody else know about. I wanted to be in cause they had the pretty girls and everything. (Male #015, "Karry," fifteen-year-old Crenshaw Gangster Blood)

But status concerns were not confined solely to the pursuit of women.

It make me big, it make me carry guns, it made me like if somebody called and I tell them to come over and they don't come over I get mad cause I'm the big man, he supposed to come to me. I might pop them upside they head or I might pistol whoop them or I just sit back and just dog them out. Many things I can do to a person that they don't ask. (Male #018, "Maurice," twenty-year-old 107 Hoover Gangster Crip)

**Process of Entry.** Typically, the process of joining the gang was gradual and evolved out of the normal features of street life in the neighborhood. Indeed, the imitative aspects of adolescent life are strong enough to

suggest that most gang members affiliated themselves with friends from the neighborhood already involved in the gang. In describing how they came to join their gang, twenty-nine of the fifty-four who offered an answer to this question indicated they joined as a consequence of neighborhood friendships. On average, members of our sample heard about their gang while they were twelve, started hanging out with gang members at thirteen, and had joined before their fourteenth birthday. This suggests a gradual process of affiliation rather than one of active recruitment.

Eleven percent of our respondents began the process of affiliating with their gang by being involved in fights. In these instances, they joined with friends in the neighborhood to fight rival groups in other neighborhoods before formally accepting membership. Violence is a hallmark activity for gangs and serves a variety of latent functions. It strengthens the bonds between existing members, increases the stake of prospective or fringe members in the gang, and serves as a means by which nongang youth come to join the gang.

It was just when I was being around them they was cool with me and stuff so they just asked them to join in one time. They helped me in a lot of fights and stuff like that. (Male #093, "Lil-P," sixteen-year-old Crenshaw Mob Gangster Bloods)

I just went on a few posses,<sup>2</sup> I just started hanging around a little bit with them but I was seeing the way things was going and I wanted to join in so I initiated it by the hand signs. (Male #017, "Billy," twenty-one-year-old North Side Crip)

Another route to entering the gang stemmed from normal activities in the neighborhood. As such, becoming part of the gang is a gradual process, often the logical outgrowth of having gang-involved friends in a particular neighborhood.

The people I hang with are all in it. You know like how you find yourself in a situation. (Female #047, "Baby," fifteen-year-old Rolling 60's Crip)

I was hanging with them, it was just the area I was in was claimed by them so I just started claiming with them. (Male #025, "Tony," seventeen-year-old 107 Hoover Gangster Crip)

For others, school was the place where entry into the gang occurred. After all, it is not uncommon for friends at school to self-select into the

same activities. Viewed in this light, the gang represents a "normal" feature of adolescent life.

**Initiation.** Becoming a gang member requires more than a decision. Most gangs require prospective members to undergo some sort of an initiation process. Over 90 percent of our sample indicated that they participated in such a ritual.

The initiation ritual fulfills a number of important functions. The first is to determine whether a prospective gang member is indeed tough enough to endure the rigors of violence they will undoubtedly face. After all, members of the gang may have to count on this individual for back up, and someone who turns tail at the first sign of violence is not an effective defender. But the initiation serves other purposes as well. In particular, the initiation increases solidarity among gang members by engaging them in a collective ritual. The initiation reminds active members of their earlier status as a nonmember and gives the new member something in common with individuals who have been with their gang for a longer period of time. Because of these common experiences, the initiation ritual — especially to the extent that it involves violence — creates aspects of what Klein (1971) has called "mythic violence," the legends and stories shared by gang members about their participation in violence. The telling of these stories increases cohesiveness among gang members. Further, mythic violence enables gang members to engage in acts they may otherwise regard as irrational, risky, or both.

Padilla (1992) reports the most common initiation ritual is being beaten in or "V-ed" in, a finding similar to those of Moore (1978), Hagedorn (1988), and Vigil (1988). Gangs in St. Louis also employ this method of initiation. This form of initiation included seventy of the ninety-two gang members who offered an answer to this question. While it took many forms, in its most common version a prospective gang member walked between a line of gang members or stood in the middle of a circle of gang members who beat the initiate with their fists. Falling down, crying out, failing to fight back, or running away sounded the death knell for membership.

I had to stand in a circle and there was about ten of them. Out of these ten there was just me standing in the circle. I had to take six to the chest by all ten of them. Or I can try to go to the weakest one and get out. If you don't get out they are going to keep beating you. I said I will take the circle. (Male #020, "Lil Thug," sixteen-year-old Gangster Disciple)

the gang he had to shoot him. So he did. (Male #013, "Darryl," twenty-nine-year-old Blood)

INT: How was he brought in?

MALE #069, "X-Men," fourteen-year-old Inglewood Family Gangster: We asked him how he wanted to get in and he said he wanted to do a ride-by and shoot the person who killed his brother. So he did a ride-by shooting and killed him.

INT: Was his brother a gang member?

069: A Neighborhood Piru Blood.

INT: His brother was killed?

069: Yeah, that's why he wanted to be in. He wasn't gonna get in anyway but his brother got killed.

Gang members and their victims in such encounters are not always strangers, as seen in the case of a gang member who shot his brother, a member of a rival gang.

INT: What did you have to do to be accepted as a member of the Rolling 60's?

MALE #087, "Blue Jay," eighteen year-old-Rolling 60's Crip: Either kill somebody close to you or just shoot somebody, do harm to somebody close to you like family or something.

INT: Which one did you take?

087: I shot my brother. He didn't know I did it.

Others told us that shooting someone, especially a rival gang member, as part of the initiation gave them "rank," higher status, and responsibility in the gang.

Six gang members reported an alternative means of initiation. Two members told us that they got "tagged" (tattooed) with India Ink and a needle or with a white hot coat hanger as part of the initiation process. Another gang member told us he was expected to sell a certain amount of crack cocaine in order to be accepted. Three gang members told us that as relatives of influential gang members, they were able to avoid the initiation ritual that characterized entry into their gang. These examples illustrate the adaptive nature of most of the gangs we studied; after all, for the most part, they were organized and run by adolescents. As such, we would not expect to find a rigid set of procedures to govern the initiation process.

In late 1991, we received a fax from city hall, advising the public of a new form of gang initiation taking place across the country. The fax described a process by which gang members drove a car at night with their

Taking "six to the chest" was commonly reported as a means of initiation, especially by gangs who use the six-pointed star as one of their symbols, such as the Disciples.

Well it's like this, if you around us and we recommend you to G, we just make up our minds and then somebody look at they watch we'll yell it's on, we'll initiate you. Then after you initiated you on the ground we pick you up hug you and say what's up G, just showing him that it's love. It wasn't that we wanted to rush you or hurt you nothing like that. It's meant because we want you to be around us, we want you to be a part of us too. (Male #036, "NA," eighteen-year-old Compton Gangster BIC)

The initiation fulfills other purposes, such as communicating information about the gang, its rules, and activities.

INT: So that was your initiation?

MALE #099, "Joe L.," eighteen-year-old Insane Gangster Disciple: Yeah. And then they sat down and blessed me and told me the 16 laws and all that. But now in the new process there is a 17th and 18th law.

Other gang members reported that they had the choice of either being beaten in or going on a "mission" or a "posse." A mission required a prospective gang member to engage in an act of violence, usually against a rival gang member on rival turf. Nearly a fifth of our respondents were required to confront a rival gang member face to face.

You have to fly your colors through enemy territory. Some step to you, you have to take care of them by yourself, you don't get no help. (Male #041, "C. K.," twenty-two-year-old Blood)

To be a Crip you have to put your blue rag on your head and wear all blue and go in a Blood neighborhood that is the hardest of all of them and walk through the Blood neighborhood and fight Bloods. If you come out without getting killed that's the way you get initiated. (Male #084, "Rolo," fifteen-year-old Rolling 60's Crip)

The requirements of going on a mission also may include shooting someone. Often the intended victim is known to the gang before the prospective member sets out on the mission.

Something has got to be done to somebody. You have to do it. Part of you coming in is seeing if you for real and be right on. The last person came in, we took him over to a store. That person identified somebody out of our gang members that shot somebody. We told him that in order to be in

lights out and followed anyone who flashed their lights at them. It was reputed that the gang members would then kill those individuals. We were skeptical about the validity of such claims, a skepticism shared by local law enforcement officials. At scores of local and national conferences, we have been unable to verify a single instance in which this process occurred. This incident illustrates the symbolic threat represented by gang members and how effectively the process of cultural transmission of gang images can work. The creation of images such as this leads to further isolation of gang members from social institutions and interactions.

The steps by which women were initiated into the gang varied considerably from those reported by men. While one, a leader of the G Queens, reported that fighting was the primary means of being initiated, other women said female members of her gang had the option of engaging in property crimes such as burglary or shoplifting. We did hear stories, exclusively from male gang members, that prospective female gang members were required to have sex with male gang members. Two male gang members illustrate that contention.

Yes, they with it. For them [the Cripettes] to be down they got to have sex with us. One night one little gal and her friends were out saggin, she was a fine little gal, and she said she wanted to be down with us. She had to fuck everybody but I felt sorry for the little gal. (Male #083, "Larry," eighteen-year-old Thundercat)

INT: Did she have to be beat in?

MALE #084, "Rolo," fifteen-year-old Rolling 60's Crip: No, she got to poke everybody in the crew to get in. There was about 30 or 40 of us.

Female gang members, however, disputed this notion. Not one woman indicated she chose this means of initiation; indeed none could recall a woman who had. One woman's response, when asked about being required to have sex with members of the gang to be initiated, was laughter. This discrepancy illustrates the belief systems and bravado of adolescent males about their sexuality and control over females.

**Reasons to Be in a Gang.** We now consider what gang members regard as the positive features or advantages of gang membership. We presented subjects with twelve features of gang life, asking them to specify whether they represented a good reason to be in their gang. The responses to this question are found in Figure 3.1, where we list, in rank order, the percent of gang members who indicated that each category was a good reason to be in their gang.

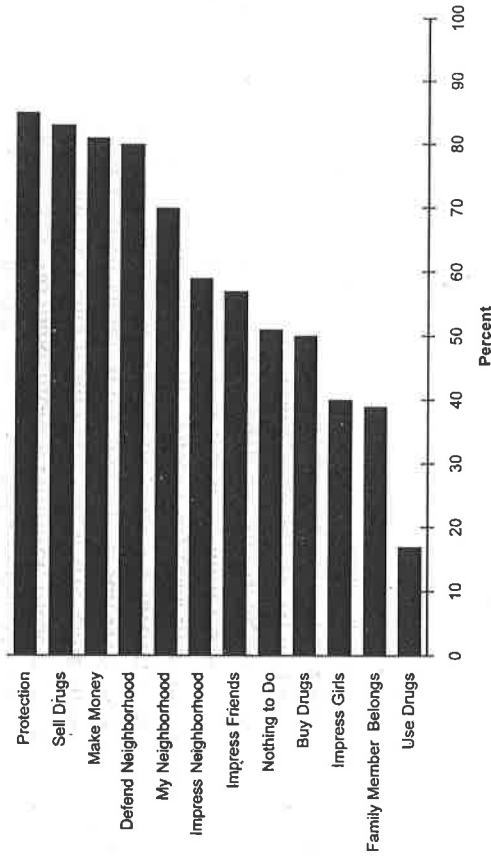


Figure 3.1 Reasons to Belong to the Gang

Protection was identified as a positive feature of gang membership by 86 percent of the subjects, more than any other category. However, selling drugs and opportunities to make money were seen as advantages of gang membership by 84 percent and 82 percent of subjects respectively. Defending the neighborhood also was viewed as an important reason to belong, as 81 percent of gang members responded in the affirmative when asked if this activity was a positive feature of gang membership. Interestingly, impressing people in the neighborhood, impressing friends, and impressing girls, all measures of status, received lower levels of support from gang members than did the categories just reviewed. In general, status concerns were endorsed as advantages to being in the gang by fewer members (thirty-eight) than were more instrumental aspects of gang life such as protection (eighty-three) or making money (seventy-nine). These responses reflect a preference for instrumental benefits of a more tangible nature than status concerns.

It is interesting to compare the responses to this series of questions to the answers gang members gave us about their reasons to join the gang. The desire for protection was the overwhelming motivation cited by gang members in their decision to join the gang. Their experiences in the gang had done little to change this. However, two notable differences can be observed between the reasons to join the gang and, once having joined, the advantages of membership. The second and third most fre-



quent responses to the question "Why did you join your gang?" were the chance to sell drugs and make money. However, these categories received far stronger endorsements from currently active gang members as reasons to belong to their gang. At the same time, status concerns (ranked as the fourth most important reason to join) fell farther down the list as advantages to membership. This pattern suggests that once in the gang, instrumental concerns like protection and money assume even greater importance. In addition, it is no surprise that drug sales and defending the neighborhood received similar high levels of support. In a sense, these are mutually reinforcing categories, since successful drug sales require a secure turf or neighborhood base from which to operate. Thus, one way to enhance the profitability of drug sales is to protect the neighborhood, particularly against rival gangs that would seek to use a gang member's neighborhood as a location for selling drugs.

Many gang members who cited protection as a positive feature of gang membership echoed sentiments similar to those who cited this as a reason to join. There is a very utilitarian tone to these comments.

It's like a comfortable feeling, you got someone to back you up and protect you. (Male #017, "Billy," twenty-one-year old North Side Crip)

Those who noted the importance of the gang for making money have a similarly utilitarian perspective toward drug sales.

There's money in a gang. I want to be in it, you see a lot of money in it man. That's why I really got in the gang, money and all. (Male #033, "Larry," eighteen-year-old Thundercat)

You live in a neighborhood that's run by a gang you just can't up and start selling drugs getting they profit. They'll tell you. You either got to be in their gang or give them half of what you make or don't sell at all. (Male #038, "G. O. D.," nineteen-year-old Compton Gangster)

Gangs can "organize" drug sales in two important ways. First, some gang members have the economic capacity to "front" drugs that would allow an individual gang member to begin selling drugs or to make more profit than they could if they were independent of the gang. Second, and more importantly, gangs have both the will and the mechanism to use violence in order to control a particular turf and keep competing drug sales from interfering with their profits. The ability to accomplish these goals contributed to the large number of gang members who responded that making money or selling drugs was a good reason to be in the gang.

Despite these instrumental concerns (protection and making money), a number of members indicated that their gang fulfilled a variety of more typical adolescent needs — especially companionship and support. While we maintain that violence or its threat is central to understanding gangs, street gangs of the 1990s meet a number of the emotional needs of adolescents that do not differ much from those of nongang adolescents.

One thing I like about gangs it's more people to be around, more partners to go places with. Like certain days we do, like Saturday and Sunday we go up to Skate King. Like next weekend we might go out to Northwest Plaza (a large shopping mall) and wear all blue colors. (Male #003, "Jerry," eighteen-year-old Thundercat)

Social stuff and if somebody mess with you. You know you grow up into this shit. Mostly social. (Male #012, "Lance," twenty-year-old West Side Mob member)

Each of these quotes illustrates typical adolescent activities — hanging out at the mall, being in the company of friends, and engaging in "social stuff" — behaviors that resemble those of other adolescents.

**Symbols.** Becoming accepted into any organization is a more or less gradual process; gangs are no different. Displaying the symbols of gang membership (clothes, hand signs, tattoos) is a way of being enculturated into the gang, or "learning" to be a gang member. Wearing gang clothes, flashing gang signs, and affecting other outward signs of gang behavior are also ways to become encapsulated in the role of gang member, especially through the perceptions of others, who, when they see the external symbols of membership, respond as if the person was a member. In a sense, exhibiting the external symbols of the gang is a way of "trying out" a gang identity. When that identity is confirmed by both gang and nongang members in the community, the identity of an individual as a gang member is solidified.

Symbolic representations of gang membership fulfill a variety of functions for gang members. First, the symbols of gang membership help to identify both rivals and allies, providing a "perceptual shorthand" by which the threat represented by an individual can be gauged. Many gangs have grown too large for all the members to recognize each other by sight, and the use of symbols allows one to quickly determine the gang allegiance of another individual. A second function of gang symbols is to announce the presence of a gang or gang member in a neighborhood.

This can help identify oneself to potential drug customers or serve as a recruitment tool by making the gang member and his (or her) gang highly visible to others in the neighborhood. A third function of symbols is to communicate threats to others. Individuals who exhibit the symbols of membership inform others they are in danger if they claim allegiance to a rival gang and that they should give a wide berth to the gang member, because of the ever present threat of violence. A final function of symbols is to increase cohesiveness among gang members. The process of symbolic communication (either through visual recognition or exchanging common symbols) serves to heighten the identification of individuals in the gang to each other. Through this process, bonds of membership are strengthened and gang activities attain a group context, hence a certain legitimacy.

Assuredly, the spread of gang symbols has been aided by popular culture, particularly films, and music. Within this context, it is important to underscore the role of imitation, an especially powerful force among adolescents.<sup>3</sup> The most common symbolic representations of gang membership included wearing specific colors (mentioned by fifty-seven subjects), giving hand signs (eight), painting graffiti (eighty-one), or being tattooed (fifteen). Most of our subjects identified one or more of these when asked to provide examples of ways in which they distinguished gang members from others.

If they throw up signs or wear their pants sagging or got on too much of a color. (Male #045, "C-Loc," seventeen-year-old Rolling 60's Crip)

They be throwing up signs, got they clothes sagging, top of their shirt buttoned up, what kind of shoes they got. (Male #080, "Coke Cane," thirteen-year-old Rolling 60's Crip)

The use of hand signs was particularly important as they often served as a prelude to violence. A number of the violent encounters our subjects participated in were precipitated by showing a gang sign and having it met with the sign of a rival gang.

Then I throw up a sign and if he throw one back then he a Gangster, or if he do it different you know he in a different gang. (Male #008, "Robert," fourteen-year-old Compton Gangster)

We could dress natural, we can dress what we want. It's basically not into the colors thing any more. It don't matter. It's about the signs you throw. If you at a party and someone throw up a sign then we know what that cat

is and we got to get that cat. (Male #092, "Derone," twenty-one-year-old Rolling 60's Crip)

A substantial fraction (27 percent) of our subjects told us that clothes were a means of identifying potential gang members.

INT: How can I tell who is a gang member?

MALE #031, "John Doe," sixteen-year-old Thundercat: Most of the time you can tell by the colors they wear. At first there wasn't a color code but now there is. Crips wear pants sagging and all blue mostly white tee shirts or something like that and you can tell a Slob from wearing red and black.

You can tell Rolling 60's because mostly we walk around in all black some-times and a hat with an S on it. So either by how we dress or our hats. You see a hat with an S like Chicago White Sox that a Rolling 60's. (Male #050, "John," nineteen-year-old Rolling 60's Crip)

The wearing of a "rag" or bandana, either as a head band, on the upper arm or hanging out of a pant's pocket, was offered as another means of identifying gang members. Our subjects indicated that rags were generally worn for gang functions such as meetings, going on campaigns (when a large number of gang members invade rival territory for the express purpose of engaging in violence), or funerals.

Most likely he'll die and on his will<sup>4</sup> he will ask to have his rag on his coffin or lay it on his body or something like that. (Male #020, "Lil Thug," sixteen-year-old Gangster Disciple)

The wearing of tattoos, or getting "tagged," was another symbol of membership, especially for older members of the gang. Fifteen of our subjects showed us their tattoos, most of which were crudely applied with either a needle and India ink or a hot wire or coat hanger. Tattoos were not confined to the males in our sample, as several of the women we interviewed had tattoos. The tattoos generally reflected the set or gang a member belonged to, either by including part of the name of the gang ("60" for Rolling 60's, "19" for 19th Street Long Beach Crips) or a symbol of the gang (pitchforks for Disciples). In some gangs, tattoos have special relevance.

INT: Does it mean anything different if you have a tattoo?

MALE #083, "Winchester," fourteen-year-old Rolling 60's Crip: It's different. If you have a tattoo that means you willing to kill somebody, like if

they mess with your boys, it's like a symbol. If your boy dies then everybody, Bloods, Slobs, they got to go look for them and shoot them.

Not all gang members wanted a tattoo, however. Anticipating his future, one gang member indicated he hadn't been tagged because "I'll probably be going to jail too much" (#057), and being tattooed would make him an obvious target for rival gangs and special attention from authorities. Consistent with this observation was the response of "Lance" (male #012, twenty-year-old West Side Mob member), "I ain't got none of them [tattoos]. Cause that's the first thing the police ask you, 'you got any tattoos?'"

Symbols play another important function in gangs, distinguishing "real" members from individuals imitating gang behavior, or wanna-bes, as they are known on the street. Because gang signs, clothes, and other symbols have become widely diffused through American culture as a consequence of movies, music videos, and the media, many people — gang members and nongang members alike — are aware of the common symbols of membership. Thus, concern over wanna-bes has grown, both among gang members and the public. One gang member, though, offered this pragmatic assessment of wanna-bes.

There ain't no wanna-bes to me. If you claim a gang, I believe it. A perpetrator [wanna-be] will shoot in a real gang bang. To me there ain't no perpetrators. But you can tell a perpetrator because they are always throwing up signs and saying what's up brother, what's up brother. But to me, I don't believe there are no wanna-bes, cause to me a fake one is just like a real one. He can pull the trigger. He can fight his way out. (Male #015, "Karry," fifteen-year-old Crenshaw Gangster Blood)

### Who Belongs to the Gang?

**Race and Gang Membership.** Race is an important element of the composition of gangs. The growth of the underclass, especially in predominantly minority neighborhoods, is clearly related to the high numbers of minority gang members (Hagedorn 1988; Jackson 1991). While the majority of individuals we interviewed were black (96 percent), not all gang members in St. Louis are black. However, nearly half (45 percent) of our gang members said their gang would accept white members, and an equal proportion told us that there were white members of their gang. Only one-fifth of respondents said they were "dead set" against having whites in their gang.

Gang members who told us they would have whites in their gang said that, for the most part, color doesn't matter. For a number of gangs, the proof of this assertion could be seen in the racial composition of their membership; a large number of the gangs whose members we interviewed had mixed-race membership. Typically members of such gangs informed us that the gang transcended race.

We feel that color ain't nothing about gang banging, they can be any color. (Male #101, "Money Love," twenty-year-old Insane Gangster Disciple)

INT: How did white guys get in?

MALE #015, "Karry," fifteen-year-old Crenshaw Gangster Blood: The same way a black man does. They was just real cool. We don't care about they skin color as long as they was cool. There's some white guys in our group in St. Louis.

The majority of whites (3/5) who joined the gang did so as a consequence of living in the neighborhood where a black gang was operating. This underscores the importance of neighborhoods as a setting for gangs.

INT: Any white guys?

MALE #048, "Corkey," sixteen-year-old Rolling 60's Crip: Yeah.

INT: Why is that?

048: I don't know, they in a black neighborhood and they just get hooked onto us.

INT: How come you all let them in?

MALE #087, "Blue Jay," eighteen-year-old Rolling 60's Crip: Cause, they grew up in the hood. They was there when I came. Ever since then they been hanging with us, they cool.

This sentiment was echoed by a white gang member who belonged to a predominantly black gang.<sup>5</sup>

INT: So there are black and white members in your gang, right?

MALE #100, "J Bone," nineteen-year-old Insane Gangster Disciple: There's only about two or three other white people in our gang, the rest are all black.

INT: Out of the 50 to 100 members, there are only two or three white? 100: Yeah. I'm one of them two or three. There's about four I guess.

INT: How did you all, if it's predominantly black, how did you all get interested?

100: I live in a predominantly black neighborhood and that's just where I was raised at. Most of my friends are black and all that.

didn't like whites. Some of the dislike was linked to the belief that white would readily "snake out" black members.

We just don't like them. They snitch too much, can't be trusted. (Male #094, "John Doe," fourteen-year-old 107 Hoover Crip)

We don't mess with no white dudes. They some snakes. (Male #068, "CK," sixteen-year-old Piru 104 Blood)

The racial composition of gangs confirms the strong neighborhood character of St. Louis gangs. Most gangs members we interviewed belonged to gangs that were exclusively black (56 percent). However, their members were drawn from the neighborhoods they lived in, neighborhoods that had experienced decades of racial segregation. While most claimed to be open to white members, few were to be found. Ethnic and racial identification was generally not strong among the members of our sample, perhaps because of the absence of interracial conflict. Gang conflicts were almost exclusively intraracial. Thus the conflicts between racial and ethnic groups likely to generate and strengthen ethnic identification were generally absent from the lives of our members.

**Women.** Despite notable exceptions (Bowker and Klein 1983; Campbell 1984; Taylor 1993) female gang members and female gangs have received little explicit attention. In some ways, this makes sense, because males dominate gang membership and are arrested with much higher frequency for violent offenses. On the other hand, female gang membership may be a more significant problem than their numerical representation in gangs suggests. Female membership in gangs is an important topic of study because of shifts in sex roles, particularly in poor communities where changes in family structure over the past two decades have had important consequences for the role of women. Female gang membership seems to accelerate several years after males begin to form gangs and expand membership. Thus the growth in female gang members may be a sign of the increased formalization and expansion of gangs. In addition, many reports of female gang activities indicate that they engage in considerable amounts of violence (Curry, Ball, and Fox 1994). The consequences of female gang membership also are magnified, because women in gangs often attract males to gang membership. Finally, because women tend to play the primary role in raising children in poor communities, the consequences of increased female gang membership

Other black gang members told us that having white members provided their gang with access to either drugs or guns. In this sense, having a mixed-race gang provided instrumental advantages to the gang. These advantages were strong enough to transcend parochial concerns over race.

INT: Do you have white guys in there?

MALE #063, "Bobtimes," sixteen-year-old 6 Deuce Blood: Why not? I mean, you know, they claiming, they down for us.

INT: By having white guys do you get special connections or something?

063: Sometimes, yes.

INT: What kind of connection would that be?

063: Dope.

INT: What kind of dope do you sell?

063: Cocaine.

INT: Why do you have white people in your gang?

MALE #092, "Derone," twenty-one-year-old Rolling 60's Crip: Easier to hook up with guns. They know how to get to the guns, they know how to get to anything really.

The majority of subjects (55 percent) came from gangs with only black members. However, slightly more than half (52 percent) of this group told us that their gang was open to the possibility of having white members. A major impediment to expanding the racial diversity of gangs stemmed from the rigid racial segregation in most St. Louis neighborhoods. Underscoring this fact was the response of one black gang member who said, "How many white guys do you find in the city?" (#042). This observation is supported by the high level of racial isolation in four of the areas we recruited in.

INT: Why there no white dudes?

MALE #065, "BK Kill," nineteen-year-old North County Crip: Cause they don't live in our neighborhood.

INT: Any white people in the gang?

FEMALE #046, "Lady Tee," sixteen-year-old 74 Hoover Crip: No.

INT: Why not?

046: There's no whites who live in our neighborhood.

Twenty gang members told us they were opposed to whites joining their gang. Some of the opposition centered on what was referred to as the "Three K Posse" (the Ku Klux Klan). Others simply stated that they



may have profound effects for intergenerational transmission of gang membership.

We examined the involvement of women in St. Louis gangs by looking at the extent to which women: (1) were members of gangs dominated by males or (2) had their own gangs, separate from male gangs. We also asked about the activities women engaged in under each circumstance, hoping to learn whether their roles in mixed-gender gangs was different. In general, we found few differences between the roles and activities of women regardless of whether they were in an all female gang or a male-dominated gang. It is important to keep in mind that we were studying gangs in a city where they had only recently reemerged. Over the course of our study, we observed an increase in female gang members as well as in their activities.

Gang members in St. Louis reported that women were integrated into their gangs, even though those gangs were dominated by males. Indeed, 70 percent of our respondents said that the roles of women were indistinguishable from those of men. A high value was placed on being able to get the job done, and women who could be counted on to achieve this goal were held in high regard.

INT: Are they a separate part or are they mixed in with the guys?

MALE #001, "Mike Mike," twenty-year-old Thundercat: Mixed in with the guys. B-Dogs and C-Dogs.

INT: Do they sell drugs too?

001: Yes they does.

INT: And how about, uh, guns and stuff? Are they involved in that?

001: Yeah, they shoot them pistols.

Yeah, they fight, they shoot. They do anything just like us, but I can't tell you about they meetings cause we ain't be in they meetings. (Male #013, "Darryl," twenty-nine-year-old Blood)

INT: What role do they [women] play?

FEMALE #078, "Tina," fifteen-year-old Treetop Blood: They like drug dealing, steal cars, do drive-bys, they act like boys.

INT: So they basically play the same role as the boys.

078: Yeah.

They do the same thing we do, shoot, hang out, party, make some money. (Male #086, "Gunn," nineteen-year-old Rolling 60's Crip)

Other accounts of the female gang members' activities placed women in a role secondary to males. This group represented one-third of the sam-

ple. From this perspective, women joined the gang because they were following their boyfriends or were just hanging around with the boys.

Naw, they ain't really but they hang wit us, they try to hang wit us but we be like go on, ya'all better quit following us. We kick em around, somethin like that they be still tryin to follow us cause, cause most of them got a baby by each other and then when they be tryin to follow they boyfriends and stuff we be like, go on, go on, we don't want ya'all on us too cause we try to holler at some other girls you know they be blockin and stuff. (Male #002, "Eric," sixteen-year-old Thundercat)

They basically brought in by their man friends. (Male #085, "2-Low," eighteen-year-old Rolling 60's Crip)

INT: Are there any women in your group?

MALE #088, "T-Loc," twenty-one-year-old Grape Street Crip: Yeah, we got a few.

INT: How do they figure in?

088: Most of them go with us.

INT: They really girlfriends?

088: Yeah.

These secondary roles often involved the use of women to "set up" rival gang members. Women gang members were used to attract rival gang members making them vulnerable to attacks.

INT: Are there women in your gang?

MALE #060, "Bullet," twenty-year-old Inglewood Family Gangster Blood: Not in the gang but there is girls that do more dirt than we do, but they not really Bloods, they just down with us and all. They wear colors, they do everything we do but they just down with us. We will have them do certain things for us like if we wanted to set up somebody we would use one of the gals to get them and get them off where we can get them at. They go pick up things back and forth for us and stuff.

The diversity of female involvement in gangs was reinforced by the comments of the female gang members we interviewed. Two women indicated that their gangs were separate from males, while the others told us they played subservient roles within male gangs. One woman reported that most female gang members were affiliated with male gangs.

INT: Are there girl gangs that don't have boy gangs or aren't part of boy gangs?

FEMALE #011, "Lisa," fifteen-year-old Compton Gangster: That ain't part of boys? No. Most girl gangs that I know of is with the boys.

And another woman told us that her gang was separate from boys.

INT: Do the girls in your gang have a separate kind of group?

FEMALE #007, "Tina," fourteen-year-old Hoover Crip: Yeah. We don't be like with the boys.

INT: Hang out by yourselves most of the time?

007: Yeah.

INT: If you got into fights would the boys support you?

007: If they around they would.

Another variety of female gangs was less organized than their male counterparts.

INT: Are there some gangs in the city that are just girls other than the Switch Blade Sisters?

FEMALE #046, "Lady Tee," sixteen-year-old 74 Hoover Crip: Yeah but they just cliques.

INT: But they tend to be less organized and smaller?

046: Yeah.

Finally, one woman told us that women in her gang, while integrated into a male gang, have the same functions as males in the gang.

INT: How many females are in the gang?

FEMALE #078, "Tina," fifteen-year-old Treetop Blood: About ten.

INT: What role do they play?

078: They like drug dealing, steal cars, do drive-bys, they act like boys.

In sum, it is difficult to categorize the role of women in gangs as such roles display considerable diversity. Some female gangs were independent from male gangs. Other women played subservient roles in male gangs. These findings were consistent across reports from men and women involved in gangs.

### Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed several membership issues, including the process of joining the gang, symbols of membership, reasons to join, and the positive features of membership. In addition, we examined two of the primary dimensions of gang membership, race and sex. Reports from our subjects reveal the importance of *process* in becoming a gang member. This process has its origins in neighborhoods and has important consequences for the structure of gangs, the topic covered in the next chapter.

## "We Ain't No Worldwide Thing or Nothing":

### Gang Structure and Relationships

To be in a gang you have friends. It's kinda good to be with some friends instead of being out cause if you aint got no friends it's really hard to get along out there. If we in trouble they help you. (Male #009, "Marrien," fifteen-year-old Compton Gangster)

To be with the in crowd, be with the fellas. We been together so long if they doing something, I'm doing it. I do something, they doing it. (Male #030, "Kenneth," seventeen-year-old Thundercat)

THERE HAVE BEEN gangs in St. Louis since the end of the nineteenth century. Indeed, Thrasher (1927) makes numerous references to gangs in St. Louis, their influence on Chicago gangs, and the nature of their activities. Similar to other cities, St. Louis had a "gang problem" during the 1960s. However, this does not account for the presence of gangs in St. Louis in the 1990s. No member of our sample claimed that their gang was an extension or outgrowth of a St. Louis gang from an earlier era. Thus we must explain the origins of contemporary gangs and, in doing so, focus on the role of cultural transmission – the process of communicating the values, images, symbols, and behaviors common to gang members across the country.

### Gang Origins

We examine two views about the origins of St. Louis gangs in the 1990s. The first view, more instrumental in nature, argues that gangs reemerged in the city from the purposive efforts of gang members in other

tion) by his mother so that he would stay out of trouble in St. Louis. When he returned, he had learned how to be a gang member and quickly transmitted his new-found knowledge to his friends in the neighborhood.

I'm from St. Louis but I got 10 people that stay in California. Sometimes I go up there and visit. I know my way around California like I do here. (Male #017, "Billy," twenty-one-year old North Side Crip)

Before I got into the Bloods I was down here on the West Side and a friend of mine, a Blood, he be what's up Blood and all this and that. Then I have an auntie and her and her husband stay up in L.A. So we went up there, me and my mother and my sister and all them went up there. I ran into a bunch of Bloods and that's how I became one up there. Then my grandfather passed away, my mother moved back down here to be with my grandmother. (Male #060, "Bullet," twenty-year-old Inglewood Family Gangster Blood)

More typical descriptions of the origins of St. Louis gangs emphasized the neighborhood affiliations that were influenced by popular culture. As noted earlier, St. Louis is a city with strong neighborhood divisions and allegiances. These divisions have been the source of conflict for generations and these antagonisms often produced gangs.

It started bout six or seven years ago. Somethin like that. See, the Crips, we didn't know nothin about the Crips and then there was this other neighborhood that they use to wear red all the time and we use to wear blue all the time just like to be the opposite of em or something like that. We didn't even know nothin about the Crips then till one came down there and got kilt. (Male #002, "Eric," sixteen-year-old Thundercat)

We started out, we didn't want nobody coming out and tellin us, walking through our neighborhood cause we grew up in this hood and we was going to protect it even if it did mean us fighting every day, which we done. (Male #036, "NA," eighteen-year-old Compton Gangster BIC)

Some of these antagonisms grew out of break-dancing contests often held between neighborhoods, an occurrence similar to that reported by Hagedorn (1988) in Milwaukee.

How we uh, ya know how it first got started, you know, they used to go to little dances and if the sink [an uncontested or unclaimed spot where neighborhood youths converge] at the southside get into a fight with the Vaughns one persons and then all the southside and all the Vaughns be

cities to bring their gang to new cities. We refer to this as the "importation" model, one that emphasizes the role of gang members in other cities (almost exclusively from California) consciously coming to St. Louis (among other cities) to open up new markets. The second view emphasizes the role of informal factors such as popular culture and cultural transmission. This approach argues that gangs grow out of "normal" features of urban life. We refer to this approach as the "imitation-adaptation" model. This approach emphasizes conflicts between neighborhoods, fights that emerge between different groups of young people, and popular culture in its explanation of the origin of gangs. The evidence from our research provides more support for the imitation-adaptation perspective.

Only a minority of our sample (16 percent) provided responses consistent with the importation model. These individuals argued that a small group of gang members had come to St. Louis from Los Angeles for the express purpose of starting gangs.

MALE #041, "C. K.," twenty-two-year-old Blood: Some Bloods came from California and they was off into selling dope then. I didn't really know nothing about rock cocaine and they started schooling me on how much is how much and how much I can get and how to cut it and break it up.

INT: Where were they from California?

041: Inglewood, California. In order to really be down with them be around them, some of them didn't matter if you was gang banging or not but in order to get a connection, a steady connection, you might as well just go and hook up with us and that's how I went from there, I just hooked up with them.

Didn't nobody from out here started the set, people from California came here and initiated us. (Male #092, "Derone," twenty-one-year-old Rolling 60's Crip)

People say *Colors* brought the Crips but when I was at Beaumont [High School] they came from California. They was on our set. (Male #050, "John," nineteen-year-old Rolling 60's Crip)

However, even when it is claimed that gangs from California had a hand in starting St. Louis gangs, explanations do not always follow the importation model. In many cases, gangs in St. Louis did originate due to the efforts of Los Angeles gang members but in the normal course of life events, such as visiting relatives. In fact, one member of our sample was sent to Compton (in South Central Los Angeles, a notorious gang loca-

together and then I guess they just kept on fighting, kept on fighting they say, oh man we gonna get into a gang cause the Vaughns fixin to start takin over. (Male #001, "Mike Mike," twenty-year-old Thundercat)

People who dance against each other at first. One person might move and the other person might win. That person lost because the other person won so they would get in a fight and his group would fight his group. Throughout the years it just got in deeper. (Male #031, "John Doe," sixteen-year-old Thundercat)

The powerful images of Los Angeles gangs, conveyed through movies, clothes, and music, provided a symbolic reference point for these antagonisms. In this way, popular culture provided the symbols and rhetoric of gang affiliation and activities that galvanized neighborhood rivalries. This helps to explain why the characteristics of gangs in Los Angeles, nearly two thousand miles away from St. Louis, came to dominate rather than those of Chicago gangs, only three hundred miles to the north. Indeed, Chicago gang traditions had been carried to East St. Louis, Illinois (just across the river from St. Louis) through the Illinois prison system. Unlike Los Angeles, Chicago gangs lacked the means of transmission for their beliefs and practices found in popular culture. In a sense, the symbols of gang membership served to strengthen and make more visible antagonisms that had long existed. Once these antagonisms found an attractive and efficient vehicle for transmission — through the images of popular culture — they spread the threat of gang violence. Our argument has underscored the role of the *threat* of gang violence in the spread of gangs and the growth of gang membership. Absent the symbolic aspects of gang membership — colors, rhetoric, clothes, hand signs — the long-simmering neighborhood antagonisms would likely remain just that. However, popular culture provides the mechanism or catalyst by which gangs in St. Louis come to resemble those in Los Angeles.<sup>1</sup>

The reason how it got started is they had the movie *Colors*, that was a gang-related movie and the action impact that had on teenagers, they liked stuff like that. They looked at it like the real reality of things in the movie *Colors*. (Male #017, "Billy," twenty-year-old North Side Crip)

All I know is when *Colors* came out that's when they started sparking up all of these gangs, Crips and Bloods and all that. (Male #045, "C-Loc," seventeen-year-old Rolling 60's Crip)

And for many gang members, the movie *Colors* provided an important reference point for the origins of gangs in St. Louis.

The Crips been around for a long time. People just never heard of them until the movie *Colors* came out then it started spreading from LA out to here. Coming down here to St. Louis. (Male #050, "John," nineteen-year-old Rolling 60's Crip)

Other symbols of Los Angeles gangs were evident in descriptions of the origins of gangs in St. Louis. Six gang members specifically identified "King David," a Crip leader, as one of the three kings of gang lore. Despite references to his name, there was little agreement about who he was, his role in the gang, or whether he was alive. Some reported that he was still an active gang member in Chicago, others claimed that he was in a California prison, another offered that he was in prison in Illinois, while others believed that he was dead. Notwithstanding the fact that nineteen of our subjects were affiliated with a gang that had the name "Hoover" in it, none knew who Larry Hoover was or his whereabouts.<sup>2</sup> Three of our subjects made specific references to King Piru, who originated the Bloods. These insights confirm the role of popular culture and its function in the transmission of belief systems from one city to another. The mythic status that King David and King Piru had attained was important in spreading the word about gangs, generating a mythology or belief system to support gang activities, and providing symbolic links between St. Louis gangs and gang members to those in Los Angeles.

In sum, imitation played the largest role in the spread of gangs to St. Louis and their subsequent growth. While some evidence exists to support the contention that gang members purposively came to St. Louis to expand drug markets, and used gang affiliation as a vehicle to do so, there is little basis for this as an explanation of the rapid growth in gangs and gang membership in St. Louis. Rather, long standing neighborhood antagonisms (which themselves produce threats that create the impetus for more individuals to join gangs seeking protection) coupled with the images of gangs produced through popular culture, provide a plausible explanation for the origin of gangs and their growth in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

**Cities.** The role played by Los Angeles gangs in the origins of St. Louis gangs has been examined in the preceding section. However, gangs in a number of cities have ongoing relationships with those in St. Louis. These relationships may be instrumental (providing guns, drugs, or support for campaigns or battles) or the relationships may be more symbolic in nature. In this section, we explore the extent to which gangs in St.



Louis have relationships with gangs in other cities and the nature of those relationships. As was the case in describing the origins of St. Louis gangs, these relationships have a more informal character; that is, they are dependent on relatives and mobility to a far greater extent than they are on the provision of "criminogenic commodities" such as guns or drugs. Often there is variation within a gang regarding the effect of gangs from other cities. Such variation is linked to individual experiences (a cousin from that city) rather than the experiences of the gang collectively.

A number of gang members (sixteen), told us that their gang had no ongoing relationship with gangs in other cities. These gangs were active in their neighborhood and had rather narrow horizons.

We ain't no worldwide or anything like the Crips and the Bloods. There's about 30 of us, that's all. (Male #012, "Lance," twenty-year-old West Side Mob member)

Other links were more amorphous in nature, consisting primarily of the symbolic ties between groups that share the same name and some of the same symbols. A Compton Gangster from St. Louis described the relationship his gang maintained with a similar gang in East St. Louis, Illinois in the following way.

It's not what they do for us. It's like they Insane Gangsters and we hooked up with them. When we first hit town we was the Compton Gangsters. They was the Insane Gangsters and they just made our posse bigger. If they need our help they call and if we need their's we call but we never had to call them for nothing. (Male #036, "NA," eighteen-year-old Compton Gangster BIC)

Others focused on the more symbolic aspects of their membership such as "being down" for each other.

INT: What kind of relationship do you have with them?

MALE #066, "Short Dog," fifteen-year-old Crenshaw Mob Gangster:  
They down for Bloods.

INT: Most of these places that you all have relationships with, you all are just down for each other?

066: Yeah.

INT: But it's nothing in particular that you get from them or they get from you?

066: No.

Gangs from Los Angeles were often used as a barometer against which the status of St. Louis gangs were gauged. In some cases, gangs in Los Angeles were romanticized.

We related to the Crips of L.A. Some of them come back here to do something. Sometimes we hang with the big boys. (Male #032, "Skonion," seventeen-year-old Thundercat)

In other instances, Los Angeles was rejected as the standard by which St. Louis gangs could be measured.

Some people name us wanna-bes. What is the difference? You don't die faster in L.A., you don't shoot any different, what's the difference? I just want somebody to explain it to me. (Male #042, "Leroy," seventeen-year-old Rolling 60's Crip)

A quarter of our respondents, the modal category, identified a relative in another city as the primary link between their gang and the gang in the other city. Yet even this category showed considerable variation within gangs, illustrating the diverse nature of membership. These contacts included Indianapolis, Kansas City, Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles, East St. Louis, and several cities in Mississippi.

INT: What is the relationship that you got with the Detroit gang?

MALE #033, "Larry," eighteen-year-old Thundercat: When I need something, like I need a weapon. A certain kind of weapon that I want to get like an AK or something I'll call up Detroit and put the word out. I got family up there that's Crip and they like older men like in they 20s and 30s. I got connects up there.

INT: What is your relationship with the L.A. gang?

MALE #048, "Corkey," sixteen-year-old Rolling 60's Crip: They claiming the same thing we claim. Some of the guys we know that claim 60 got family in L.A. that claim 60.

The majority (54 percent) of subjects identified the relationship with gangs in other cities as instrumental. This was particularly true for relationships with gangs in Los Angeles and Detroit who were cited as the source of guns and drugs. When asked about relationships he had established with gangs in Los Angeles and Detroit, one gang member told us that the form of his relationship with gangs in those cities consisted primarily of "ammunition, guns, and drugs" (#072).

INT: Any relationships with national gangs?

MALE #004, "Anthony," seventeen-year-old Thundercat: Yeah, the Crips in L.A.

INT: What's the nature of that relationship?

004: They bring drugs. We'll buy them. They'll bring them down to us cheap and we will buy them cheap from them and sell them at a higher price down here.

From California they send in drugs. In Atlanta they mostly have guns, artillery. (Male #031, "John Doe," sixteen-year-old Thundercat)

Though it represents an outlier, the response of "Darryl" (the oldest member of our sample and a former Los Angeles gang member) indicates the level of organization and coordination seen by some gang members in their relationships with gangs in other cities.

INT: To what extent does your gang deal with gangs outside of the St. Louis area?

MALE #013, "Darryl," twenty-nine-year-old Blood: It's like the Coca Cola thing man. Everything we do is big. We travel to different cities and set up organizations.

INT: So is it mainly to disperse drugs?

013: Disperse drugs, robbing, and murder.

Gangs in other cities play a role in maintaining gang life in St. Louis. This role has a strong symbolic character and is often sustained by relationships with relatives in those cities. However, just over half of the gang members we interviewed identified an instrumental role played by gang members in other cities, especially in the provision of drugs and guns.

### Relationships with Other Gangs in St. Louis

Every gang in St. Louis maintains relationships with other gangs in the city. These relationships show considerable diversity, and while many of them are antagonistic, a number are supportive. Many of the antagonistic relationships have their origins in the division between major gang groups (Crips versus Bloods), but others are rooted in long standing disputes between the residents of adjoining neighborhoods. Even these antagonistic relationships perform useful functions for the gang, often serving to increase cohesiveness among members, a process that occurs through fights or the threat of attack by rival gangs. Such threats recruit gang members to their own gang, uniting them against a common enemy. However, we found that almost all gangs (85 percent) had posi-

tive relationships with members of other gangs. These relationships almost exclusively occurred within the larger divisions of gangs. Crip sets from different parts of the city would do things with each other, as would Blood sets. These activities between gangs reflected the age related interests of their members, usually focusing on traditional youthful concerns such as drinking, partying, and dating members of the opposite sex.

Most of the antagonistic relationships between gangs involve Bloods and Crips who report that they fight over colors, turf, or respect. Major campaigns or wars occur between members of these two gangs. However, many of the fights between gangs reflect long standing antagonisms that have their genesis in neighborhood rivalries that precede the arrival of gangs in St. Louis.

INT: How about the south side? Do you guys get along with the south side?

MALE #033, "Larry," eighteen-year-old Thundercat: No. I hate them.

INT: Any guys from the Thundercats hooked up with the south side?

033: The Peabody Projects, we been fighting them since before the Crips and Bloods came up. We been fighting them since 1981. Since we Crip they was claiming Slob.

Despite the fact that fights between major gang divisions (Bloods and Crips) are more common, there were frequent reports of fighting between different sets of Crips. This appears to be the case for several reasons. First, Crip sets in St. Louis outnumber Blood sets by about three to one, so sheer numbers alone make this more likely. The number of Crip sets also means that there is greater rivalry between them for dominance. Because Blood sets were fewer in number, and therefore in more danger from outside gangs (i.e., Crips), they could ill afford to fight one another. There is another reason for less violence between Blood sets; a major difference between Crips and Bloods in St. Louis is that Bloods were consistently more committed to making money. Put simply, fighting is bad for business, detracting time and effort from more lucrative pursuits. Crip gang members knew the allegiances among Crip sets very well.

MALE #044, "Paincuzz," sixteen-year-old Rolling 60's Crip: Our set is hooked up with the Disciples, 19th Street and the ECG's.

INT: Do Crips fight other Crips in St. Louis?

044: Some of them do.

INT: How about Rolling 60's?

044: Yeah, they fight Hoovers and 8 Tray.

example of political awareness in the course of our study. In 1991, the Greater Ville, an historic neighborhood that had produced a considerable amount of African American cultural heritage in St. Louis was "leafletted" by the Ku Klux Klan. The leaflets were placed under the windshield wipers of hundreds of cars in the neighborhood and carried a simple message: the Klan thanked black residents of the city for doing their job so efficiently by killing so many young black males. This outraged neighborhood leaders, one of whom painted "Bloods and Crips will kill KKK" in alternating blue and red letters on an abandoned gas station in a prominent location. This was not the work of a gang member, and in general we found very low levels of political awareness of gang members.<sup>3</sup> The lack of political involvement is consistent with the description of gang members as individuals who must be concerned about threats of violence from within their own and adjoining neighborhoods. In a sense, such political concerns are foreign to the day-to-day requirements of survival. In this respect, St. Louis gangs differ little from those described by Short and Moland (1976) in Chicago between 1959 and 1962.

### Heirarchy

Organizations can be defined in a number of ways. In the following sections, we examine the level of formal organization within the gangs we studied. We focus on four measures of organization: roles, rules, meetings, and the existence of junior gangs. The extent to which a gang has roles, rules, or regular meetings is an indication of their level of formalization.

**Roles.** Role differentiation is an important characteristic of formal organizations. The presence of different roles or levels of responsibility would be evidence of increasing formalization or organization within the gang. Though twenty-six different roles were identified, few were of a well-defined character. The most typical role identified in the interviews was that of "leader." However, not all gangs reported they had leaders; indeed, many of the gang members we interviewed (16 percent), expressed hostility toward the idea of having leaders.

INT: Does anybody got the power? Do some people have more power than others?

MALE #008, "Robert," fourteen-year-old Compton Gangster: If somebody want to run everybody we say you don't run nobody, we all together.

Knowing these alliances can be important for maintaining personal safety.

Most gang members (85 percent) reported that there were other gangs with whom they were allies. A number of activities took place between the members of two allied gangs, most of which followed patterns of adolescent behavior typical of males. These activities centered around fighting, drinking, and hanging out.

We sit around and get high or go out and do some fighting. (Male #065, "BK Kill," nineteen-year-old North County Crip)

INT: Does your group, your neighborhood gang do other things with other Crip groups in the city?

FEMALE #006: "Yolanda," nineteen-year-old 23rd Street Hoover Crip: Yeah, go places or whatever.

INT: Get into fights together?

006: Yeah, get drunk and fights together. I always get into fights.

INT: What do you all do together with them [other gangs]?

MALE #069: "X-Men," fourteen-year-old Inglewood Family Gangster: Help them fight together, hang out together, that's about all, or go places together.

INT: What kind of places?

069: Skating, dances, that about all like that.

There is one interesting sidelight to the issue of intergang relationships. Following the Rodney King verdict, there was considerable discussion of a truce between Crip and Blood gangs in Los Angeles. Similar talk was heard in St. Louis, though there is little tangible evidence to support the view that such a truce actually took place. One of our subjects did tell us, however, that his gang (a Crip set) had established relationships with Blood gangs.

INT: Do you all have relationships, are you all cool with some other Crips?  
MALE #094, "John Doe," fourteen-year-old 107 Hoover Crip: Yeah, some Bloods too.

INT: You all cool with Bloods?

094: Yeah.

INT: How did that work?

094: Since they heard about that Rodney King deal on the television, all Crips and Bloods are joinin' together.

When asked what activities Bloods and Crips did together, his response was that they "went to the arcade." We encountered only one other

The reason why they become leaders is because they are so powerful. They know how to handle things and they are going to get down to it. In real bad situations they always try to handle it. (Male #017, "Billy," twenty-one-year-old North Side Crip)

Age (in combination with length of time in the gang) was also noted as a major criteria that set leaders apart from other members. In particular, the old gangster, or OG, was a role identified with leadership.

When I first came down here I was already in the gang four years so they made me a old G, old gangster, cause I been in longer than most of the guys that been over there. (Male #014, "D. C.," sixteen-year-old Disciple)

Others talked about the need for the OG or leader only under special circumstances.

If we got a little trouble we think we can handle we take care of that ourselves but if we got some trouble with somebody that have cars and stuff like the Peabody's then we'll go tell him [the leader]. He got the people with the cars and he got most of the guns. (Male #090, "Rello," fifteen-year-old 19th Street Long Beach Crip)

The significance of age as a criterion for leaders included female gangs.

I'm the leader of the girls. I'm the oldest one. I've been around more than them. (Female #006, "Yolanda," nineteen-year-old 23rd Street Hoover Crip)

Age and physical prowess were not the only criteria for leadership though. Nearly half of the gang members identified leaders as persons who could provide material advantages, thus ascribing a functional character to leadership within the gang. Since half of our sample was in their early teens, someone with the ability to procure cars, drugs, guns, or alcohol could play a valuable role in the gang. Consequently, it was no surprise to find that over half of gang members identified leaders as persons who could "deliver." Because of the situational nature of leadership, persons moved in and out of this role. This was especially true in the case of being able to provide drugs in large quantities for street sales.

INT: Does someone have more juice in the gang?

MALE #041, "C. K.," twenty-two-year-old Blood: Yeah, you always got someone that got more juice.

INT: What is the type of person who usually have more juice?

041: The one who got the connection with the drugs.

INT: Ok, so what is your role in the gang?  
008: That nobody runs me and nobody really going to tell me what to do. Ain't nobody be running it. It's like everybody does. (Male #009, "Marrien," fifteen-year-old Compton Gangster)

Ain't no leaders. If we put a ride on somebody, they will come to me to bring the play in. But there ain't no leader, everybody just listen to one another, ain't no leader. (Male #033, "Larry," eighteen-year-old Thundercat)

Most gangs, however, reported *some* form of leadership. The leaders of these gangs did not have *de jure* powers granted to them by all members for all situations. Rather, gang leadership had a more informal, situational character to it and often varied between subgroups in the gang. This is evident in the following responses to questions about the nature of leadership within the gang.

INT: Do you have a reason why they look up to your brother a little bit more?

MALE #051, "David," eighteen-year-old Blood: Because he the strongest one out of the group but they don't call him the leader.

Yeah, it's not like he'll tell you what to do; he just keeps it together so that we don't fall apart. So we won't fight each other. (Male #020, "Lil Thug," sixteen-year-old Gangster Disciple)

INT: Do some guys in the gang have more juice than others do?

MALE #045, "C-Loc," seventeen-year-old Rolling 60's Crip: Yeah, some of them.

INT: How do they get more juice than other folks?

045: They bigger and talk more.

Size and age were identified as the two primary criteria by which leaders assumed that role in the gang. In a social group that formed largely in response to physical threats, initiated members through violence, and engaged in frequent fights, it is no surprise that physical prowess demonstrated through fighting would emerge as a criteria for leadership.

Lance [a leader in the gang, not the subject] like the oldest one, he tough I guess. He is the toughest one. He been in more fights and in jail more than all of us. He's bigger than a motherfucker too. (Male #012, "Lance," twenty-year-old West Side Mob member)



INT: Who has the most juice?

MALE #071, "B Daddy," seventeen-year-old Inglewood Family Gangster:

Dude named T-Loc.

INT: Why does he have more juice than everybody else?

071: Cause he travels a lot. Gets the good stuff.

INT: What's the good stuff?

071: Like guns, cocaine, weed.

INT: What gives him the juice?

MALE #093, "Lil-P," sixteen-year-old Crenshaw Mob Gangster Blood: He has a lot of dope and stuff like that and he handle our business.

Others reported that selling drugs gave people "juice," or influence, within the gang.

If you sell dope, you get the power. If you don't sell dope, you just one of the boys. (White male #091, "Paul," eighteen-year-old 107 Hoover Crip)

The functional quality assigned to leaders within these gangs suggests that leadership is not a product of motivational skills (i.e., charismatic leaders) or organizational skills (bureaucratic skills) but rather emerges from the ability to satisfy everyday needs of the gang.

Having a leader is the first step in role differentiation for gangs. While half of our sample told us their gang had a leader, fewer told us that there were distinct roles within their gang. Often this varied within gangs, with older members more likely to identify roles (however general) than did their younger counterparts. This indicates that the structure of the gangs whose members we interviewed were more informal and less organized than has been suggested by at least one commentator (see especially Sanchez-Jankowski 1991). Little role specialization exists within these gangs beyond being able to provide drugs or guns. This is reflected in the role differentiation reported by gang members. Only two-thirds of our sample reported that their gang had identifiable roles, and there were few gradations between those roles. Indeed, most members fell into one of two categories, regular members (56 percent of that group) or those who occupied a middle status, situated between the leaders and regular members (44 percent of that group). In most cases, this "rank" was earned as a consequence of engaging in acts of violence against rival gang members.

I was a G. Most gangsters say I have more brains than a lot of people. I was a G3. When I left I was a G6. G6, that's a whole lot of rank. (Male #014, "D. C.," sixteen-year-old Disciple)

Another member described how he got his "rank"

MALE #015, "Karry," fifteen-year-old Crenshaw Gangster Blood: As soon as they start coming around the corner you just start firing. How many Crips you hit depends on how you get your rank. They call it CK rank. Mine was third degree CK.

INT: CK is Crip Killer?

015: We call it 3-11.<sup>4</sup> We use code. The police are hip to it now but they weren't hip to it then.

Included in the roles defined by violence are the enforcers such as "Sandman," so named because if he hits you, "you out" (male #023, "Benz," fifteen-year-old 107 Hoover Gangster Crip). Others in the middle ranks are described as "bounty hunters." This role requires a gang member to dress in the colors of a rival gang, "invade" their territory, and shoot members of the rival gang. Four respondents told us that they fulfilled this role for their gang, one that placed them at high risk for violence and consequently carried a great deal of status.

The overwhelming majority of gang members reported that they were "regular members" and that this represented the modal category of membership in their gang. Some in this status referred to themselves as "busy bees, foot soldiers" (male #082, "Dough Boy," fourteen-year-old B Gangster Disciple) while most just identified themselves as a regular member. It is important to underscore that the gang was largely a collection of adolescents with adolescent concerns. In this regard, one gang member (male #094, "John Doe," fourteen-year-old 107 Hoover Crip) told us that his role in the gang was "to steal bikes." Finally, one gang member described his role in the following way.

Since I'm big, my job is big man, throw the first blow, cop the beer, drive everybody when they want to run somewhere. I'm the one that can drink the most beer. I don't smoke the most weed though. There is another motherfucker that smokes the most weed. (Male #064, "Pump," fourteen-year-old 6 Deuce Blood)

The most important role distinction was between real gang members and those whose commitment to the gang and gang life was somewhat lower. Perpetrators, busters, or wanna-bes were all terms used to identify individuals who lacked a commitment to the gang. One respondent offered a distinction between these roles.

Another gang member told us, "Some of the rules are just passed on from way back" (#031).

The specific behaviors prohibited by the rules included five major categories: (1) disrespecting your colors, (2) fighting members of your own gang, (3) "snaking," or turning in a member of your own gang, (4) running from a fight, and (5) "perpetrating," or pretending to be a member of a rival gang. Just under half of the gang members mentioned rules governing what colors could be worn and how they could be displayed. However, we received the most strongly worded responses when questions about perpetrating were asked. Just over half of the gang members told us that perpetrators (or "busters" as they were also known) would hang around with rival gang members or pretend to be a member of more than one gang.

MALE #027, "G-Loc," fifteen-year-old Gangster Disciple: The worst rule you could break would be being a perpetrator.

INT: What do you mean by perp?

027: A perpetrator like say you down with the Gs and then they see you with the Bloods.

INT: Are there any rules to you all group?

MALE #089, "C-Note," fifteen-year-old 88 Street Mob member: Yeah. Just don't be perpetrating. If you gonna be down with us don't be down with somebody else.

INT: What happens if somebody get caught perpetrating?

089: They would probably end up being shot.

In a life under threat of physical violence, it is important to know who can be counted on when actual violence is encountered. Clearly, a perpetrator cannot be depended on under such circumstances. Similarly, someone who would run from a fight is not worthy of trust, especially since the majority of gang members define the gang in terms of violent activities.

One of them [rules] is never run away from a fight, help one another if it's a fighting thing. (Male #082, "Dough Boy," fourteen-year-old B Gangster Disciple)

MALE #036, "NA," eighteen-year-old Compton Gangsters BIC: We made a vow when we first started. Whenever we fight, whoever we fight, if one fight we all fight.

INT: What happens if somebody break the rules, like don't fight?

036: He getting his ass whupped. Like if I was fighting and one of my

INT: Are there any rules to your group?

MALE #090, "Rellol," fifteen-year-old 19th Street Long Beach Crip: Don't be a buster.

INT: What's a buster?

090: A person who changes groups.

INT: That mean as far as flip-flopping Blood to Crip or Crip to Blood?

090: Yeah.

INT: Even Crip to Crip?

090: If it's Crip to Crip, you a transformer.

**Rules.** We now consider whether gangs have developed rules to guide the actions of their members. Most conceptions of urban gangs depict them as relatively unorganized, particularly when it comes to their efforts to control the behavior of their members (Thrasher 1927; Klein 1971; Short and Strodtbeck 1974; Vigil 1988; Hagedorn 1988). With few exceptions, our observations confirm this. The majority of gang members we interviewed (84 percent) responded affirmatively when asked if their gang had rules. However, the "rules" they described generally were of an informal character. We found very few instances where rules were written or came into being through some formal process. Nearly all of the rules evolved out of practice, lore, or common sense. We describe them as being the product of shared understanding or experience.

Most of the rules that guide gang members had no specific point or process of origin. One gang member, who had denied the existence of rules earlier in the interview responded in the following way when asked who makes the rules:

There ain't no specific rules there is just boundaries that you don't go beyond. You know what not to do. If you down with the gang you know what not to do and when not to do it and all that stuff. (Male #042, "Leroy," seventeen-year-old Rolling 60's Crip)

In the words of one gang member, the rules "just happened" (#009). Another described them as "unspoken rules" (#084) that everyone understood but did not need formal articulation. The rules, such as they are, have an evolutionary character:

INT: Who makes the rules?

MALE #036, "NA," eighteen-year-old Compton Gangster BIC: It's not who makes the rules, it's like all of us got together and somebody had an idea and if we agree to it then, bam, there it is. It's an idea thing.

the movie *Colors* (#034). Other gang members reported more abstract sources for the rules that governed their behavior. These included such authors as the "High Priest" (#023), King David, originator of the Hoover Crips (#016, #028), King Piru, originator of the Bloods (#059), or simply the King (#097). When pressed, our subjects were unable to confirm the existence of any of these individuals.

The punishments for violating the rules reflected the centrality of violence to the gang. Some reported that a rule violation would result in a loss of rank. In most cases, however, the punishments were more severe, involving, at a minimum, a beating.

MALE #043, "Lee Roy," sixteen-year-old Rolling 60's Crip: We would have to see what's up with them, beat them down once or twice then see if he wants out.

INT: Give him a whupping?  
043: Yeah.

We'll beat them up then give them a second chance. Then if they want to get out they can get out. If they get out they might join another gang, and if they join another gang we gonna get somebody to get 'em. (Male #069, "X-Men," fourteen-year-old Inglewood Family Gangster)

Another gang member reported that when he was initiated by gang members from California, he was told that people who broke the rules would be killed. When pressed, this gang member (#005) said that he had not seen it happen. One final statement captures the underlying tone of many comments about the consequences of breaking the rules, underscoring the violence that is ever present in the lives of gang members.

INT: What happens if somebody breaks that one rule.

MALE #072, "Blood," seventeen-year-old Swan Park 59 Blood: Tragic things could occur. If someone was to break that rule anything could be happening.

**Meetings.** Another measure of the degree of formalization in organizations can be seen in whether or not the organization holds meetings. The gang members we interviewed were evenly split on this matter; about half indicated their gang held meetings and half said the gang did not meet. There is a remarkable similarity, however, in the way members of these two groups describe gatherings of gang members, suggesting that the term meeting is too formal to account for most of these engagements

boys don't help me. If I get put in the hospital or something then the rest of them going to whup them.

The need to depend on fellow gang members is enhanced by the threat of violence common to life in the gang. Because gang members face the potential for violence moving throughout the city, as well as in their own neighborhood, the need to know who they can count on is intensified. For this reason, rules that proscribe deceiving fellow gang members take on added importance. It is not surprising that such rules were reported by a number of our subjects.

Don't steal from me. Don't snake your partner out. And, uh, don't lie. (Male #001, "Mike-Mike," twenty-year-old Thundercat)

There are certain individual rules like snaking and stuff like that. We don't like them to be with us and them be with somebody else. (Male #030, "Kenneth," nineteen-year-old Thundercat)

The need to respect the symbols or colors of the gang was reported as a rule by just over one-third of subjects. Such rules included the colors that could be worn, how much of a particular color could be worn, which way a hat could be turned, what letters could be used in speaking, or how the pants could be worn. Crip gangs generally wore blue clothes, turned their hats and belts to the right, and refrained from using the letter "b." Blood gang members generally wore red, turned their belts and hats to the left, and avoided using the letter "c" wherever possible. In addition, the "rag" or bandana worn hanging from the pocket was of particular importance. These symbolic representations of membership had significant consequences for being able to recognize whether a member was "safe" or in enemy territory.

You wear red you get beat. If you wear green or brown you got to take it off. (Male #032, "Skonion," seventeen-year-old Thundercat)

Don't throw your rag on the ground. That's it, no other rules. You put your rag on the ground and you might get killed. You don't get killed you gonna wish you would be and don't fraternize with no Crabs. (Male #041, "C. K.," twenty-two-year-old Blood)

We found no consistent source of the rules reported by the gang members we interviewed. Indeed, the most notable feature of the responses to this question was the lack of a pattern. One gang member told us that "everybody" made the rules, "Everybody does. I can't really say who made the rules" (#016), while another told us that they came from

and that variation in responses by members of the same group were common. A frequent theme among those who denied that the gang had meetings was that they just "hung out" with each other.

We just chill on the corner and talk to each other. (Male #093, "Lil-P," sixteen-year-old Crenshaw Mob Gangster Blood)

We get together everyday. We decide on anything. Like today when we go home we might meet up at the park and decide. One of us might say let's go downtown to the mall. We say we down and go all the way down the line to see who's down. (Male #003, "Jerry," eighteen-year-old Thundercat)

Approximately half of the gang members who reported that they did not have meetings said there was no need to meet, as they saw each other on the street anyway. Typical of such comments were those offered by two gang members who denied that they had "meetings" but acknowledged that they did indeed "meet" with other members on a daily basis.

Even for those who claimed the gang met regularly, an air of spontaneity and informality characterized their accounts of the meetings. The most formal description of a meeting was given in explaining how to deal with problems from drug sales.

All heads to the table. We go over to Terry house and all sit down and talk. Hey man, shit ain't going right, you fucking up the money. We have meetings like that talking about what we need to do and who tripping. (Male #012, "Lance," twenty-year-old West Side Mob member)

The informal character of meetings was evident in the activities that went on at such events.

MALE #015, "Karry," fifteen-year-old Crenshaw Gangster Blood: We hug each other, do little hand shakes, drink, smoke weed, bless a 40 [forty-ounce bottle of beer].

INT: Bless a 40, what's that?

015: Bless your homies, them your family.

The informal nature of "meeting" described by gang members provides insight into the level of formalization within the gangs we have studied. One of the functions of meetings is to reinforce the cohesiveness of the gang. The absence of such formal events, however, does not mean that the frequent, informal meetings of gang members on the corner don't fulfill that purpose. Quite to the contrary, the bonds of membership are reinforced daily by the steady pattern of "hanging out" that most mem-

bers engage in. When pressed, this is what the vast majority, over 90 percent, of gang members identify as meetings.

**Junior Gangs.** Another measure of the extent to which gangs have a formal structure concerns whether they have a separate gang for younger members. Gangs that have a formal "training ground" for younger members have a more formal structure and have taken active steps to insure their perpetuation beyond a single generation. Nearly two-thirds (65 percent) of gang members we interviewed told us that their gangs lacked such groups, and even those who claimed that their gang had a separate named group for younger members described a very loose structure. This is not to discount the imitation of older gang members by younger individuals in the neighborhood, because such patterns of imitation were indeed quite pronounced. However, we discovered few purposive efforts by older gang members to organize youngsters in the neighborhood. One third of our respondents told us that their gang maintained a junior gang. Despite this, activities in the gang remained age graded, with drug sales and weapons procurement being the province of older gang members (generally seventeen and over), and fighting, property crime, and general expressive gang behaviors being most common among younger members (usually sixteen and younger).

The imitative process is often extended to adolescents who were quite young.

They try to stick together. I say what happen this summer. Through the summer it be so hot everybody just hang out. That little huge park where everybody hang out, bring they radios over there, little kids be trying to wear blue, doing the signs, talking about I'm down with you guys. They try to get together and do something like that. They be about seven or eight years old or something like that. (Male #003, "Jerry," eighteen-year-old Thundercat)

Yeah, we be together and they want to be with us and then they just make their own little group and copy us. (Male #008, "Robert," fourteen-year-old Compton Gangster)

The attractiveness of the hip street life that gang members have come to represent minimizes the need for forming such groups. Young children in neighborhoods find the behavior of gang members attractive enough that gangs need not consciously organize them. However, even among those who deny the existence of junior gangs, the need to think about the

future of their gang has an effect on their relationships with younger gang members.

Mostly we put them in a situation of being used to being in a gang now running around with they little partners and stuff they age. We getting older, we feel like all of us ain't going to be around forever. Some of us might get killed, some of us might get locked behind bars or some of us might just stop and go on with our life. We still got to look back for the future so it's more like we plan on them taking care of this neighborhood too. (Male #036, "NA," eighteen-year-old Compton Gangster BIC)

More vehement denials of a training gang for younger members came from a twenty-one-year-old Crip who replied, "This ain't no community center" (#092) when asked if there was a gang for young people to graduate from.

Just over a third (35 percent) of respondents indicated that junior gangs did exist. However, even among these subjects the descriptions of the level of organization, links to the gang for older members, and activities more closely resembled those of the young people who imitated neighborhood gangs. Referred to as "young schoolers," "Pee Wees," Baby Crips, or Junior Bloods, these organizations were even more loosely organized and informal than the gangs of older members to whom they were related. Others denied that younger residents of the neighborhood were really in the gang, referring to them as "wanna-bes."

**Neighborhood Gang.** We have characterized gangs in St. Louis as having a strong neighborhood base. Thus there are strong pressures — another form of threat — for young people to join the gang active in their neighborhood. Most gang members told us that, while there was typically no direct coercion to join the gang, life could be pretty difficult for those who refused to do so. Most young people in a neighborhood with an active gang could expect to be "tested" to determine if they were interested in or worthy of joining the gang. Many would decide that joining the gang was their most prudent choice, especially in those neighborhoods plagued by the highest levels of violence. However, we received very few reports of physical coercion in the recruitment of new members.

The neighborhood orientation of St. Louis gangs means that most members, at least at the time the gang began, lived in the same neighbor-

hood. However, urban mobility patterns play a role in dispersing members of the same gang throughout the city. Since most poor city residents move frequently, often from one neighborhood to another, many gang members don't remain in the neighborhood where they joined the gang. This could have two potential effects. On the one hand, by dispersing gang members throughout the city, high residential mobility could weaken ties between individuals and the gang. After all, leaving the neighborhood is one way to diminish the threat presented by one's own as well as rival gangs. On the other hand, high levels of residential mobility could spread the gang throughout the city. The effect of high levels of residential mobility in St. Louis has been compounded by the closing of several public housing projects, where gangs had operated. This had the effect of splintering one of the earliest gangs in St. Louis, the Thundercats. Rather than leaving the gang, or affiliating with other gangs, members of the Thundercats recruited new members and increased the size of their gang, despite the fact that the initial members of the gang no longer lived in close proximity to each other. Such dispersion led this gang to engage in more formal levels of organization, as it depended on meetings and leaders more than did gangs whose members were concentrated in a single neighborhood. It appears that gangs begin in specific neighborhoods and have a strong membership base from that neighborhood. Over time, though, many members leave the neighborhood, and their affiliation with the gang remains.

Most respondents indicated that at the time of its origin, all members of their gang lived in the same neighborhood. For some of the gangs, this remained true, sometimes by design, but other times because the gang was relatively new and none of the members yet had moved with their families to another neighborhood. Maintaining neighborhood affiliations for membership was viewed as important because it was a way to keep out "questionable" members, that is, those who may be "perpetrators" or not tough enough.

INT: So nobody lives outside the neighborhood and is still a member?  
 MALE #025, "Tony," seventeen-year-old 107 Hoover Gangster Crip: Right.  
 INT: How long has it been that way?

025: I don't know. We just don't trust nobody that stay outside our neighborhood cause they might bring some little boys from over where they stay to where we at. We don't know nothing about them other dudes.

INT: Do all the members live in the neighborhood?

FEMALE #046, "Lady Tee," sixteen-year-old 74 Hoover Crips: Yes.



INT: Can you live outside the neighborhood and still belong?

046: No.

INT: Why not?

046: Because you can go perpetrate. You claim 74 Hoovers and go back over on the west side and claim Bloods. You will never know.

The neighborhood orientation of gangs illustrates the need to protect against the threat of outsiders or those who may be unreliable because of their allegiance to more than one neighborhood gang. This further illustrates the role of threat in the neighborhood context of gangs. It also serves to increase the cohesiveness among members, heightening their commitment to a common symbol, and enhancing the chances that gang members will commit violence against "intruders."

Over time, however, many gang members move with their families. This is not an unexpected development, since residential mobility is high among the urban poor. This means that while the gang still is based in the same neighborhood, some of its members no longer live there. Most gangs found it necessary, even desirable, to keep these individuals in the gang. And, similarly, the individuals maintained ties to their original gang, in part because they had already been identified as a rival by other gangs. The majority of gang members reported that their gang started by having members exclusively from the neighborhood but that this had changed over time.

When it first started they all was stayin down there together. Ya know some people moved, some people got put out [evicted] because they in too much trouble, mama was gettin' violations, peace disturbance, trippin with the security guards and all this little stuff. (Male #001, "Mike-Mike," twenty-year-old Thundercat)

In situations where gang members had left the neighborhood, their responsibilities to the gang were not diminished. They were still required to "hang" with the gang.

You don't necessarily have to stay in the hood as long as you be over there hangin' with the boys. (Male #093, "Lil-P," sixteen-year-old Crenshaw Mob Gangster Blood)

It's been like that for a while though but you still got to come in the hood every day and say what's up to everybody and say your GD [Gangster Disciple] prayer. (Male #084, "Rolo," fifteen-year-old Rolling 60's Crip)

While it is possible to remain in the gang once you have moved out of the neighborhood, it is essential that you lived in the neighborhood at one time and could be trusted.

You got to know the hood real good and you got to know everybody in there. If you lived in the neighborhood before. You can't just come in from the outside. (White male #091, "Paul," eighteen-year-old 107 Hoover Crip)

Three-quarters of Laclede Town,<sup>5</sup> a large federal housing project in St. Louis, was closed in the late 1980s, displacing the Thundercats. Members of the gang moved to a number of different neighborhoods, though they still claimed alliance to the Thundercats, and Laclede Town was still their meeting place.

They separated but I guess that's where everybody moved to that got kicked out of Laclede Town and stuff. It's about six different people that used to stay in Laclede Town stay in O'Fallon Place so they, they got the little O'Fallon place cats hooked up. People just come down there [Laclede Town] to hang out. They come 'bout every weekend to hang out and uh go over to one of their friends houses or something and spend the night down there. (Male #002, "Eric," sixteen-year-old Thundercat)

Thus, even when a neighborhood is rendered uninhabitable, its importance to the gang remains.

The neighborhood was the primary source for recruiting gang members. The gang members we interviewed were evenly split about whether or not individuals were coerced to join their gang, and there was some disagreement within gangs. Most of those who said there was little direct pressure brought to bear on potential members underscored the attractiveness of the gang. In these cases, there was no need to pressure people to do something they wanted to do anyway.

No, we never did pressure people to join. It was like the cool thing to do. It was like respect, you know what I'm saying. OK, all of us go to a dance, it's a Crip dance, everybody want to start joinin'. (Male #003, "Jerry," eighteen-year-old Thundercat)

INT: What happens to someone in the neighborhood who doesn't want to join the gang?

MALE #005, "Antonio," nineteen-year-old 6th Street Hoover Crip: That's up to him. If he don't want to join that's up to him. Now if it's somebody out and they don't live in our neighborhood and they wear other colors we are going to ask them what side they plan to be staying on.

We just tell them to go on your way boy. We don't want nothing to do with you. (Male #008, "Robert," fourteen-year-old Compton Gangster)

Belonging to the gang does confer some advantages, most notably protection, or in some cases, the promise of retaliation against a rival gang if they were to harm an individual. The following quote also illustrates the strong identification of the gang with the neighborhood, as the terms are often used interchangeably.

Nothing actually happens to them. It's just that if they don't help the neighborhood, nobody will help them. Everybody gets in a tight spot sometimes. (Male #040, "Knowledge," twenty-one-year-old Compton Gangster)

Another gang member indicated that people in his neighborhood might as well join the gang, because they will be perceived as a gang member anyway and therefore be a target of other gangs. In this way, the threat posed by gang members in a neighborhood extends to people who live in the neighborhood, whether or not they claim membership in the gang.

It's on his choice. I'm not going to make this man be in a gang if he don't want to gang bang. That's on him. But then there is going to be times that if he hang around us that he going to be labeled as a gang banger anyway. (Male #036, "NA," eighteen-year-old Compton Gangster BIC)

A small number of individuals told us they did put direct pressure on neighborhood residents to join the gang. It was important that people in the neighborhood in the "eligible" categories (i.e., age, race, sex) be affiliated with the gang, to strengthen it in numbers as well as to prevent them from joining a rival gang or being susceptible to becoming a "snitch." The most direct statement of this position came from "Darryl," at twenty-nine, the oldest member of our sample.

If you refuse to be a Blood somebody in your family going to get killed or you are going to get killed. (Male #013, "Darryl," twenty-nine-year-old Blood)

Others told us that people who refused to join were beaten up, either in retaliation for not joining, as an inducement to join, or as a message to others.

They stupid. Most of the time they would get beat anyway or they get looked [stomped] over. (Male #031, "John Doe," sixteen-year-old Thundercat)

They get beat up every day till they join. Spray paint they house. (Male #063, "Bobtimes," sixteen-year-old 6 Deuce Blood)

INT: What happens if there is somebody in the neighborhood that you want in the gang and they refuse to join?

MALE #083, "Winchester," fourteen-year-old Rolling 60's Crip: Well, it's kind of difficult then. We ain't never ran up to nothing like that but if we do, they caught up with them and beat them up bad, I mean whip them up. You talking about somebody that's come in the hood and they say they don't want to be in the gang?

INT: Yeah.

083: He gonna have to make a choice or get his butt whipped every day.

Not all of the threats against people who refuse to join are hypothetical.

They get called stuff. Some of them get beat up. Just a couple of weeks ago someone got shot because they refused and they got killed. They was only 14. He came to basketball practice and they asked him if he was claiming and he said no so they shot him. (White male #100, "J. Bone," nineteen-year-old Insane Gangster Disciple)

The neighborhood plays a vital role in the life of most gangs in St. Louis as it is the principal recruitment ground for new members. Because most gangs emerge from existing neighborhood groups, the ties between members of the same neighborhood and the antagonisms against rivals in neighboring areas already exist. Even when gang members leave their neighborhood, they maintain some level of commitment to the place where their gang originated.

**Turf.** If the neighborhood defines the rough boundaries of where the gang operates, its "turf" is a specific location of importance within that neighborhood. With only two exceptions, every gang member told us of a specific location that was important to the gang. The responses to this question elicited among the strongest reactions to any issue we raised, typically underscoring the role of threats to gang turf, and the need to be vigilant in defense of that turf against threats from outsiders. Not surprisingly, there was consensus within gangs on this issue. Eighty-one percent of gang members identified the symbolic importance of their turf, either because the gang started there, they lived there, or, most importantly, it was theirs, and its defense was a matter of honor or respect. A smaller number (eleven) pointed to more instrumental reasons in defending their turf, particularly drugs sales, since successful drug sales required a secure turf.

Symbolic reasons were identified by 81 percent of gang members as a reason their turf was important to the gang. For many, because the gang got its origins in a particular area, it was imperative for the gang to protect it.

INT: Is there a particular area or turf that is important to your group?

MALE #004, "Anthony," seventeen-year-old Thundercat: Just Laclede Town.

INT: Why is Laclede Town important to the Thundercats?

004: I guess because that's where it originated.

INT: If somebody from a rival gang comes onto your turf, what does the group do?

004: Whoop them.

INT: No matter what?

004: No matter what.

For others, defending their turf was important because they lived there, and failure to defend it against rival gangs would put them in physical jeopardy or in jeopardy of being run off. This group represented twenty-three of the fifty-nine gang members who responded to this question.

We fought every day. If you walked through the neighborhood and we didn't know you or you didn't know where you was going in the neighborhood we would rush you. (Male #036, "NA," eighteen-year-old Compton Gangster BIC)

INT: Why is it [your turf] important?

MALE #085, "2-Low," eighteen-year-old Rolling 60's Crip: It's important because basically it's where I was raised at. I can't stand to see nobody come on my street and beat me up on my street.

We don't want anybody coming into our neighborhood and thinking they run it. Make sure other gangs don't come and take over your turf and run you out of your own neighborhood. (Male #008, "Robert," fourteen-year-old Compton Gangster)

Just over a third of gang members told us that a particular turf was important to them because of the simple matter of respect; it was their turf and they were not about to see others come onto it. The "trespass" of members of other gangs onto their turf was seen as an affront to the gang, presenting a direct threat of violence as well as the threat that gang members would be "run" or "told what to do" by other gangs.

INT: Is there a particular area of turf that's important to your gang?

MALE #075, "Tyrell," sixteen-year-old Bounty Hunter Blood: My old street.

INT: Why is it important?

075: It's where we used to hang out, old memories and stuff.

While symbolic reasons, like respect, provided the justification for defending their turf for the majority of gang members, a sizable fraction expressed more instrumental concerns. Almost exclusively, these concerns focused on the need to have a secure turf from which to sell drugs.

You let them know cause you got the area so tight. This house right here we selling out of, this house across the street we selling out of, right here. If you come up in there and they still there doing some stuff, they don't get out of there, they come in but they don't come out. (Male #019, "Anthony," twenty-two-year-old Crip)

INT: Is there a turf or an area that's important to your gang?

MALE #015, "Karry," fifteen-year-old Crenshaw Gangster Blood: Dope house is the most important. That's how you make your living.

INT: If somebody from another gang tried to come into your dope house or come on the property of your dope house, what would happen to them?

015: He would get shot.

Nearly 90 percent of gang members acknowledged that they had defended their turf against rival gang members in the past year. The primary means by which the turf was defended was through fighting, and guns were used in over 95 percent of these skirmishes. When asked how they defended their turf, most gang members provided graphic responses that indicate the extent to which they were willing to insure that it was secure.

INT: If someone from another gang comes to your turf what does your gang do?

MALE #019, "Anthony," twenty-two-year-old Crip: First try to tell him to leave.

INT: If he don't leave?

019: He'll leave one way or the other, carry him out in a Hefty bag.

MALE #013, "Darryl," twenty-nine-year-old Blood: A guy came in [to our turf], he had the wrong colors on, he got to move out. He got his head split open with a sledgehammer, he got two ribs broken, he got his face torn up.

INT: Did he die from that?

013: I don't know. We dropped him off on the other side of town.

INT: In that incident, did you do anything?

013: Yes, I'm the one that split his head open.

If they Crips, if they don't come prepared then that's where they gonna lay. That's just like trespassing, if you get caught you go to jail. If they get caught on our set they going to hell. (Male #072, "Blood," seventeen-year-old Swan Park 59 Blood)

These responses illustrate the matter-of-factness associated with acts of violence used to protect turf. Almost all gang members accept it as a given that incursions on their turf will be met with violent responses, as will their trespasses onto the turf of rival gang members. Talk of the need for defending gang turf occurs on a regular basis among gang members, far more often than do actual acts of defense. In this way an atmosphere of symbolic vigilance against the threat of outside intruders draws the gang together and prepares it to use the expressive (and excessive) violence often associated with defending home territory against rival gangs. These processes again underscore the role of threat in providing explanations for the nature and level of violence which occurs between gangs. When such acts are actually carried out, they provide the basis for "legends," the mythic violence identified by Klein (1971) that serves to increase cohesiveness among gang members. In the end, then, defending gang turf is an important activity, one that generates a considerable amount of violence and discussions of violence.

### Subgroups

Every gang member reported that there were subgroups within the gang that he or she hung out with most often. This is not surprising; after all, gangs in our sample averaged just over two hundred members, too large for daily associations and activities and certain to attract police scrutiny. However, the subgroups within gangs reflected more than these pragmatic concerns. Subgroups consisted of between two and ten friends and were based on friendships usually formed prior to entering the gang. Two different sorts of activities were more likely to take place in the subgroups than within the entire gang. First, members of the subgroup engaged in conventional adolescent activities together. These activities included such things as watching television, playing basketball, "chilling," drinking, shopping, and interacting with members of the opposite sex. Many of these activities were not related to the gang; indeed it is hard to think of "gang-related television watching" as a meaningful category of behavior for understanding gangs.

However, the subgroup was also the locus for a second type of behav-

ior, one that had a more instrumental character. Drug sales, stealing, and robbery were activities far more characteristic of the subgroup than the gang as a whole. In fact, only a handful of gang members told us that income-generating crime was motivated or organized by the gang as a whole. These activities were much more likely to occur in the context of smaller subgroups. This stands in stark contrast to the activities that took place when the gang as a whole got together - campaigns, drive-by shootings, and retaliatory strikes against rival gangs. These activities have a much more expressive character, providing little of direct, instrumental gain, but reinforcing the bonds of membership and allegiance to the gang and territorial boundaries.

As observed above, subgroups within the gang were the source of "typical" adolescent activities not narrowly associated with gang membership. The activities mentioned most frequently in this context were social in nature.

Go shopping, play basketball, hoop up, getting beer, walk ourselves around the neighborhood, find some whores. (Male #065, "BK Kill," nineteen-year-old North County Crip)

We mostly go to the show, we go shopping. Sometimes we might even ride bikes. (Male #031, "John Doe," sixteen-year-old Thundercat)

The Gs mostly the ones I hang out with. We just sit around playing cards, watching TV or some videotapes, go over to some gal's house, something like that. (Male #036, "NA," eighteen-year-old Compton Gangster BIC)

Girl gang members differed from their male counterparts in two primary ways: they more often indicated that they went shopping with their gang subgroup and were interested in looking for boys.

Many of our subjects explained that there was a small circle of friends they spent most of their time with.

I say five that I hang out with: BJ, Redrum, Looney, CKR, and Blue Gauge and that's it. We just be chilling sometimes. Just chill at one of they house and watch TV or something. (Male #067, "\$hortDog," fifteen-year-old Inglewood Family Blood)

These friendship subgroups were also the locus of criminal behaviors of an instrumental nature.

We do stuff together, make our money and stuff. (Male #082, "Dough Boy," fourteen-year-old B Gangster Disciple)

Go to the movies, most of the time we go buy Nintendo cartridges and play Nintendo for awhile. Go to Children's Palace. They be going in there stealing and stuff. (Male #084, "Rolo," fifteen-year-old Rolling 60's Crip)

The whole gang only seemed to come together when under the threat of danger from a rival gang. Many respondents divulged that the gang got together as a whole only when "something" was about to happen, typically a fight.

But if something happen like a fight or something then that's when you hook up on everybody. (Male #048, "Corkey," sixteen-year-old Rolling 60's Crip)

The threat of violence from a rival gang plays the important function of a catalyst, uniting members of the gang against a common enemy. Initially, we were puzzled by the consistent reports we received from gang members that they went skating with the whole gang, not just their subgroup. This seemed inconsistent with the general explanation that informal social activities were confined to the subgroup, and expressive actions (or their threat) took place in the context of the whole gang. We learned an explanation for this puzzle from "X-Men," a member of the Ingelwood Family Gangsters.

INT: As a gang what do you all do?

MALE #069, fourteen-year-old Ingelwood Family Gangster: Go skating.

INT: What else?

069: That's about all on the weekends. When the skating be open all gangs be up in there, all the Bloods be up in there.

Because the skating rink is a site where rival gangs are known to congregate in large numbers, it is important to go there with the entire gang, not to go there only in a subgroup. The skating rink serves as a staging ground for violence given the presence of large numbers of gang members from rival gangs; thus it is important to have the protection afforded by large numbers of fellow gang members.

The gangs whose members we interviewed had little in the way of formal structure or organization. Rather, St. Louis gangs were loosely confederated groups of neighborhood residents. Cultural transmission plays a central role in the spread of such gangs, and informal processes play a large part in keeping gangs together. Despite their lack of a formal structure, St. Louis gangs are involved in a variety of minor and serious criminal acts. In the next two chapters, we examine these topics.

## "Where You Hanging? Let's Go Banging": What Gang Members Do

MALE #013, "Darryl," 29 year-old Blood: Yeah, we hang out together, we go to parties together. We drink together, we also go kill together.

INT: What activities do you do the most with other gang members?

013: Just fuck around.

SO SAYS THE OLDEST active member we interviewed.<sup>1</sup> His conjunction of harmless socializing and lethal violence is echoed in the voices of younger gang members, and their words reflect two polar opposites of the group behavior of gang members. Like most teenagers and young adults, gang members in St. Louis do a lot of "hanging" with their friends - watching television, drinking beer, sitting and talking, shooting hoops, smoking weed, cruising, looking for girls. Gang members spend their lives (and most often commit their crimes) in groups (Zimmering 1981; Klein 1971) and what those groups usually do together is nothing more than "just fuck around."

But the litany above finishes with: "we also go kill together," an indication of the integral role violence plays in the lives of gang members. Nonlethal and lethal force is routinized through initiation rites involving "beating in" and shooting at enemies, in dealings with drug customers, and in "gang banging" - fighting with rival gangs, beating up interlopers or insulters, drive-by shootings, planned killings. Violence is both a defining attribute of gangs (Thrasher 1927) and an epitomizing activity that sharply differentiates the lives of gang members from their nongang peers. One sixteen-year-old male subject, a member of the 6 Deuce Bloods, pointed out the contradiction of being both "just like young people" and a violent criminal:



MALE #063, "Bobtimes": We chill out, sell dope, mess with girls just like young people.

INT: Is that all you all do? Gang banging?

063: Yeah, we gang banging, shoot, 187.

INT: 187? What's that?

063: A drive-by.

INT: You said sell drugs, chase girls, gang bang, chill out, 187s, anything else?

063: No, just act like teenagers.

Teenagers who use guns and sell drugs.

It is important to distinguish between gang and nongang activities as well as between serious and nonserious criminality of gang members. In order to identify the role of the gang in enhancing criminality, it is necessary to distinguish between those activities that take place with other gang members and those with nongang members. In addition, it is important to differentiate serious crime from more minor offenses that are commonplace among both gang and nongang members. The next two chapters describe what our subjects do as members of their gang (group activities) and what they do with other gang members (as friends) – a distinction that some subjects perceived quite acutely. In this chapter, we first discuss how gang members spend *most* of their time together – hanging out – as well as the varied noncriminal activities they engage in. Next is a discussion of "cafeteria-style" minor delinquency of gang members (Klein 1971, 125): shoplifting, thefts of services, petty thievery, public order violations (disturbing the peace, gambling in public, loitering), spraying graffiti (and other forms of vandalism), underage drinking, and drug taking. The third section discusses nongang activities of gang members – things they do with friends, peers, and/or relatives who are not in the gang.

### "Me and My Partners Just Chill Out, Talk to the Females": Noncriminal Gang Activities

Gang members spend much of their time together being "normal" teenagers or young adults: hanging out at each others' homes, in parks, on street corners, at fast food joints, malls, skating rinks, bowling alleys, and youth clubs. When we asked subjects "what do you do the most with other gang members" the dominant answer was "hang out" (or one of many equivalents – "chill out," "playing," "hang," "fuck around"). Figure 5.1 displays the percentage distribution.

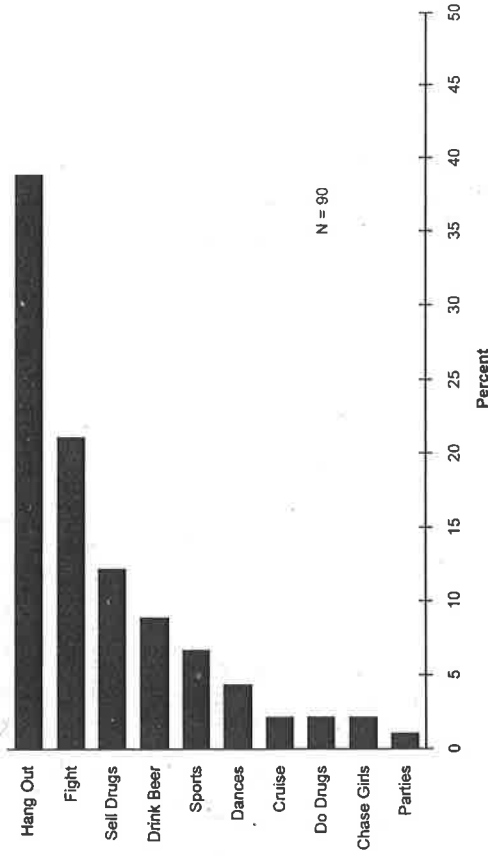


Figure 5.1 Most Common Gang Activity

About two-fifths of the subjects chose "hanging out." Nearly two-thirds of the responses involved fairly innocuous and noncriminal behaviors (drinking beer, sports, dances, cruising, chasing girls, doing drugs, parties). Other researchers have found a similar pattern of activity among gang members in a wide variety of times and places (Klein 1971; Moore 1978; Vigil 1988; Padilla 1992; Sanchez-Jankowski 1991; Short and Strodebeck 1974; Thrasher 1927). Given the importance of friendship subgroups or cliques within St. Louis gangs this dominant activity is unsurprising – it is a continuation of both pre-gang and nongang behaviors. In other words, they "just act like teenagers" with their friends, who (not so coincidentally) are also gang members.

Hanging out includes watching television, drinking beer, smoking weed, playing sports, walking malls, cruising for girls.

The Gs [old gangsters] mostly the ones I hang out with. We just sit around playing cards, watching TV or some videotapes, go over to some gal's house, something like that. (Male #036, "NA," eighteen-year-old Compton Gangster)

We have our own little baseball team and stuff. We go swimming all summer long, stuff like that. Be with our girls. Like two or three of us will be at whoever's house with our girls. Go over and have fun like that. Get drunk most of the time together. (Male #039, "Kaons BIC," seventeen-year-old Compton Gangster)

We do the same things most normal people do. Go to the park and play football, we do the same thing they all do, it's just that we fight. I still sit out on the front and drink beer with them. We always together. (Male #060, "Bullet," twenty-year-old Inglewood Family Gangster Blood)

Subjects also mentioned, often poignantly, behaviors that reveal their age, vulnerability, structural position, and interests. For these individuals, being young means being exposed to and participating in violence. What distinguishes them from other people their age is their willingness to engage in violence. A sixteen-year-old Disciple said:

I have a few beers with them every once in a while. Other than that, we just sit around and try to harmonize singing together. There be about three of us that sing. I be about the only one that can hold a real tune for real. Most of them they just. [breaks into song] . . . ain't nothing wrong with trying. (Male #014, "D.C.," sixteen-year-old Disciple)

Sports are an important part of many of these adolescents' lives (although few remain involved in school-sponsored or other organized team sports after joining a gang).

We just hang around most of the time. We mostly hang around and do sporty things. (Male #009, "Marrien," fifteen-year-old Compton Gangster)

Play football against the Crips or something like that. We have it where there is no violence. (Male #020, "Lil Thug," sixteen-year-old Disciple)

But not all subjects were athletically graced:

No, don't nobody play no sports. (Male #067, "\$hortDog," sixteen-year-old Inglewood Family Blood)

These behaviors are not against the law and, in fact, many of our subjects do not view themselves or their acts as criminal. Two young men interviewed together illustrated this.

Talk about each other and joke around. We be wrestling and stuff. (Male #021, "40 Ounce," sixteen-year-old 107 Hoover Crip)

We ain't what you call real bad people. We just trying to take over our set that's all. We down. It ain't like we a lynch mob hanging together. (Male #022, "8 Ball," fifteen-year-old 107 Hoover Crip)

Gang members' joint activities also reflect various constraints. Age, for example, may limit what they can do and when they can do it. Two of our

youngest subjects, thirteen and fourteen years old, gave age-dependent descriptions of what they do most with their gang. One said that he "go[es] downtown. We walk or ride our bikes" (male #094, "John Doe," 107 Hoover Crip). These young gang members apparently did not steal cars (or do not hang with older members who do). The other subject, a Rolling 60's Crip, said that what he did most with the gang was "sit around, spray paint on the corners" (male #080, "Coke Cane").

Forty percent of our subjects were still in school when we interviewed them, and 17 percent had legal jobs. Although they hung out with fellow members in school (and sometimes worked with other gang members), they were mainly "down with their boys" after school or work and on weekends.

It's Friday, it's the weekend, baby. We might kick it all through the whole week. Like today we might go down to the mall later, like when it starts getting dark. That's the only time we out when it starts getting dark, terrorizing, but we ain't going looking for no trouble because we don't want to get locked up on the weekend. We might buy ten forty-ounces, just walk down there and get full, and just go down there and clown or something like that you know. We not real bad until we have to get bad you know. We not a really dangerous gang you know. (Male #003, "Jerry," eighteen-year-old Thundercat)

Postadolescent gang members are also constrained. A twenty-two-year-old Compton Gangster described a typical day for himself and his subgroup within the gang:

Well mostly what we do, we hang out. We start our day out looking for a job. We fill out applications. We stop looking for jobs about 1:00, start at 8:30 and stop at 1:00. We get a little R [reefer]. Sit in the park and get R'ed out. All us be rapping about our boys that just passed. We sit up and rap about it. We call them our dead homies. If none of our boys come with a problem, somebody rolled them or something like that, we just sit out in the park and chill. We laugh, rap, have a little moment of peace for our boys, take a swig, everybody breaks to a crib and eats and then meet back up. Then everybody go and do what they gonna do, just like that. (Male #037, "Big Money")

Being identified or known as a gang member also limits activities as members are easily recognized. Our subjects said the best way an average person could tell who was in a gang was because an individual was "wearing colors" (fifty-seven subjects), by their "clothes" (twenty-seven subjects), or by "hand signals" (eight subjects).

Cause I be going around wearing red and throwing signs up. (Male #080, "Coke Cane," thirteen-year-old, Rolling 60's Blood)

I be wearing my hat to the right and my rag hanging out of my pocket and the way I be saying things and when I be throwing up my signs and stuff, that's about it. (Male #084, "Rolo," fifteen-year-old Rolling 60's Crip)

Police surveillance or harassment of known or suspected gang members was another restraint on subjects' activities.

Sit around, chill, eat, go over to girl's house, that about all. It's me, my cousin and about two more boys, that about all, around four of us. We can't walk in Pine Lawn with more than three people. (Male #069, "X-Men," fifteen-year-old Ingelwood Family Gangster Blood)

Sometimes they [the police] just mess with you. Like a dude will be sitting on a porch and ain't bothering nobody. They come up and start checking you and stuff to see if you got any dope. Sometimes they make you pull your pants down, take your shoes off, socks off, coat, jacket, hat and all that. (Male #055, "Chris," seventeen-year-old Hoover Crip)

Neighbors are also, in general, unsympathetic to gang members and often actively hostile to their presence.

No, they think it's a bunch of hoodlums. Yeah, bunch of kids getting ready to do something bad. When they hear shooting and all that they call the police and the police is everywhere. They usually be scared for real and don't come out of they house or something. (Male #063, "Bobtimes," sixteen-year-old Six Deuce Blood)

They hated us. They asked for more security. They just really hated us, just put that. (Male #092, "Derone," twenty-one-year-old Rolling 60's Crip)

Only three subjects said that the neighborhood had positive feelings toward their gang (although thirty members said that the neighborhood liked them as individuals).

MALE #018, "Maurice," twenty-year-old 107 Hoover Crip: They think it's [the gang] silly and crazy and stupid.

INT: Do they like you?  
018: Yeah, they like me but they want me to better myself cause they knew me for a little while and when they talk to me and I talk to them they say this boy got a head on his shoulder, you don't need to be in there. You got too much to live for. Look at you, you are twenty years old. Think about when you turn 65. I said that's some thought. The lady next door

to me she brought it to my attention. She say, don't you want to see your grandkids? I said yeah I want to see my grandkids. Well you better get out of that gang or you won't see them. Yeah, they feel threatened. Only reason they feel threatened is they can't even walk out of they house or they can't drive down the street without seeing somebody get killed or getting shot. Bullets passing them.

Yeah, most of the people in my neighborhood like me, they just don't like the people that I hang out with. (Male #084, "Rolo," fifteen-year-old Rolling 60's Crip)

Our subjects were evenly split in their answers to the question "Does the neighborhood feel threatened by you?" Thirty-three said no; thirty-three said yes; thirty-three gave no answer. But only twenty-six said that the neighborhood was not afraid of them (or their gang), while forty-three indicated that the neighborhood *was* afraid. And fifty-eight subjects said that residents regularly called the police about their gang. Some members said they got revenge on those neighbors who "snitched" on them (although this may have been wishful thinking).

MALE #002, "Eric," sixteen-year-old Thundercat: Yeah. Call theyself snitchin, but they don't tell my momma nothin she don't know.

INT: So they tell your mother?

002: Yeah, they call theyself tellin my mother. Then when they get they window bust out, shot out door, they gonna be wishin they never did nothin like that.

INT: Have you actually done that?

002: Naw, yeah. But they didn't tell my momma, call the police or some-thin like that. But I done busted some people window out for tellin my momma cause I didn't want to hurt em wit no gun so I bust out they window. But if they call the police on me yeah, I'm gonna shoot up their house door or something for a warning.

Relations with the neighborhood are not always negative. At least two members of one gang, the Compton Gangsters, argued that they were a positive force in the neighborhood.

No, we cool with all our neighbors. We protect everybody in our neighborhood. You can be a neighbor, say you are a lady, if a boy goes over there jumping on her and we see it we will jump on him. We watch out for our neighborhood, don't let nobody do no burglaries or jumping. If there is fighting around there we doing it. (Male #038, "G.O.D.," nineteen-year-old Compton Gangster)

Our group is 66 members all trying to eliminate the gang flow and violence that flows through our community. We can't worry about somebody else's community. We just try to stop it from flowing through our community. We look out for the elderly, we cut grass for nothing, we go to the store for our old people, we do all that stuff like the Italian gangsters used to do. Throw barbecues, we throwing a barbecue today for the whole hood in the park. We went to the store yesterday and spent about six hundred dollars on meat. (Male #040, "Knowledge," twenty-one-year-old Compton Gangster)

But most gangs did not hold block parties, throw barbecues, or otherwise try to create any sort of "collective effervescence" with their neighbors. We find no evidence, however, that gangs have emerged as neighborhood vigilantes, protecting residents from street crime or the unscrupulous practices of businessmen. And the notion that gangs were actively involved in efforts to quell violence, while popular in the media, was unsubstantiated by the actions or words of our subjects.

Fear was the most commonly mentioned constraint on gang members, especially with regard to concerts and dances, although fears regarding rival gangs and the possibility of serious violence did not necessarily prevent some members from doing things. This further illustrates the role of threat, which constrains the activities of gang members while compelling them toward violence. Over time, such threats limit interactions between gang members and nongang peers and activities.

Ok, they all be at the concerts right, the VTOs, the Crips, Thunderscats and the Bloods, and one, a few, one little Bloods can just walk up to em and what's up with that dude, bam, hit em in the jaw and then it's gonna be the Bloods into a fight. That's just how it be. (Male #001, "Mike-Mike," twenty-year-old Thundercat)

Mostly we go to concerts. It be plenty of Blood gang and that's the only time we really do some heavy fighting. You know where the Arena is? We went down in blue, stole us a couple of vans, went to the concert, packed all the guns we had. (Male #003, "Jerry," eighteen-year-old Thundercat)

No. You can get busted at concerts. (Male #048, "Corkey," sixteen-year-old Rolling 60's Crip)

Age and danger also interact to constrain activities, as these quotes from members of the same gang illustrate. First, an older member on going to concerts:

Oh, yeah. We don't go without our boys, never know what's gonna happen down there. (Male #060 "Bullet," twenty-year-old Inglewood Family Gangster Blood)

And then his younger compatriot:

INT: Do you guys go to concerts together?

MALE #067, "ShortDog," fifteen-year-old Inglewood Family Blood: No.

INT: How come?

067: Sometimes you always find Crabs somewhere.

INT: So it's kind of dangerous?

067: Yeah.

Partying, in various guises – dances, parties, drinking, using drugs, cruising, looking for women – is also often cited as a common activity done with other gang members.

Go to dances. Just chill and drink, smoke dope. Go get a couple of beers, chill out, find a female. Me and my partners just drink beer, chill out, talk to the females, whatever. (Male #004, "Anthony," seventeen-year-old Thundercat)

Go to ball games, out to eat. We go to dances more. (Female #011, "Lisa," fifteen-year-old Compton Gangster)

Drink and go to dances. (Male #044, "Paincuzz," sixteen-year-old Rolling 60's Crip)

Three of these rather harmless activities – drinking, drugs, and driving – do involve criminality. The mean age of our subjects is seventeen, well below the legal drinking age of twenty-one, yet 9 percent of the active members said they spent the most time with the gang drinking, and almost all subjects mentioned drinking as a common group activity. Beer in forty-ounce bottles is the beverage of choice; malt liquor and wine are occasionally drunk; hard liquor is seldom mentioned. Drinking can also lead to fighting and violence and, it appears, sex (or mythologized sex).

MALE #018, "Maurice," twenty-year-old 107 Hoover Crip: Drink beer, smoke weed, sit back and laugh and joke, sell dope. Sometimes we fucked the same woman about three or four times.

INT: What kinds of things did you do the most with the gang members?  
018: Mostly selling drugs and doing it with the same woman three or four times.

Yeah, we calmed down from the way it used to be. There used to be a time every Thursday was DGF, don't give a fuck. We just get drunk. Get stupid drunk and whoever we see walking we just jump on them. Fool around, selling dope. (Male #038, "G.O.D.," nineteen-year-old Compton Gangster)

Drink beer and after we get drunk we go out and get rowdy sometimes. But we like to get rowdy when we are sober too. Like in the summertime we have barbecues and shit, have ourselves not a party, but have 10 or 12 of us out there. And then somebody will say hey man, I heard them hooks out there in Golden Gardens is talking that shit again. (White male #099, "Joe L.," eighteen-year-old Disciple)

Only two subjects nominated doing drugs as the most common gang activity, although almost all subjects said that drug use (usually only marijuana smoking, according to them) was fairly common for most members.

Get high. (Female #096, "L. C.," twenty-three-year-old Inglewood Bounty Hunter)

Chill and smoke weed. (Male #042, "Leroy," seventeen-year-old Rolling 60's Crip)

Cruising – riding around in cars with "no particular place to go" – was mentioned by two subjects as the most common thing they do with their gang. Often linked with looking for women or girls, it is a very common young adult and teenage pursuit that is not, of course, illegal. But cruising by gang members often involves serious illegality. Most do not have a driver's license, insurance coverage, or, for that matter, a car. They borrow vehicles from older relatives – siblings, parents, cousins – or, more typically, steal from the gang's or a nearby neighborhood.

Yeah, mostly we does that [steal a car]. We catch up on new areas, new territory where we can sell our dope, stuff like that. (Male #018, "Maurice," twenty-year-old 107 Hoover Crip)

Everybody goes and steals them a car or whatever and we go cruising. (Male #005, "Antonio," nineteen-year-old 6th Street Crip)

Steal cars, go riding, go start some trouble with some Crabs. (Male #067, "\$hortDog," fifteen-year-old Inglewood Family Gangster Blood)

Cars are also "borrowed" from drug "fiends."

No, we get all our cars from fiends. They give them to us for awhile but we don't give them back. They got to catch us, trick us. We go to the liquor store and come out and they sitting on they car like man, your time up. I want my car back. We give them the keys and say all right, drop us off here. But the next week they come back. We always keep it longer than we supposed to. Except when they got to go to work we give them the car back so they can go to work cause we know when they get off they gonna come and give it right back to us. (Male #038, "G.O.D.," nineteen-year-old Compton Gangster)

Much of what gang members do together is innocuous and not atypical for their age or social position. Nongang members from the same neighborhoods and schools hang out together, drink, use drugs, go to parties, dances, and concerts. Most of the time our subjects spend with other gang members is a continuation of pre-gang behaviors – things they did before they joined the gang, usually with the same group of people – and activities they would probably engage in if they were not gang members.

There is, however, a discontinuity in our subjects' descriptions of what they do together. The disjunction of harmless adolescent and young adult behaviors and varying levels of criminality is vividly emphasized by many subjects.

Chill out. Nothin, we don't do nothin. Hey man, that's about all we do together you know. We have shoot outs and stuff. (Male #002, "Eric," seventeen-year-old Thundercat)

We sell drugs together, fight together, go to dances together, hang out together, we do a lot of stuff. Smoke together, drink together. (Female #046, "Lady Tee," fifteen-year-old 74 Hoover Crip)

Do different things just like a family. Hang out together, rob, steal cars, fight other gangs like for competition. Mostly just fight against other gang members then sell drugs. (Male #017, "Billy," twenty-one-year-old North Side Crip)

These descriptions of common gang activities – with their overtones of violence, drug sales, and criminality – conform more to common stereotypes of gangs. And indeed, criminality of various kinds can be seen as a distinguishing marker both of being gang members and of the existence of a particular gang.

We found little evidence of intergang variation in our subjects' dominant behaviors. Only a few subjects (usually older ones) stressed that they



did not regularly hang out with their fellow members. For most respondents, "hanging" with their gang peers was their dominant activity, and we have no evidence to think this is not true of their gang compatriots we did not speak with or observe.

But much of the criminality associated with gang members is not necessarily gang motivated or gang initiated. And here again our subjects are not probably much different from their nongang peers in St. Louis neighborhoods. Low-order illegalities engaged in by teenagers and young adults — shoplifting, petty theft of various kinds, order violations, drug use, graffiti and other vandalism — are committed by both gang members and nongang delinquents. As we shall see in the next section, it is often hard to identify these activities as "gang" related.

### "Smoking Joints, Spraying Paint, I Stole These Pants I'm Wearing": Minor Criminality Among Gang Members

Although the most common gang activities are legal and fairly harmless, the lives of members are permeated by a wide variety of criminality. Arrests provide one measure of this, albeit an imperfect one. Although nineteen of our subjects said they had never been arrested,<sup>2</sup> the mean number of arrests for the other eighty active members was just under ten. This criminality began at a fairly early age — sixteen subjects had been arrested before they were thirteen years old (the lowest age of first arrest was eight), and the mean age of first arrest was fourteen. Sixty-one subjects had been arrested within the year prior to our interview with them; and thirty-four within two months of our contact. Their most recent arrests ranged from homicide to disturbing the peace, with the most common crime being assault (seventeen subjects). Fifty-three subjects said they were with other members of the gang at their last arrest, only eighteen said they were alone.<sup>3</sup> Given the social characteristics of our subjects, the pervasiveness of illegal activities revealed by this abbreviated statistical portrait comes as no surprise.

This section discusses low-level criminality of gang members — misdemeanors and nonviolent felonies. These activities may take place as part of their membership, with other gang members but not as a gang activity, with nongang members, or as individuals. We have already discussed underage drinking, probably the most prevalent criminal behavior of gang members. We have also mentioned car theft for cruising and use of illegal drugs. Gang members also steal cars for profit — selling parts or

the entire car — which we consider with other serious property crimes in the next section. Our discussion here focuses on public order crimes, small-time thefts of various sorts, and drug use.

**Peace Disturbances and Painting Names.** Our subjects often commit crimes or are arrested solely because they are gang members. They are easily distinguishable from other adolescents or young adults in their neighborhood (a differentiation that they sometimes violently maintain), and when they congregate their presence is often disturbing. Six subjects said their most recent arrest was for a "peace disturbance" of some kind, and two were most recently arrested for "obstructing police" — crimes that often result from a refusal to "break it up," "move along," or "get out of here."

Yeah, a whole lot, about every other night. They call the police around 8:00 for peace disturbance and the police are just as prejudiced to me because they come by and tell us to turn the music down or whatever.

We'll tell them, look, [inaudible] it's only 8:00 so why are we peace disturbing somebody. One time we had people to call the police at 12:00 in the afternoon saying peace disturbance, our radio was up too loud. (Female #096, "L. C.," twenty-three-year-old Inglewood Bounty Hunter)

One subject's most recent arrest was for gambling — shooting craps on the street with his "boys" — not exactly the heinous crime of a dangerous deviant.

MALE #067, "\$hortDog," fifteen-year-old Inglewood Family Gangster  
Blood: Every day. I got locked up once five times in one week shooting craps and stuff.

INT: What was the most recent arrest for, gambling?

067: Yeah [shooting craps]. About a week ago.

These kinds of arrests are often used by police to control and constrain gang members' movements and to remove or break up public "hanging out" by groups.

MALE #065, "BK Kill," nineteen-year-old North County Crip: In Pine Lawn on the corners. The police get upset and we used to fight a lot.

The fine is a lot now, two-fifty.

INT: \$2.50?

065: No, \$250.

INT: They got illegal gambling or something?

065: They say there's a lot of drug problems in the neighborhood so they prefer us not to hang on the corner.

Another example of criminality arising from gang membership is vandalism and/or destruction of property. The young man who broke a neighbor's window because they snitched on his gang activity is a good illustration. More typical, though, is police attention as a consequence of painting graffiti.

INT: Have you been getting more heat from the police?

MALE #067, "ShortDog," fifteen-year-old Inglewood Family Blood: Yeah. For writing our names on buildings and stuff.

Eighty-one of our subjects said their gang painted graffiti, although this label was sometimes misunderstood, and a number of gang members did not recognize the term graffiti. This reveals the extent to which members of the gang subculture are enmeshed in a linguistic life apart from mainstream culture.

INT: Do you guys paint graffiti?

MALE #012, "Lance," seventeen-year-old West Side Member: No, we wrote our names on the side of buildings but we don't go nowhere where people will see us.

INT: Like West Side Mob?

012: Yeah, we got that on our elementary school building. We write on vacant houses but we don't go nowhere like.

INT: So you guys paint graffiti?

MALE #025, "Tony," seventeen-year-old 107 Hoover Gangster Crip: What?

INT: Do you know what graffiti is? It's like what you guys were doing down there on that blackboard [in a conference room while waiting for the interviewers]. Do you guys paint gang symbols up on walls?  
025: Yeah.

Graffiti usually takes the form of street names, set names, and symbols. Thus, graffiti serves to identify gang territory as well as the location of the gang. The messages graffiti displays are targeted at rival gangs, neighborhood residents, and members of the gang.

The location of graffiti was also significant. While not generally concerned with the physical appearance of their own neighborhood, rival territory was often viewed as the appropriate location to spray graffiti.

Not in our neighborhood we don't. Our neighborhood clean. We got over to the Slob territory and paint there to make them mad. (Male #021, "40 Ounce," sixteen-year-old 107 Hoover Gangster Crip)

A fair number of subjects, however, saw painting graffiti as something "juniors" did, and not serious or important gang business:

They be, they be doin it sometime. I be tellin them man don't do that man, that ain't what's happening. (Male #001, "Mike-Mike," twenty-year-old Thundercat)

MALE #037, "Big Money," twenty-two-year-old Compton Gangster

Blood: The little juniors was doing it but we stopped them.

INT: How come?

037: We want our neighborhood to look decent.

One subject mentioned the role of graffiti in initiation:

My partner brought him down and said he wanted me to sit down with him. I asked him was he ready to get with it. He said yeah. Well let's ride. Go on over there. Put his name up on the wall. (Male #033, "Larry," eighteen-year-old Thundercat)

Reactions to the removal of graffiti and gang symbols varied, depending on who did the painting over or defacement. Some subjects said that it did not bother them, especially when done by officials.

Police or something? We will put it back up there. If they continue to take it down I ain't going to waste my money on putting something up there if I know it coming right back down. (Male #027, "G-Loc," fifteen-year-old Gangster Disciple)

[If the city does it] we just respray paint. There's a couple of walls that we put our symbols on it. We just went and got a couple more cans and spray painted again. (Male #038, "G.O.D.," nineteen-year-old Compton Gangster)

One subject provided an economic rationale for his gang's vandalism:

INT: What if it was the parks department, that wouldn't piss you off?

MALE #029, "Randell," seventeen-year-old Thundercat: No. A lot of people keep jobs that way. If we didn't litter then a lot of janitors wouldn't have jobs.

INT: So you think you are doing a community service by painting graffiti?

Another subject pointed out that graffiti is "just paint."

If my name is on the wall in all black and white and somebody comes over with red paint and spray it out I'll say something real smart. If he can't give me a good reason why he did it I'll just say ok cause it's just paint, man. (Male #040, "Knowledge," twenty-one-year-old Compton Gangster)

But most subjects felt that removal was disrespectful and to be responded to forcefully.

If we know that they removed it we go over there and fight them or shoot at them or whatever. (Female #006, "Yolanda," nineteen-year-old 23rd Street Hoover Crip)

Crossing out a name (or painting RIP - rest in peace - over or near a member's gang name) is a sign that a rival gang intends to kill that member.

If you go to their neighborhood and say you crossed one of the gang members name out, like when you kill him and his name is still up on the wall you going to cross it out or when you getting ready to kill him you might put RIP over his name. (Male #031, "John Doe," sixteen-year-old Thundercat)

It depends. A lot of them just write over our stuff. We'll go write over theirs. If they put an X through our name we got to find out who put the X on there and we got to go get them. X through you name means you dead, they out looking for you. I've had X put through my name a lot of times but I'm still here. (Male #060, "Bullet," twenty-year-old Inglewood Family Gangster Blood)

Mostly when we go over there and cross out they stuff that ain't cool with them because we put our stuff up. If there is a person we are looking for, we'll put 187 up by his name or something like that, put a shotgun pointed to his name or something like that. (Male #084, "Rolo," fifteen-year-old Rolling 60's Crip)

**"I Stole these Pants I Got On, Just Put the Pants On and Walk Out".** Sixty-seven subjects said that the gang stole things together, although only forty-three said that these joint property crimes were planned. Most minor thefts seem to be spur-of-the-moment actions involving a group of members who just happen to be hanging out together when someone (or many of them) decide to steal something.

FEMALE #011, "Lisa," fifteen-year-old Compton Gangster: Sometimes we have the car pulled up in the back and we will toss the sodas in there. They [the gas station] put them inside because we emptied them out.

INT: Does the gang sort of plan these things?

011: Well we spotted them and everybody just said let's go get us some sodas from Clark's.

Like at gas stations or they be walking down the street. Some of them steal out of stores and some of them steal tapes and stuff. (Male #068, "CK," sixteen-year-old Piru 104 Blood)

Gang motivated thefts do occur, both as part of initiation or to raise money for desperately wanted necessities (like beer or jackets).

Get initiated by fighting like ten people jump on them, other people have to steal something. (Female #078, "Tina," fifteen-year-old Treetop Blood)

INT: What kinds of things do you take?

MALE #092, "Derone," twenty-one-year-old Rolling 60's Crip: Shoes, shirts, pants, jackets, hats, cars, stereos, all the necessities.

Planning of property crimes by gangs, however, appears fairly simple, more similar to the Andy Hardy refrain of "hey gang, let's put on a show, we'll go to the mall and steal something (clothes, food, liquor, tapes, CDs, etc.)" or "let's steal a car so we can go cruising (gang banging, etc.)" than the actions of a professional safe cracker.

INT: Do you guys plan those things?

MALE #042, "Leroy," sixteen-year-old Rolling 60's Crip: No, that's disastrous. You got to have a good mind to plan something like that and have it work. The spur of the moment, the only time you do that is when you know you can get away with it. That would be the best time.

Sometimes. We really don't shoplift. If we was going into a store we wouldn't call it shoplifting cause we just, everybody just grabs what they want and walk out the store with it in they hand. Somebody just say come on come on you all, let's go hit Famous [a large department store], something like that. (Male #004, "Anthony," seventeen-year-old Thundercat)

Planning for serious property crimes - car thefts for profit, robberies, burglaries, jackings - does occur, but as we shall see in the next section, even those are most often opportunistic and ill conceived.

INT: Do you all ever set a plan how to steal cars?

MALE #093, "Lil-P," sixteen-year-old Crenshaw Mob Gangster Blood:

Not really, we just walk around the neighborhood earlier. We'll just chill around here playing basketball until 12 or 1:00 and then steal it.

INT: So you all see it, stake it out.

093: Come back and get it.

INT: And you all usually do that when you bored right?

093: Yeah bored or need some wheels to get to a party on the north side or get some guns and bring them back over.

These gang members, and the gangs they belong to, do not strike us as organized thieves. Forty-three subjects said that their gang planned property crimes, twenty-three subjects answered no, and thirty-one did not answer. Members of the same gang also gave opposite responses to the question, testifying to the loose structure of St. Louis gangs.

Besides auto theft, shoplifting is probably the most common property crime committed by our subjects.

MALE #030, "Kenneth," nineteen-year-old Thundercat: We rob the stores. No we don't rob them, we steal from them.

INT: Shoplift?

030: Yeah, just take it.

INT: What do you steal?

MALE #032, "Skonion," seventeen-year-old Thundercat: We just go down there when we want some junk food.

INT: At the convenience store, 7-11?

032: Yeah.

INT: So food, clothes?

032: We steal clothes from the mall and shoes.

Various "thefts of services" are also popular — our subjects attempt to sneak into movies, concerts, amusement parks, skating rinks, and other entertainment venues, much like juveniles anywhere. Minor theft and public disturbances are part of gang culture, but not its defining feature.

**"Everybody and They Mama Smoke Weed," or "You Just Married a Pipe:" Drug Use by Gang Members.** No other topic we discuss better illustrates the frustration, ambiguities, and contradictions inherent in interviewing gang members about their criminality than drug use. In media stereotypes, after all, contemporary street gangs are well-organized purveyors of crack cocaine — cool, steely eyed, determined businessmen and women who would never use their debilitating wares. Or they are fiends with hair-trigger, violent impulses and reactions. Which of these, if either, is true?

Neither, of course, yet both of these extremes can be found in our subjects' self-reports of drug use by themselves and their fellow members. Recall that only two subjects said that the most common gang activity was "doing drugs," yet sixty of our subjects said that a "lot of members are doing drugs." Also, no subjects said that "doing drugs" was a good reason for joining their gang, although sixteen said that the opportunity to do drugs was a good reason to belong to (or stay in) a gang.

INT: [Does the gang provide an opportunity] to use drugs?

MALE #026, "Chill," fifteen-year-old 107 Hoover Gangster Crip: Smoke weed.

Thirty-three subjects, however, said that "a lot of members were *not* doing drugs." Many subjects flatly deny that anyone in their set does drugs, and seven subjects answered "never" to our question "How often do members use drugs?"

We'll we don't. It's something that we know is wrong for a change. We know drugs is bad but if you want to buy it from us of course we are going to give it to you. (Male #020, "Lil Thug," sixteen-year-old Gangster Disciple)

Not really. If you going to sell drugs keep your mind clear so you can be alert. You can't be high and nodding off and tripping and the police ride up on you with rocks on you. (Male #041, "C. K.," twenty-two-year-old Blood)

Or do they? Our subjects often contradicted themselves over the course of the interview about drug use, or perhaps more commonly were not sure what we meant by "drugs."

INT: Do a lot of gang members use drugs?

MALE #014, "D. C.," sixteen-year-old Disciple: They smoke weed.

One subject, "C-Loc," a seventeen year-old Rolling Sixties Crip, (male #045), said early in the interview: "No, nobody do drugs." But later on in our questioning the following exchange took place:

INT: Are a lot of gang members involved in using drugs?

045: No, not really.

INT: What kind of drugs do the gang members use?

045: Usually rock, that's about it.

INT: They like to smoke the Primo's?

045: Yeah.

INT: And weed right?

045: Yeah.

INT: What happens if somebody in the gang uses drugs?

045: Nothing.

When we asked subjects "What kinds of drugs do members use?" we counted four mentions of cocaine, five of crack, two of heroin, one of PCP, and forty-nine of marijuana.

FEMALE #006, "Yolanda," nineteen-year-old 23rd Street Hoover Crip: Yeah, there's a whole lot of them like about 20 or 25 of them are using drugs-like coke. Not really crack. Now they're not using crack, they using it but they really on that coke and stuff.

INT: Marijuana?

006: Yeah, but some of them say that ain't nothing now. Like if they mix it up with coke, then yeah, that's Primo. But weed is not really hot or nothing like that. [T]here's a whole lot of them on heroin. Majority of the men. Some of it shooting it in and some of them snorting it. Really the majority of them are shooting it in they arm.

Rock, marijuana. Mostly on Fridays. Like before going to the show. (Male #008, "Robert," fourteen-year-old Compton Gangster)

They might smoke some weed but that's about all. Everybody and they mamma smoke weed. (Male #060, "Bullet," twenty-year-old Inglewood Family Gangster Blood)

For me it has been every day. I started smoking weed when I was, I was selling weed. There is so much drugs in my family, you could have anything you want. The table would be full of marijuana. In our gang now there is nothing but marijuana. That's all. (Male #034, "Lil Gene Mack," eighteen-year-old 19th Street Rolling 60's Crip)

Yet when we asked "How often do members use drugs?" seventy-one subjects could not provide an answer. Gang members in St. Louis apparently do not want to be perceived as hard-drug users, probably because of the low regard in which "fiends" are held.

INT: What happens to people in your gang who use drugs?

MALE #028, "Killa 4 Ren," fifteen-year-old 187 Crip: They die out. They are fools.

INT: Those guys that smoke Primo, are they looked down on?

MALE #033, "Larry," eighteen-year-old Thundercat: They looked down on. We don't even tell them that. Ain't no sense in hiding it man but they just try to hide it. They don't even hide it no more. They be sitting

out, like we smoking a joint out on the porch, they be out there smoking Primo out on the corner. They so sharp, clean, with jewelry, you can't tell, man. If they want to do it that's why they want to do it.

[Rocks?] That's a downer. That's a rich man's high and a poor man's dream. (Male #037, "Big Money," twenty-two-year-old Compton Gangster)

Subjects may also be differentiating between "regular" use of drugs other than marijuana (and alcohol, of course) and infrequent, experimental, or occasional use of other drugs. Others didn't regard marijuana as a drug. Some, certainly, were also lying to us! Our field-worker, for example, had subjects who told him in interviews that they never snorted coke or smoked crack and then subsequently witnessed these same subjects using these drugs.

Drug activity (use or sales) is pervasive in our subjects' lives, whatever their denials may indicate to the contrary. Eighty-five subjects indicated that their gang was involved in drug activities (either sales or use); only fourteen did not mention drug sales or use as a gang activity.

We asked subjects "What happens to members who use drugs?" hoping to find out what happens to members who get addicted or habituated to drugs other than marijuana. Again, the answers are ambiguous and somewhat contradictory. Apparently, many subjects thought we were talking about marijuana use – or did not believe that their fellow members ever could or would be that stupid. The modal category, forty-two subjects, did not provide an answer to this question. Twenty-nine subjects said that the gang does "nothing" about drug users.

INT: What happens if somebody in the group do use drugs?

MALE #051, "David," eighteen-year-old Blood: Nothing, that's they life they wasting.

INT: So if they are a Primo king it don't mean shit?

051: Yeah.

Nothing, they just get fucked up. That's it, they just get fucked up and have a good time. (Male #092, "Derone," seventeen-year-old Rolling 60's Crip)

Thirteen subjects said that the gang would separate from drug users.

MALE #040, "Knowledge," twenty-one-year-old Compton Gangster:

Yeah. No cocaine smoking at all. You get caught smoking cocaine you an outcast, black sheep.

INT: Including Primos?



040: I mean no cocaine, no heroin, no PCP.

INT: How did you all get that rule?

040: [just sat down and talked about it. One day me and [another member] sat out there and said can't nobody smoke cocaine or we ain't dealing with you. Simple as that. We ain't going to jump on you or shoot at you or nothing. You got no more friends, you just married a pipe.

INT: So if they break the rules you all just through with them?

040: Yeah, we just don't deal with them anymore. We will try to talk with them. That would be the first thing. To me a person out there smoking cocaine don't care about they self.

No. I would say all right Cuz, slow down. You can talk to him and tell him. Nothing else you can do, just tell him. (Male #042, "Leroy," seventeen-year-old Rolling 60's Crip)

Five subjects said the gang would help a member quit drugs.

Weed, that's all. If somebody in the gang and we find out you smoke rocks or anything we beat you up and make you check yourself into a care unit or something cause we just hate to see one of our boys go out. We know fiends that look bad and we don't want none of our friends to go out like that. (Male #038, "G.O.D.," nineteen-year-old Compton Gangster)

Yeah, if we see its getting to be a problem and we see that he want to get some help we all chip in some money and put his ass in rehabilitation. If that don't help then there ain't shit that we can do for you. (Male #041, "C. K.," twenty-two-year-old Blood)

Violence and separation were also mentioned.

We might smoke every once in a while but no cocaine, no Primos. I know what that shit can do to you and if I catch anybody, like one of my boys, he used to sell dope, he turned into a smoker. I beat the piss out of that man. I said you in violation, you lucky you don't get capped. We don't want you around no more and the homie ain't around no more. (White male #099, "Joe L.," eighteen-year-old Insane Gangster Disciple)

For many subjects the most important reason for separating from drug users and for members refraining from using drugs was economic.

Yeah. I gave my partner some dope and he was smoking dope. He was smoking Primos, weed, and cocaine. He messed up. People that have gave me some dope, they took losses. You going to take some losses in the dope game. He telling me he lost the dope. I knew what time it was but I believed him. Tried him again, tried him again and he messed up. I said man I can't give you no more and then about two weeks later he wants a

bag. I gave him like a pound of weed and he got stupid. I gave him half ounce of cocaine and he came back with the money and everything. Now he got him a little car. He chilling. He still smoke it but he chilling. (Male #033, "Larry," eighteen-year-old Thundercat)

You can't have too many doing it because I can give a man so much amount of this stuff and I ask him to knock it off and he wind up smoking half of it. That's not making a good profit. We have to kick them out. They get so hooked on to it. (Male #017, "Billy Kelly," twenty-one-year-old North Side Crip)

MALE #018: "Maurice," twenty-year-old 107 Hoover Crip: We'll tell them don't take no losses. You wait until you finish selling and then you can buy whatever you want to buy with your own money but don't fuck up our profits. You mess our things up we going to mess up your thing. INT: So you will kick him out?

018: No, we will beat his motherfucking ass cause we took a loss.

Surprisingly, none of our subjects mentioned the potential causal link of drug (and alcohol) use with violence. Although respondents regarded drug "fiends" as tricky, untrustworthy, and violence-prone, they did not appreciate the relevance of this last characteristic to their own drug and alcohol use. Violence against gang members who overused drugs is mentioned, but the possibility that gang violence could be curbed by lower consumption or that it arose from overconsumption of drugs and drinks is strikingly absent from our interviews. This omission is perhaps due to the accepted and commonsensical nature of the linkage — it just does not need to be repeated. But even so, the omission — which is in part ours for not asking it directly — is particularly striking.

This section has illustrated the pervasive low-level criminality that characterizes the lives of gang members. Some of their minor criminal behavior arises from the fact of their membership in gangs; order disturbances, loitering, and curfew violations are probably enforced more routinely and harshly on gang members than on other adolescents or young adults in the same neighborhood. And the vandalism or destruction of property arising from graffiti spraying is a direct function of gang membership, sometimes as a requirement of initiation, sometimes as a "stand-up" or "macho" necessity.

Petty theft — shoplifting, thefts of services, stealing from open cars — although sometimes gang motivated or "planned," is more likely to be an incidental or coincidental, spur-of-the-moment action. Drug use is not, of course, a requirement for joining a gang or continuing in good stand-

ing (quite the contrary, in fact), but the ease with which members can obtain drugs probably increases the amounts and rates of use. Nevertheless, many subjects vehemently denied any drug use by themselves or their fellow gang members.

There is some internal differentiation in these activities. Younger members, under sixteen, were more likely to mention petty criminality — shoplifting, sidewalk gambling, graffiti, thefts of services. To some extent this may be a matter of economics, younger members may not have as much ready cash to purchase some of the items stolen. They are too young to hold jobs and are not yet sufficiently trusted, experienced, or established to sell drugs as regularly or lucratively as older members. Old gangsters are also likely to be more cautious and thoughtful and more experienced in assessing the payoff of minor criminality.

We found little evidence of intergang variability in the commission of petty crimes. This is due, in part, to our sampling technique and the uneven representation of particular gangs. Only a few subjects seemed to indicate that their gang did not have any members who engaged in minor criminality. There also may be differences between cliques within gangs, although this is probably age related, since such friendship cliques and subgroups seem to be age graded and predate, in many cases, gang membership.

As we also observed in the last section, these activities and behaviors do not sharply differentiate gang members from other young adults and adolescents in the same neighborhoods. Nor do they reflect the behavior of a well-organized gang in pursuit of common goals. A life filled with petty criminality — order disturbances, vandalism, petty theft, drug use — is common in poor, black St. Louis neighborhoods.

But all three of these kinds of criminality are linked to much more serious criminal behaviors that help mark gangs and gang members as different kinds of people from their nongang peers. Petty theft through shoplifting and thefts of services becomes strong-armed robbery when large groups of gang members invade a store and dare the employees to stop them.

We'll just walk in, it be so many of us they can't grab one of us. They grab one of us, he going to get beat so they just let us walk out. (Male #004, "Anthony," seventeen-year-old Thundercat)

Vandalism in the form of graffiti can have violent and even deadly consequences; crossing out a rival's name, having your name crossed out, catching someone painting over your set's name. And while peace/order

disturbances are probably most often a controlling device used by police, they perhaps are just as often reduced charges from more serious crimes — assaultive violence, brandishing weapons.

While we would not argue that alcohol and marijuana consumption inevitably leads to a lifelong addiction to those or harder drugs, the easy availability of drugs and the need to acquire purchase money may lead to more serious crime — thefts, robberies, burglaries, drug sales, the concern of Chapter 6.

### **“We Do What We Do Together”: Activities With Nonmembers**

In this section we discuss what little our subjects do with outsiders, nongang peers and friends. If framed as a question, the answer would be “almost nothing.” Gangs and gang life have a fatal attraction for our subjects (literally so in eleven cases), an attraction that, over time, constricts and diminishes their involvement in activities and events not involving the friendship group of the gang. Nearly two-thirds of our subjects, for example, did not supply an answer to the question “What activities do you do when you're not with the gang?” This may not be surprising, given the adolescent modality of our subjects, and the friendship clique underpinning of St. Louis gangs. A nearly identical statistic might occur if any group of teenagers in the metropolitan area were asked “What activities do you do when you're not with your friends?”

INT: Do you do things without gang members?

MALE #026, “Chill,” fifteen-year-old 107 Hoover Gangster Crip: Like what? I hang out with my cousins [also gang members].

INT: So basically other than sleeping or eating you are with the gang?  
026: “Chill.” I wash dishes and stuff.

Sometimes, though, hanging out with nongang members was no different than hanging with gang members.

MALE #052, “Jonathan,” fifteen-year-old 107 Hoovers: Dudes that don't want to be in a gang.

INT: What do you all do together when you with them?

052: The same thing.

INT: What, drink beer?

052: Yes.

INT: Do they fight too?

052: Yes.

Yet gangs have a strongly chilling effect on our subjects' participation in outside activities, especially institutionalized or organized groups. Eighty subjects indicated they had belonged to one or more legal groups (of a social, religious, or recreational sort) before joining the gang, while only nineteen denied any previous involvement in such activities.<sup>4</sup> In a stunning illustration of the near exclusivity of gang activities, only *twenty* subjects said they currently belonged to any group besides their gang, while seventy-nine subjects were affiliated only with the gang. Thus three-quarters of those involved in legal groups dropped out after joining the gang.

INT: You were an honor student and a good athlete, what made you decide to start living on the streets again?

MALE #035, "Edward," twenty-year-old Hoover Gangster Crip: I don't know. Just got tired of being smart. I couldn't tell you.

INT: What other groups do you belong to besides the gang?

MALE #083, "Winchester," fourteen-year-old Rolling 60's Crip: I belong with them, no other.

INT: What things do you do that you don't do with gang members?

083: I don't know.

The withdrawal from nongang activities also extends to other social arenas. As our discussion of labor force participation in Chapter 7 shows, only sixteen subjects were employed when we interviewed them. Eighteen subjects said they had children (and five males said that their girlfriends were pregnant), yet none of our subjects were married and only seven had their children living with them. Although seventy-three subjects said they would choose their natural family over the gang if they had to make such a choice, only twenty-four subjects said that they spent "about the same amount of time or less time" with the gang as compared to with their family.

The gang has become the primary reference and peer group for our subjects. Many, if not most, of the friends and relatives they would normally interact with are in the gang, or in a gang. Their involvement in institutional activities — church, school, employment market, clubs — is constricted, with, of course, the major exception of the criminal justice system. For most of our subjects then, their primary interpersonal interactions and activities are with other gang members (and/or hangers-on). Once a member, former ties diminish and sometimes disappear completely, as members become more and more enmeshed in a world of serious crime. As many observers have noted (Esbensen and Huizinga

1993; Thornberry et al. 1991; Sampson and Laub 1993) involvement in crime, such as that produced by the gang, heightens criminal activity. Our observations offer a mechanism to explain this. Over time, gang membership reduces involvement in conventional activities and contacts with individuals whose involvement in criminal activities is low. Thus, individuals and institutions with the ability to restrain criminality lose their socializing power. When this occurs in conjunction with heightened involvement with criminal peers the result is increased criminality. Thus, the conjunction of isolation from legitimate activities and individuals, coupled with an increased involvement among gang peers produces a context in which constraints against crime are diminished and support for criminal involvement is ever present. These forces, working together in opposite directions, help to account for the increased criminality of gang members, whether those crimes are committed as part of the gang or outside of it.

## “I Love To Bang”: Serious Crime by Gang Members

St. Louis gangs and individual members routinely steal things, both together and on their own. Sixty-seven subjects, for example, said that their gang steals things together. Although much of this theft may be no more harmful than minor shoplifting – sodas, candy, beer, cigarettes – gangs still are involved in a lot of serious property crime. Our subjects’ self-reports of their most recent arrests, for example, included two for possession of stolen property, two for burglary, four for robbery, and eight for possession of a stolen vehicle. Property crimes also occur frequently: fourteen subjects said that the gang stole things together every day, seven said that they stole weekly, and eight said monthly.

They beat up people and take their stuff. About every now and then . . . Five times [in a month]. (Male #010, “Jason C.,” fifteen-year-old Compton Gangster)

Some of them do and some of them don’t. They do it mostly everyday. (Male #052, “Jonathan,” fifteen-year-old 107 Hoover Crip)

Almost every weekend. (Male #029, “Derone,” twenty-one-year-old Rolling 60’s Crip)

Forty-three subjects said that the gang planned property crimes, although very few could or would elaborate on such assertions. Two examples of somewhat rational planning include:

Well, first we won’t do no robbery, we do a burglary to get some quick money. We might creep around the neighborhood, we don’t do it in our neighborhood, not downtown we go somewhere like across the street you know and see an open house you know, we go in there and hit it, boom, you know come on out with a VCR, nineteen-inch TV, jewelry. We go over there on the lane, the guy selling drugs he buy all this kind of stuff. (Male #003, “Jerry,” eighteen-year-old Thundercat)

They plan them. They observe. They stake out the house, see what time they leave for like a week or so. For a whole week so you know which day they off, whatever. So one day they just go in and do the job when they ain’t there. (Male #005, “Antonio,” nineteen-year-old 6th Street Hoover Crip)

But other subjects pointed out that much “planning” was remarkably spontaneous and haphazard.

Bang, drive-by and shoot shit up. It just feels good. Like [unclear] says, damn it feels good to be a gangster. I love to do it. I love to bang, I love to shoot shit up, we all do it together. (White male #099, “Joe L.,” eighteen-year-old Insane Gangster Disciple)

POPULAR STEREOTYPES of gangs and gang members – reflected in news and entertainment media, in public opinions, in officials’ statements, and in some scholarly works – consider them to be organized, violent predators on society. In this vision, gangs – guided by older leaders – plan burglaries and boostings, commit armed robberies, terrorize neighborhoods, run crack houses, distribute and sell a wide variety of drugs on the street, and revel in assaultive and lethal violence against each other, innocent bystanders, and any who thwart them. Some of this may be true, as the statement by “Joe L.” implies. What is not true, at least from talking with our subjects, is the intensity of this stereotype, the well-organized nature of their group activities, and the delight in violence shown above (a more common attitude towards violence was fatalism – “you gotta do what you gotta do”; “we don’t go looking for trouble”; “we use violence when it comes to us”). Serious crimes – both nonviolent and violent – are a defining feature of gangs, but gang crimes seem neither as purposive, organized, or frequent as the popular (and official) mind imagines. Often, violence is a response to the threat of violence from the presence of other gangs. This chapter discusses three kinds of serious crime by gang members: felony property crimes (burglary, armed robbery, auto theft for profit, truck jacking, boosting), sales of illegal drugs, and assaultive violence.

MALE #010, "Jason C.," fifteen-year-old Compton Gangster: They plan it.

INT: What do they say?

010: They say, see that dude over there, we are going to gang bang him. Take his stuff and run.

INT: How often do you do [robberies]?

MALE #035, "Edward," twenty-year-old Hoover Gangster Crip: Whenever we get drunk and somebody mention it. People walking downtown. They be drunk as a skunk.

INT: So you do it mainly at night when people are walking around drunk?  
035: Yeah.

No, we really don't set them up. It's just if our boy work at a place he keep it open for us and we just go in there and just start jacking. It's just whatever's whatever, they know what they gonna do. (Male #092, "Derone," twenty-one-year-old Rolling 60's Crip)

The relative absence of planned, organized, and gang-motivated property crimes is also apparent in the division and use of criminal proceeds. Although forty-seven subjects said that illegally obtained profits (chiefly from drug sales) went for gang-related acts or needs, the actual percentages and items were usually inconsequential.

We'll rob somebody and everybody will go buy some drinks or something. (Male #087, "Blue Jay," eighteen-year-old Rolling 60's Crip)

Sometimes they might go out and buy ski masks or stuff that will get us in some more trouble. (Male #031, "John Doe," sixteen-year-old Thundercat)

MALE #083, "Winchester," fourteen-year-old Rolling 60's Crip: Yeah, we have to give it [money to the gang].

INT: Half the money go to the gang? If you got a burglary where you got \$100, how much would go to the gang?  
083: About \$5.00.

Thirty-four subjects said that illegally obtained money did not go to the gang, and one subject stated quite emphatically:

MALE #092, "Derone," twenty-one-year-old Rolling 60's Crip: You mean the crimes that we do are they for the gang? No sometimes we just do it for fun, jack cars, take a nigger's shit because we don't like him, we just do it, take it to the pawn shop and pawn it or stick it in our ride and tear off the serial numbers.

INT: Have you ever committed crimes to get money for the gang?  
092: No, I commit crimes to get money for myself.

Many subjects denied that they, or other gang members, currently engaged in property crimes; they were bringing in more money selling drugs.

I don't steal no more, I got whatever I need. I don't steal no more. If I ever catch anybody in my group stealing, I'm going to get down on them cause they know they can come to me and ask anybody in the posse you know what I'm saying, that they want this or they want that. They know they will get it. Ain't no sense in stealing it. What you steal it for? (Male #033, "Larry," eighteen-year-old Thundercat)

We don't take nothing. We pay for ours. We make money. (Male #037, "Big Money," twenty-two-year-old Compton Gangster)

**"All The Necessities."** Although cars were the most frequently mentioned target of theft, gang members steal a wide variety of items. Figure 6.1 shows the distribution of the first thing that gang members told us they stole when asked "What do you take?" Clothes, electronic appliances, jewelry, and cash were frequently noted.

Jewelry, coats, shoes, money, rings, cars. (Male #010, "Jason C.," fifteen-year-old Compton Gangster)

No, mainly like appliances like TVs, VCRs, stereos, car phones, CDs, anything that's of value that's what we get. (Male #017, "Billy," twenty-one-year-old North Side Crip)

Shoes, shirts, pants, jackets, hats, cars, stereos, all the necessities. (Male #092, "Derone," twenty-one-year-old Rolling 60's Crip)

Drugs were also a popular target. This is not surprising, since gang members are very familiar with how much drug money is available, how it is kept, and the most opportune times to burglarize a dope house. These crimes often had the added benefit of being directed against a rival gang.

We did a couple of burglaries. We just did it because we knew some drugs was up in there. (Male #039, "Kaons BIC," seventeen-year-old Compton Gangster)

If we can find a dope house we take their stuff. (Male #027, "G-Loc," fifteen-year-old Gangster Disciple)



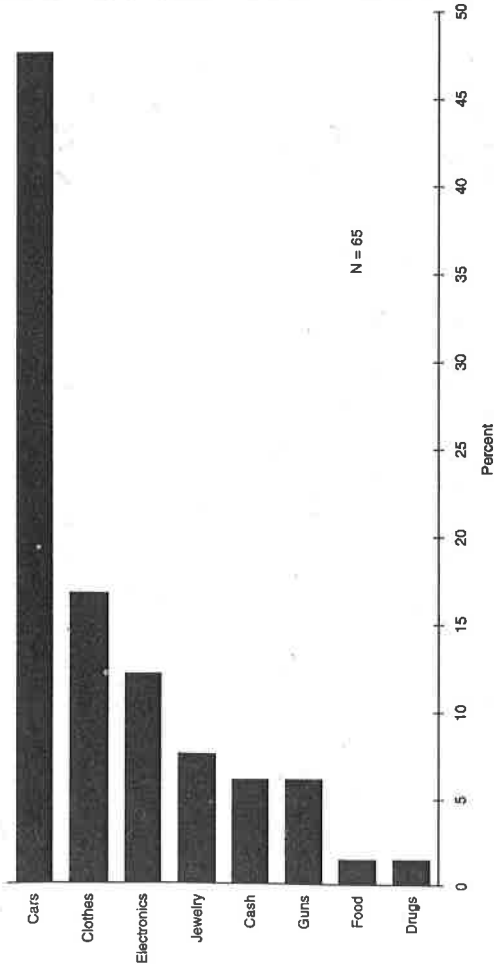


Figure 6.1 Types of Items Stolen

Guns, according to our first subject, were not the only target of burglaries.

They don't really, they don't really do burglaries too much unless they, they be uh lookin for guns. (Male #001, "Mike-Mike," twenty-year-old Thundercat)

As Figure 6.1 illustrates, cars are the modal item stolen by gang members. Cars are stolen for joyriding or for transportation to parties, concerts, and so on. But stolen cars are also used in drive-bys and are stripped or broken down for the sale of parts or delivered to chop shops.

No, what we do is when we steal a car then take it somewhere and strip it and get all the parts and just sell it. We take the money and buy dope for it and boom, bam, that's it. He got his money, I get my cut. (Male #017, "Billy," twenty-one-year-old North Side Grip)

WHITE MALE #099, "Joe L.," eighteen-year-old Insane Gangster Discipline: There is a gas station right there by the car dealer place. We go up in there and just get out of the car and it's real dark, it's a Ford dealer. Go up in there with some wire cutting pliers that cut through sheet metal and shit. You have your pliers right down in here, your 2-pound sledge over here and go around like that dressed up in your black dickey fits. After you cut that lock box up, bam, bam, bust it open, start the car, put the rag top down, you bust the window out of a back car and get you one of those sticker things for a brand new car. What do they call that? INT: Temporary plates.

099: Yeah, you stick that up in the window of the stolen car, go get you some gas, drive it around of awhile. Then you go ahead and call the dude up that wants the car at the chop shop. Tell me when to bring it down. Bring it down tomorrow morning, drive down there, here's your money motherfucker. See ya next week.

INT: Same deal.

099: But we used to steal cars like, we would never steal people's cars. We did that a couple of times. Then one of my boys got busted on a felony.

Car jacking (or a "jack move") is also mentioned by at least three subjects:

We jack people sometimes. He pulled in front of this dude and then this dude couldn't go nowhere. Only did it about three times. (Male #064, "Pump," fourteen-year-old 6 Deuce Blood)

INT: What do you all usually do on the weekends?

MALE #031, "John Doe," sixteen-year-old Thundercat: Usually go out or jack move with somebody.

INT: Jack move is fucking with somebody?

031: Robbing somebody like somebody getting out of they car and you might want to drive they car so it's more like an armed robbery.

While thirty-two subjects said that they "protected" stores in their neighborhood, this was usually a rather hit or miss activity (only eleven subjects said that stores ever paid the gang to protect them).

MALE #001, "Mike-Mike," twenty-year-old Thundercat: They be havin some of those gang members sittin down, you know what I'm sayin, then they feed em, then they have bout fifteen of em they be feedin em, then they have their head turned to the back like just lookin ya know. INT: Keep their eye on shoplifters?

001: Yea, I had a few of my gang members to kill some people in a restaurant and just bang em up and burn em cause somebody was trying to rob they store.

INT: Does the gang ever get money from store owners or merchants for protection? Do they ever go around and say we want some, give us a hundred bucks?

001: They be askin them so they won't do nothin to em. Hey man, I don't want ya'll to rob me, I'll give ya'll a hundred dollars, you know, just to watch the store for me, man, cause uh, I know ya'll bad and everything, we don't want nothin to happen to us.

MALE #038, "G.O.D.," nineteen-year-old Compton Gangster: Yeah. We can go in there loud and drunk and we see somebody fighting, no dudes, can't fight here. This is our neighborhood, you don't fight in our

neighborhood, we do all the fighting. We throw drunks out, fucking bums. Cause the guard be scared, they punks.

INT: Do stores ever pay you money to do this, to protect them?

038: No, we just do it because they mostly our neighbors working in these places so we just do it to help them out.

Only seven subjects said that they ever extorted protection money from stores, in fact, some members were not sure what the term meant.

INT: Did you ever extort money from any stores?

MALE #042, "Leroy," seventeen-year-old Rolling 60's Crip: What?

INT: Extortion, where you go in there and say you guys either pay me \$100 a week otherwise I'm going to come in here. . . .

042: No. That's what you call a cat doing stuff like that. We could do it a couple of times but you ain't going to get enough money. You can only do that so many times. You can only do it so many times.

INT: Do you ever tell store owners if you don't give us some money we'll shoot you up? That sort of thing?

MALE #002, "Eric," sixteen-year-old Thundercat: Naw, hey man we got some sense man, we don't do all that crazy stuff. Hey man, we do a little crazy stuff but what ya'll think we really doin, man, we don't be doin that.

Burglaries, after automobile theft, are probably the most common form of felony theft our subjects discussed. Gang members seem to prefer to burglarize houses, although some subjects mentioned other targets:

INT: Do you guys plan burglaries or what?

MALE #012, "Lance," twenty-year-old West Side Mob member: Yeah, sometimes we do when we broke.

INT: Steal out of stores?

012: No, we don't steal shit out of stores, we break into a house or something though.

INT: Safer?

012: Yeah, it's safer. Well, I don't know really.

INT: Do you ever do burglaries when somebody is home?

012: No, I ain't never been caught in nobody's house. If we in the house we might take some jewelry and they don't know it until later.

Big things, basically we like to hit safes. Not that petty shit, fuck that. Usually got one or two people that know about this. (Male #041, "C. K.," twenty-two-year-old Blood)

Robbery, both armed and strong-armed is another popular pastime, especially with one gang, the Laclede Town Thundercats. Their location near the Central Business District and its numerous stores, restaurants, and customers provided ample targets.

We had went and got drunk, everybody got drunk, we went down to this faggot bar. We used to go down there and beat on them all the time, take their money and stuff. (Male #030, "Kenneth," nineteen-year-old Thundercat)

Robbery was also frequently mentioned as part of the initiation, an alternative or supplement to beating in or drive-by shootings.

His name was C-Loc and he was about 14. He was down. He was from the hood, he was hanging out so he wanted to get in. He wanted to get initiated so someone gave him a mission, told him to do a robbery. He did the robbery and he shot the dude. (Male #088, "T-Loc," twenty-one-year-old Grape Street Crip)

MALE #090, "Rello," fifteen-year-old 19th Street Long Beach Crip: Somebody had a .38 and a .32 when they was downtown and they walked up to somebody and made him get out of their corner. They just went down there and whupped some ass.

INT: So you're saying he started from a robbery or something?

090: Yeah.

And once it was pointed out to one of our interviewers that he was a prime target for a robbery in many neighborhoods.

MALE #042, "Leroy," seventeen-year-old Rolling 60's Crip: Yeah, we gank people.

INT: Robbery?

042: Yeah.

INT: Ever commit armed robbery?

042: Yeah, that's what I was going to tell you about. No offense but if you were to come on College [Avenue] to try to use the pay phone or anything, I say you got some money Cuz, let's get him.

INT: If you checked my wallet you would think twice about that; there's nothing in there.

Each of these property crimes provides cash or commodities of immediate use to gang members. Their concerns were for their immediate future — the next party, the next beer, the next shootout. Such concerns reflected their constrained status and orientation toward dealing with

short-term goals. This orientation is consistent with a life under threat of violence from rival gangs.

We found few differences between gangs with regard to their commission of serious property crimes. Members of one gang, the Laclede Town Thundercats, mentioned that they regularly committed robberies (and indeed seemed to have grown out of organized rolling of the patrons of a particular gay bar), though not all members engaged in that crime. There were few other mentions of armed robbery, leading us to believe that it is an incidental, spontaneous act by gang members, subject to the serendipitous availability of a target and an immediate need for cash, clothes, or other items. None of the gangs in our study constituted burglary rings, although cliques and individuals in almost all groups said they regularly committed burglaries. But most burglaries were spontaneous, involve little planning, and are probably a continuation of previous criminal activities. Our subjects also made few (if any) mentions of fences, or disposing of stolen property (except as consumers), arguing further that they were not well-tied into that criminal sphere. Although at least two subjects mentioned car theft-for profit (stealing cars for resale or parts or delivery to chop shops), most gang members are not involved in any major way in auto-theft rings or networks. We theorize that gang members in St. Louis (especially younger ones) do not have access to the social networks and contacts that would allow their participation in this form of crime.

Robberies, larcenies, burglaries, and car thefts are not exclusively committed by gang members in the greater St. Louis area. Other individuals and ad hoc or friendship groups in gang (and nongang) neighborhoods also engage in these crimes. Nor are these typical or defining activities for the gangs we have described. These serious property crimes are instrumental – robberies provide money and goods, as do burglaries. Car thefts provide transportation, cash, and perhaps spare parts. But most gang members agree that these activities are dangerous, risky, usually spontaneous exercises. Real money, important money, is gotten by other means, by selling drugs.

### “I’m In This For Myself”: Drug Sales

Gang involvement in illegal drug sales is a major concern of the public, media, and law enforcement agencies. Many observers have drawn a causal link between the rise and growth of street gang involvement in drug sales as well organized at both local and national levels (National

Institute of Justice 1993; Skolnick et al. 1988; Sanchez-Jankowski 1991). But St. Louis gangs contradict these stereotypical notions in many ways. Although every gang in our sample had some members who sold drugs (crack cocaine, in the main), gang involvement was generally poorly organized, episodic, nonmonopolistic, carried out by individuals or cliques on their own, and was not a rationale for the gang’s existence and continuance.

This section discusses gang and member involvement in drug sales, taking up, in order, questions of why drugs are important to St. Louis gangs, how much is earned, what is done with the money, internal gang organization, external organization and sources of supplies (including the role of drug houses), and the kinds of and relations with drug customers.

**Why Drugs and Gangs.** Our subjects sell illegal drugs because it is a source of money, provides prestige within the gang and the neighborhood, and, less importantly, is a source of sexual or other favors from customers. The opportunity to sell drugs, however, is *not* an important reason for *joining* a gang. Only six subjects said that they joined because of a “desire for material goods” (which most often involves the profits from drug sales).

Girls and having a little money, things like that. Selling dope like everybody. When you selling dope you got lots of money and for protection. (Male #015, “Karry,” fifteen-year-old Crenshaw Gangster Blood)

My interest was in getting paid man, strictly getting paid. I had a job at 13. I sold dope, cocaine, but it wasn’t a career thing; it was like for extra money. (Male #040, “Knowledge,” twenty-one-year-old Compton Gangster)

Nevertheless, once a member, making money through drug sales assumes greater importance. This is not surprising. In addition to the money, drug sales provide opportunities for increased interaction with older, more respected gang members. Seventy-nine subjects, for example, said that “to make money” was a good reason to belong to their gang, while forty-six said that “the gang provided an opportunity to buy drugs,”<sup>1</sup> and seventy-seven said that “the gang provided an opportunity to sell drugs.” When we asked “what is the most important reason to stay in the gang?” The two categories most often chosen were “opportunity to make money” and “opportunity to sell drugs” (virtually the same thing).

Figure 6.2 displays this graphically. The opportunities gangs provide

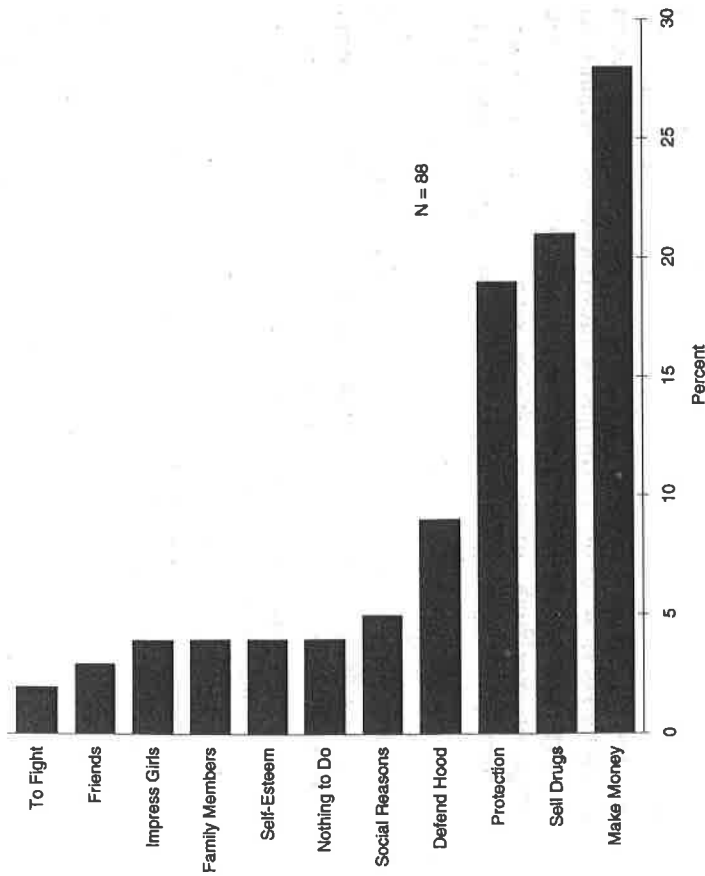


Figure 6.2 Reasons for Staying in the Gang

for selling drugs, then, are the most important reason for belonging for half of our subjects. But gangs do not control the retail drug market in St. Louis. Nor, as far as we can tell, are gangs the major wholesale source of drugs. While gang membership is not a prerequisite for selling drugs, neither is drug selling a prerequisite for gang membership. It is probable, in fact, that the majority of drug sellers in the St. Louis area are not gang members. One subject pointed this out when asked if his brother had prompted him to join the gang.

Naw. My brother was always dope dealer, just he didn't really like gangs, you know, he just sell dope and stuff like that, I mean he party wit us, into shootin and all that you know, but he didn't really, really run wit a gang, he was his own self. (Male #002, "Eric," sixteen-year-old Thundercat)

You can make money without them. Anybody can start selling drugs if they have the right amount of money and know what they are doing. (Male #005, "Antonio," nineteen-year-old 6th Street Hoover Crip)

Another indication that gangs do not dominate drug sales is that many (if not most) of the existing drug houses in gang neighborhoods are not operated by gang members. A third line of evidence is the extent of member involvement in drug sales. Several subjects denied ever selling drugs.

Only about me and this other girl who don't sell it. (Female #078, "Tina," fifteen-year-old Treetop Blood)

Other subjects said that they had quit selling drugs, often because of an arrest.

I stopped doing it though. I did it once in a while. (Male #008, "Robert," fourteen-year-old Compton Gangster)

I quit selling dope cause the police at my house ready to kick in the door. I don't want to bring that shit to my family. That's why I got to get a job. (Male #065, "BK Kill," nineteen-year-old North County Crips)

Eighteen subjects said that less than half of their fellow members were involved in drug sales, two subjects said that none of their fellow members were selling drugs, and only twenty-four subjects said that every member sold drugs. Furthermore, only eighteen subjects said that every member of their gang had to meet a sales quota.

**"I Got Me Two Golds"** Because drug money is such an important reason for belonging to a gang, we might have expected subjects to wax eloquent about their earnings and expenditures. But many subjects seemed reluctant, hesitant, or confused about their income from drug sales, as this almost comic discussion illustrates:

INT: About how much do you make per week selling drugs?

MALE #092, "Derone," twenty-one-year-old Rolling 60's Crip: About \$15,000 to \$20,000.

INT: The whole gang entirely?

092: No, just the people where I'm at, they make about \$15,000 to \$20,000. So I would say all around, you could probably make about \$150,000 a week if you go through all the sets where all the niggers be at. Some in Trailwoods, some in Seven Hills like that.

INT: About how much do you make per week?

092: How much do I make per week?

INT: Yeah.

092: Just my check plus like if I need some money for something, on my own I can go over there and hook up with \$500.

INT: So you make about \$500 a week selling drugs?

092: If I want to.

Twenty-six subjects could not (or did not) provide an answer to the question "How much money do you make every week from selling drugs?" Fifty-five subjects could not say how much money they made compared to other members; and twenty-nine subjects did not say how they spent money from drug sales. Aside from those members who denied selling drugs, this paucity of answers reflects the episodic and part-time nature of involvement in the drug market. Most of our subjects do not engage in steady, continuing drug sales — nor are they very reflective and attentive about the rewards of their activity, although one subject pointed out the falsity of popular views about gangs and drug sales.

MALE #029, "Randell," seventeen-year-old Thundercat: It ain't like on TV where they stereotype us from like L.A. and all that, people got Mercedes Benz and all that. They make about \$100 a day, \$200 at the most so it ain't no luxury money.

INT: We've had guys come up here and tell us that they drive convertible BMWs and stuff.

029: I'm talking about us. I'm not talking about if you are on a booming set like most likely they are or if they are Bloods.

Reported weekly compensation from drug sales ranges from the ridiculous of zero to the absurd of \$15,000. The median and modal category was \$500, with eleven subjects reporting that amount. Interestingly, this is approximately the figure reported by Peter Reuter and his associates in their study of the earning of street drug dealers (1990). But we suspect an enormous amount of braggadocio and income inflation in these answers.

INT: Well, how much do they make a week?

MALE #005, "Antonio," nineteen-year-old Sixth Street Hoover Crips: I estimate about \$2,000 a week. As long as they have money for their car they'll spend the rest of their money. They'll like spend \$1,500 and take the other \$1,500 and spent that up partying or buying clothes and all that.

About \$3,000 or \$4,000 in my pocket. (Male #014, "D. C.," sixteen-year-old Disciple)

In about a week, \$15,000. (Male #019, "Anthony," twenty-two-year-old Crip)

Certainly the appearance and demeanor of the vast majority of our subjects do not reflect a yearly income of \$26,000 or more, especially since the most popular way to spend drug money was buying clothes, as shown in Figure 6.3.

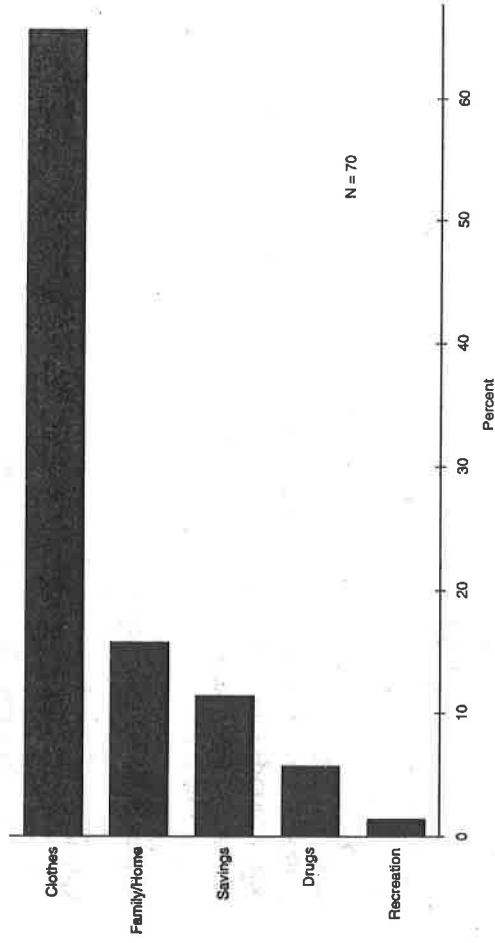


Figure 6.3 Spending Drug Money

Of the seventy subjects who answered this question, nearly two-thirds (forty-six) said that their major use of drug money was to buy clothes. Eleven subjects indicated they used the money for their family or home, three spent it on their kids, three gave it to family members, four were buying or had bought cars, and one used his drug takes for furniture.

Clothes, gold tooth in my mouth, buying my kids stuff. I wasn't working and the police took my two cars and that led to me pawning all my jewelry. Clothes, they got too little. Gave them to my little cousin. Buying shoes, going to the movies every day, getting drunk. When I'm selling drugs we all get my mom something. She don't ask, just like here mom, here's a fifty, go buy something nice. Or give it to our little sisters, like I want to go to the show, here are a couple of \$20s, buy you something. (Male #038, "G.O.D.," nineteen-year-old Compton Gangster)

I don't spend it. I pay lawyers so if I ever get caught I have enough money to get me out. (Male #072, "Blood," fifteen-year-old Swan Park 59 Blood)

Eight subjects said they saved their drug profits, although only one used an institutional deposit; the rest kept their money at home.

I ain't spent no money yet. I'm trying to get a job so I can tell my mamma I got a job. I put it [money from drug sales] in a shoe box in my closet. (Male #032, "Skonion," seventeen-year-old Thundercat)

INT: How do you spend the money that you make?



WHITE MALE #091, "Paul," eighteen-year-old 107 Hoover Crips: I save it, I'm buying a house.

INT: You the first one I ever heard say something smart. Most of them talk about buying tennis shoes.

091: I want a house specially made. It's gonna be a round house and it's gonna have a pool on the side.

Four subjects said they used drug money to buy more drugs (to recop) and thus continue their marketing efforts, and one member (perhaps the most honest of those who answered the question) said that he "spent it on women." Other subjects mentioned, as secondary uses, buying gold teeth, partying, or going to the movies and concerts.

I got me two golds [teeth] and I got me some clothes. (Male #067, "\$hortDog," fifteen-year-old Inglewood Family Blood)

Going crazy buying Nintendos and toys and VCRs and clothes. (Male #015, "Karry," fifteen-year-old Crenshaw Gangster Blood)

Our sense is that much of the money earned from drug sales was used to "keep the party going," especially since drug selling was often engaged in when gang members were low on money for necessary purchases such as beer (Wright and Decker 1994).

INT: Does the money they make go back into the gang or just into their own pockets?

010 MALE: "Jason C.," fifteen-year-old Compton Gangster: Some of it goes to the gang.

INT: What do you use the money for?

010: Beer.

Although forty-seven subjects said that some of the money made from selling drugs went for the use of the gang as a whole; such collective or organizational uses were decidedly secondary. Subjects mentioned using drug profits to purchase weapons for the group, to buy more drugs for resale or use, and to buy "party supplies."

INT: What do you buy together?

MALE #017, "Billy," twenty-one-year-old North Side Crip: Mostly equipment like TV, got to keep up on the news, see what's going on, on a different turf, stuff like that.

INT: Weapons?

017: Every so often. We got enough artillery that we need but it don't be used until every once in awhile when we have to use it.

Yeah, like you buy guns and cars. We need cars to get around. (Male #030, "Kenneth," nineteen-year-old Thundercat)

Instead of collective uses, the money made from drugs was usually kept by individual sellers, reflecting the fact that gang members rarely sell drugs in groups larger than pairs or trios as well as the fact that gangs in St. Louis exist primarily for noneconomic reasons. Members of the gangs we interviewed generally lacked the skills or commitment to organize for a long-range profit-making venture.

**Who Sells and How They Sell.** Drug sales are pervasive in our subjects' experiences, in the gang as well as in the places they stay and hang out. Only seven subjects said that there were no street drug sales in their neighborhood. Nevertheless, despite the invasive presence of the drug market and its importance to gangs, not all of our subjects sell drugs — twenty-one interviewees said that they were not involved at the time of our interview, often because of an arrest.<sup>2</sup>

About 80–20. Eighty percent do and twenty percent maybe on probation and have to get jobs. (Male #031, "John Doe," sixteen-year-old Thundercat)

Mostly all of us. At first everybody does but if they get caught they can't sell no more. (Male #082, "Dough Boy," fourteen-year-old B Gangster Disciple)

Even though not all of our subjects sell drugs (or at least were not at the time of our interview), the lure of money and prestige from drug sales is very powerful. Over three-fourths of our subjects estimated that half or more of the members of their gang were involved in the drug trade, as shown in Figure 6.4.

Twelve subjects did not answer this question (possibly because of their marginal or fringe status) and two said that no members of their gang were involved in the drug trades (an assertion denied, in one case, by the eight other Compton Gangsters we interviewed). Yet 70 percent of those who answered this question said that "most or "all" of their members were involved in drug trafficking, although subjects from the same gang gave widely different answers.

While most of the gang members we interviewed sell drugs, there is little indication that much pressure was put on members to sell. Only eighteen subjects said that everyone was expected to meet a sales quota, although these results are somewhat suspect, since we received contra-

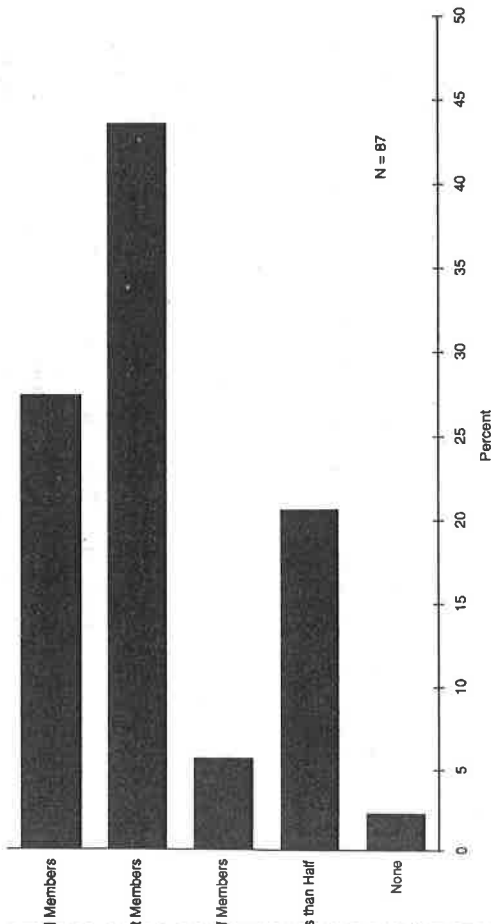


Figure 6.4 Number of Members Selling Drugs

ditory responses from members of the same gang. One Compton Gangster, for example, said that each member was expected to meet a quota, yet five indicated that was not true; four 107 Hoover Crips answered no to that question, while two answered yes; seven Inglewood Family Gangster Bloods answered no, and only one answered yes. This underscores the observation that there is considerable variation within gangs, often due to age differences.

Our subjects' confusion about how much money they make selling drugs, what they do with it, how many members sell, and whether members are expected to sell a certain amount is a reflection of the generally disorganized nature of these gangs' involvement and sporadic character of individual involvement in drug traffic. It is likely the case that one gang member is unaware of the involvement in drug sales of another member, a consequence of the lack of formal structure and organization within the gang. Perhaps nowhere is this more apparent than in the structure of selling and the allotment of sales turfs. Some members sketched out a division of labor in drug sales, with individuals assigned as rock-up men, runners, sellers, stash keepers, gun holders, and lookouts.

Somebody sell, somebody looking out, somebody standing by a gun, everybody be on the corner watching for the police. Some on this side, some on that side watching different directions and shit. (Male #036, "NA," eighteen-year-old Compton Gangster BIC)

Somebody will hold the money, somebody will hold the drugs, somebody will hold the gun and look out, some persons will watch the street and look out for the police. (Male #030, "Kenneth," nineteen-year-old Thundercat)

One person will run and give the person the dope and he'll run back. The other person will go and get the money and run back. Some people go get the dope and say come talk to him and he'll give you \$20, you give him the rock and go. (Male #015, "Karry," fifteen-year-old Crenshaw Gangster Blood)

Two subjects described how much their drug sales resembled a business:

Records, salesmen, muscles, same as a legal business. (Male #019, "Anthony," twenty-two-year-old Crip)

MALE #041: "C. K.," twenty-two-year-old Blood: You got enforcers, you got people that are like the treasurer, we have certain person just to hold the money because we might fuck up on the money.

INT: He count the money?

041: Yeah, he count the money and keep it. Then we got the person that deals with the hook up with the big person. You got the people that go get the guns.

INT: You got people that actually sell it too, right?

041: Sell what, guns?

INT: No, the dope.

041: Yeah. Everybody sell the dope.

INT: Any more: enforcer, treasurer, connections.

041: That's basically about it.

And a final subject described a well-thought-out delivery method.

Yeah, it's like my uncle used to work at Union Station and he was a valet parker. People that come there he ask them do they want some of this and they say yeah and then he will come to Laclede Town to get some from me and take it back, stuff like that. It be in their car when they come back from Union Station. (Male #004, "Anthony," seventeen-year-old Thundercat)

But most subjects could not or would not delineate a division of labor in drug sales. Only forty-three subjects could identify different jobs in selling drugs, and their level of specificity was, to say the least, less than detailed. Twenty-seven specified a "seller," eleven mentioned "lookouts," and four said "runner" in answer to our questions. Many seemed confused by the notion that there could be different jobs when selling drugs.

INT: What are the different jobs in selling drugs?  
 FEMALE #078: "Tina," fifteen-year-old Hoover Crip: What you mean? What else can you do besides that?  
 INT: What are the different jobs in selling drugs?  
 MALE #092: "Derone," twenty-one-year-old Rolling 60's Crips: Different jobs? Sell it to whoever you want to.  
 INT: I mean how many people do you need to sell drugs? Do you need like three people to sell drugs?  
 092: No, it don't matter, that's just money, it don't matter because you can get one seller and still make as much.  
 INT: So you don't need runners or watch out for anybody?  
 092: No. Police don't know what the fuck they're doing. You can go in the backyard and sell it out there.

One subject reacted with scorn to the thoughtless behavior of his fellow members who sold drugs.

No, everybody just out to make their money. They run out there like idiots instead of having a plan. (Male #005, "Antonio," nineteen-year-old 6th Street Hoover Crip)

In general, drug sales seem to be fairly disorganized as to time and sales structures. Many subjects said that they sold drugs when they wanted to make money, not at any fixed time. Subjects also indicated that selling on the street was fairly chaotic, with lots of individuals involved and with little coherence to the tasks involved in such sales.

Another way gang drug sales are disorganized is the lack of central direction. Although a third of our subjects said that their main suppliers were also leaders in the gang, forty-three subjects said that was not true.

INT: The guy who supplies you with the drugs, is he a leader in the group?  
 MALE #028: "Killa 4 Ren," fifteen-year-old 187 Crip: No, he ain't even a Crip, he ain't nothing. He just sells dope.

Again, members of the same gang contradicted each other over this point. Ten members of the Rolling 60's Crips, for example, said that their main suppliers were not leaders in the gang, while five said they were. Five 107 Hoover Crips said that their main suppliers were leaders, while one said they were not; and similarly, six Inglewood Family Gangster Bloods identified their main suppliers as leaders, while two denied their leadership role. In addition, while fifty-one subjects said that selling drugs increased a member's influence and prestige in the gang, thirty-

four subjects denied that it did. Our sense is that gang members who sell large amounts of drugs or who can control distribution are influential because of the money they can spend or the help they can provide to other members but that it is not the only characteristic that leads to increased influence and importance in a gang. As with any organization, however loose its structure, those who can deliver the goods gain a number of important advantages.

**Drug Turfs.** Although one subject said that "anyone who wants to can sell drugs on our turf," most gang members aver that their set maintains fairly exclusive drug-selling turfs.

INT: Do you allow other people to sell drugs on the street?

MALE #032: "Skonion," seventeen-year-old Laclede Town Thundercat:  
 Not in Laclede Town.

INT: Is there a particular area of turf that's important to your gang?

MALE #041: "C. K.," twenty-two-year-old Blood: Yeah.

INT: What spot is that? What is it for?

041: Drug traffic. Not nothing but drugs.

INT: So the drug areas you ain't going to give up and they got to be run right?

041: Yeah.

INT: No bullshit in between on this deal.

041: No bullshit.

Encroachment on another set's drug turf is, in fact, a major cause of gang fights. Almost all subjects who discussed drug turf mentioned the use of violence (or threats) as the main method of dealing with interlopers.

MALE #017: "Billy," twenty-one-year-old North Side Crip: Yeah, we have to push them out of our area. As long as they're not in our area and they on their turf doing their thing, that's cool.  
 INT: You told me about a fight about a year ago. Was that somebody trying to sell drugs?

017: Yeah, trying to sell drugs. It was a stranger. That's what we don't care about, he can take his business somewhere else. Come on our turf then you messing up our thing.

INT: What if somebody from another gang comes on you all set, what happens?

MALE #061: "K-Red," fifteen-year-old Inglewood Family Gangster Blood: They get shot at, get jumped on.

Some favored (or infamous) locations for drug sales are shared – with more than one set of allied gangs selling drugs – and such locations may also change hands.

INT: Have you all had to defend you all turf in the last year?

FEMALE #096: "L. C.," twenty-three-year-old Inglewood Bounty Hunter:  
No. Well, yes we have.

INT: What did you all have to do?

096: We had to defend our turf out selling the drugs cause we had people comin' in and try to take over.

One infamous site in St. Louis is a place called the Horseshoe. In the fall of 1991 that area was controlled by Blood gangs, as "Lil-B Dog" explains:

INT: Do you guys have a particular turf that's important to you?

MALE #070: "Lil-B Dog," fifteen-year-old Inglewood Family Gangster:  
Yeah. It's on Jennings Station Road and over in the Horseshoe.

INT: Are you guys the only Blood set over in the Horseshoe?

070: No. There's a lot more. 62 Brims over there, a lot more.

INT: Why is it important to you guys?

070: Cause everybody come over there and we sell our dope over there.

But within the gang, there is usually no fixed or permanent location within the larger area. Individuals or small groups select their own sales site:

INT: How do you divide the area up amongst the gang members? You can't all be selling on the same street corner.

MALE #050: "John," nineteen-year-old Rolling 60's Crip: No. You make your own set and I make my own set.

**External Sources, Suppliers, and Drug Houses.** Discussions of vertical distribution and higher-level drug trafficking were usually avoided by our subjects, most probably because they lacked the relevant knowledge (less probably is that they were too scared to discuss the topic with us). While a third of our subjects said that gang leaders were the main suppliers of drugs, forty-three subjects said that gang leaders were not their supply source, and twenty-three subjects did not know whether the main suppliers of drugs were leaders in their own gangs.

The people who's not in the gang, they the ones with the best connections. (Male #005, "Antonio," nineteen-year-old 6th Street Hoover Crip)

The main suppliers are in our group but not leaders. (Male #040, "Knowledge," twenty-one-year-old Compton Gangster)

Higher-level drug dealers were often mentioned, but little solid information was provided about them.

INT: The guy who supplies you with the drugs, is he a leader in the group?

MALE #028: "Killa 4 Ren," fifteen-year-old 187 Crip: No, he ain't even a Crip, he ain't nothing. He just sells dope.

INT: Where do those guys get those drugs? Who supplies them?

MALE #029: "Randell," seventeen-year-old Thundercat: White man out in the county.

INT: How do they get them? Does the white man come around with a bunch of rocks?

029: Yeah. Pounds, rock it up yourself.

INT: Your gang rocks it up?

029: The people who sell it.

Drug houses exist in most gang neighborhoods, but only a few gang members are involved in either selling out of houses, protecting those in their neighborhood, or competing with drug houses. Seventy-one subjects said there were drug houses in their neighborhood (and twenty-one said there were not). Some subjects boasted about the number of drug houses their gang had.

Yeah, we got about nine rock houses, nine. (Male #001, "Mike-Mike," twenty-year-old Thundercat)

Yeah, a couple of different ones. There be about three rock houses. (Male #012, "Lance," twenty-year-old West Side Mob member)

And some seemed confused about our question:

No. We have like vacant buildings we sit up in, get us a long table, everybody just go scatter around the corner watching them. (Male #003, "Jerry," eighteen-year-old Thundercat)

When gangs do run houses, they protect them as if they were drug turfs.

MALE #015: "Karry," fifteen-year-old Crenshaw Gangster Blood: Dope house is the most important. That's how you make your living.

INT: If somebody from another gang tried to come into your dope house or come on the property of your dope house, what would happen to them?

015: He would get shot.

The general lack of involvement in drug houses on the part of gang members reflects the disorganized, sporadic nature of drug sales on their part. Maintaining a drug house requires a commitment of time and purpose inconsistent with the life the majority of our subjects chose to live.

**What's Sold and To Whom.** The most frequently mentioned drug being sold on the streets is crack cocaine. Ninety-four subjects mentioned this as a drug sold by themselves or in their neighborhood as shown in Figure 6.5. Thirty-six subjects also mentioned cocaine.

Marijuana (or weed) was mentioned fifty-eight times, although some subjects were rather confused about what weed actually is.

INT: What drugs are being sold?

FEMALE #078: "Tina," fifteen-year-old Treetop Blood: Coke, crack, marijuana.

INT: Anything else?

078: Weed, that's all.

INT: Weed is marijuana?

078: No.

INT: What is marijuana then?

078: I don't know.

INT: What is weed?

078: Stuff you smoke.

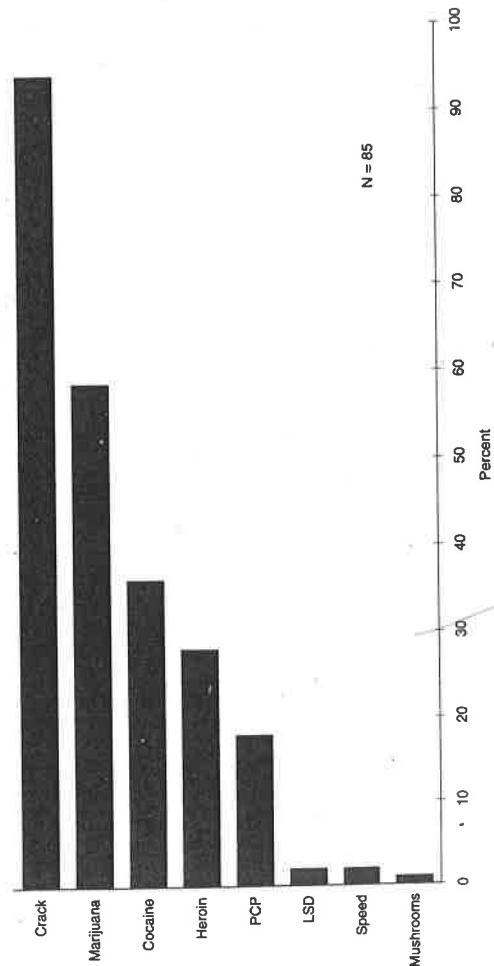


Figure 6.5 Type of Drugs Being Sold

And one subject averred that weed was no longer sold seriously by anyone.

INT: Does the gang sell more drugs since you joined?

MALE #012: "Lance," twenty-year-old West Side Mob member: Yeah man. I'm talking about hard drugs. Ain't nobody sell marijuana no more, hard drugs.

Heroin was mentioned twenty-nine times, although it appears that few, if any, of our subjects sell heroin and many are unfamiliar with the drug. One mention, for example, was made of "capsules" (not the form in which the drug is sold) of black tar being sold on the street. PCP was mentioned eighteen times — it seems most frequently to have been sold mixed with cocaine or weed.

MALE #004: "Anthony," seventeen-year-old Thundercat: Heroin, cocaine, marijuana, and Dips.

INT: What's a Dip?

004: It's like dipped in . . .

INT: Wack?

004: Yeah.

INT: Like a wack bomb, PCP.

No, we really don't fuck with that [PCP] no more. We used to sell that shit, that shit make you go crazy, man. I won't go around that shit no more man. (Male #012, "Lance," twenty-year-old West Side Mob member)

Only two mentions were made of speed or amphetamines being sold in St. Louis. Two mentions were also made of LSD (and one of mushrooms), although the subject who did so viewed those as "county" drugs, items being sold to white kids in more affluent neighborhoods.

As far as the quantities being sold on the street, the modal category was \$20 to \$25 rocks of cocaine, mentioned by forty-two subjects. Two subjects said that larger quantities, fifties, were being sold, and nine subjects said that the normal amounts were smaller, sixteenths, or as they are known on the street, teenagers. Overall, these results are consistent with a number of indicators of drug use in St. Louis, including those from the Drug Use Forecasting program and the Drug Abuse Warning Network.

Figure 6.6 displays our subjects' perception of the race of drug customers. Both black and white customers are reported, although three times as many subjects said their customers were mostly or all black than said customers were mostly all white.



018: All blacks. Half of the black city of St. Louis smoke coke. You got some whites but basically you got all blacks.

Drug customers are generally treated poorly by our subjects, who spoke of committing serious violence against them.

That's why, with me, you know, I let em know right now ya'll ain't gonna take no stuff off nobody. When people come down here like this lady yesterday, she wanted to buy some rocks. And she, she played like she had a pistol, boy they whipped her. I say man don't do that lady like that. But she had a gun for real, tried to rob one of my little partners. I told 'em to kill her. (Male #001, "Mike-Mike," twenty-year-old Thundercat)

INT: Do the rock stars sometimes try to pull off without paying?

MALE #051: "David," eighteen-year-old Blood: Oh yeah, they try to do that a lot.

INT: How do you all stop that from happening?

051: Shoot them.

Subjects also described how they stole from customers, borrowed their cars, demanded sexual favors in return for drugs.

MALE #028: "Killa 4 Ren," fifteen-year-old 187 Crip: Yeah, they'll do anything. One lady do it with the dog.

INT: Just for a rock?

028: Yeah.

INT: You ever seen that?

028: Yeah. She took off all her clothes and was kissing him.

INT: How old was she?

028: About 22. She was young.

Yeah, straight up smokers. If they good looking we probably mess around with them for a minute. (Male #037, "Big Money," twenty-two-year-old Compton Gangster)

We have little evidence about whether some gangs in our sample are more involved in drug sales than others, although it is probably true that some are. There is a wide-spread perception, held by at least one-quarter of our subjects (from both Blood and Crip gangs) that gangs affiliated with Bloods are more involved in drug sales and more focused on making money than are Crip groups. This may be true in St. Louis, but it is more likely just an item of folklore about Los Angeles gangs. No single gang exhibits a monolithic drug sales organization or much more formal structure than any other gang we have information about.

Within gangs there is much variation, as discussed above, in the

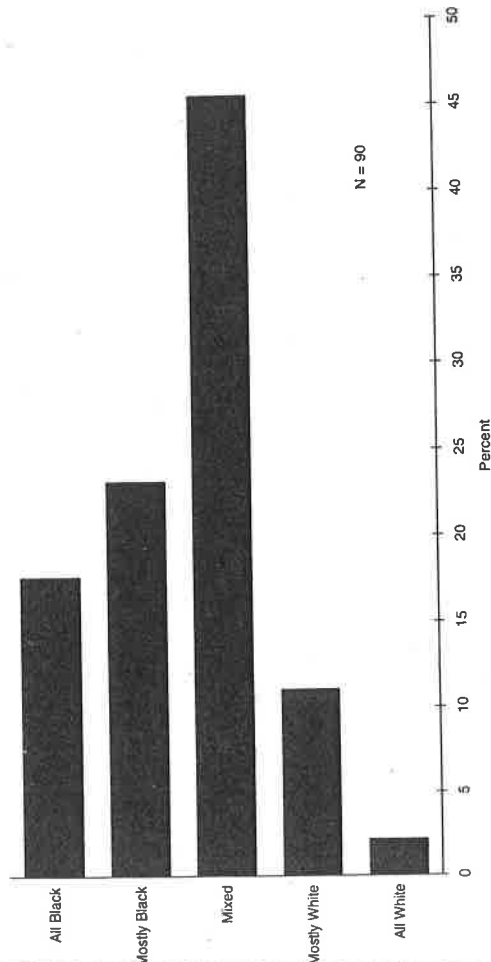


Figure 6.6 Race of Drug Customers

While this finding is consistent with what we perceive the local, neighborhood nature of St. Louis drug sales to be, subjects' statements often portrayed a more diverse customer base.

Naw, it's people from everywhere. I got some, I got lawyers and doctors and nurses, everybody be buying coke from me. (Male #001, "Mike-Mike," twenty-year-old Thundercat)

Some people sell to fiends, some people sell to old men, mammas, family members. (Male #068, "CK," sixteen-year-old Piru 104 Blood)

As we have mentioned, drug customers, especially crack fiends, are not held in high regard by our subjects. Although half of our subjects said there was competition for customers, this does not seem to be because buyers are a valued, long-term resource, whose favor and custom should be carried. Instead, most competition seemed to be episodic and spur of the moment (e.g., cutting out another gang member from a sale) and also reflective of the disorganized and chaotic state of the market.

MALE #018: "Maurice," twenty-year-old 107 Hoover Crip: Fiends. You can tell a fiend a mile away. Somebody who looks like they lost a lot of weight, got on some raggedy clothes, they really don't care about theyself. They dirty all the time.

INT: Is it mostly blacks?

to dramatic swings of interest and attention. This reflects the loose organizational structure of the gang and independence of its members. Apparently, drugs are a major source of money, though not in the amounts popular stereotypes would have us believe (nor, probably, in the amounts reported by gang members). Drug sales also figure prominently as causes of gang violence — roughing up customers, chasing off competitors, and defending turf — the topic of the next section.

### “Piling on Crabs and Shooting Slobs”: Violence and Gangs

Beating Crabs. If it wasn't for beating Crabs I don't think that I would be in a gang right now. (Male #057, “Smith & Wesson,” fifteen-year-old Neighborhood Posse Blood)

[Our] group is the Rolling 60's. Basically we're just a fighting crew. What we do is to fight and make money. We rough ourselves up. Get ourselves tougher cause we feel we better than all the rest. So like if a Hoover comes up and he talks shit then we have to whup his ass because Hoovers think they crazier than us but we the craziest but we know what we doing. We like Al Capone back in his days, suited up and know what he doing. We just normally kick ass. (Male #092, “Derone,” twenty-one-year-old Rolling 60's Grip)

Violence and violent crime is a central part of our subjects' lives in manifold ways. The “violence of everyday life,”<sup>3</sup> for example, is excessively high in their neighborhoods and families. City rates of child abuse, forcible theft, rape, assaults, and homicide are well above those for the St. Louis metropolitan area and the nation. Although we did not systematically explore the level of family and neighborhood violence in our interviews, enough background information allows us to infer its existence at high levels. Eight of our subjects mentioned having a relative who died from gunshot wounds or some other form of homicide; *more than half knew another gang member who had been shot*. Eleven of our subjects are now dead. Further evidence is apparent, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, by the importance of threat and the need for protection in generating gangs and membership.

A second arena in which violence and conflict are central is in the nature and characteristics of gangs and gang membership. Frederic Thrasher, writing nearly seventy years ago, observed that what boys receive from membership in gangs is

amount, time, and organization of drug sales. All of the gangs in our sample contain particular cliques and individuals who are more heavily involved in drug trafficking, both as sellers and suppliers. To some extent this is age dependent, as well as dependent on length of membership. Older members, and those who have been associated longer, are more involved in drug sales. They possess the necessary social capital — experience, motivation, social ties within and without the gang — that allow greater involvement. This form of social capital is crucial for successful (or even intermittently regular) retail sales, since ties to a social network are necessary for connecting with a supplier.

As we have discussed, gangs do not control the drug market in the St. Louis area. They do not have a retail monopoly, they are not the major suppliers (and in most cases are not even intermediate suppliers), and are essentially at the lowest level of retail distribution. Residential drug houses (such as the crack houses of New York) are rarely kept by our subjects. Although several members boasted of the number of drug houses their gang ran, the typical situation was the temporary or intermittent use of vacant premises, and almost all subjects who discussed the subject said that sales out of their own residence was a stupid and dangerous way to do business.

Most gang drug sales occur on the street, or as we shall see in Chapter 7, in school. Street corners, cul-de-sacs, protected locations with good avenues of escape are favored. Gang members typically sell by themselves or in pairs or trios within their own neighborhood. Guns (and drugs) are normally stashed separately and not on the sellers' person. But there is usually little organization of how sales are handled. Only four or five gangs seemed to have any rational, formal role differentiation; and that is probably applicable only to particular cliques within the gang.

Profits from drug sales do not go to any kind of common fund or gang treasury. A member's earnings accrue only to the seller and are spent on the typical purchases of teenagers (clothes, entertainment, jewelry, impressing others) or to buy more drugs for sale but seldom saved or invested for capital formation. Gang members may exist in a capitalist economy, but their behaviors are those of consumers, not entrepreneurs.

Gang members in St. Louis are, obviously, involved in crack and other drug sales in a major way. Although few of our subjects said they were attracted to the gang by the opportunity to sell drugs, once in, this opportunity to make money assumed much greater importance. But, as with many other aspects of their lives and their activities as gang members, their participation in drug sales is episodic, loosely organized, and subject

the thrill and zest of participation in common interest, more especially in corporate action, in hunting, capture, conflict, flight and escape. *Conflict with other gangs and the world about them* furnishes the occasion for many of their exciting group activities. (1927, 37, emphasis added).

This finding is just as true today and, in fact, it is echoed in our subjects' own words. Conflict, especially the use of lethal violence, not only differentiates these gangs and their members from other delinquent groups (and nondelinquent groups), it also epitomizes both the nature of St. Louis youth gangs and their appeal for our subjects.

That's what it originated from, a clique. Say we all together one day walking down the street and someone says such and such jumped me one day. Let's go find him. They came back with a whole bunch of people and got to fighting each other. Eventually those two sides decided they didn't like each other. [Our gang] originated when a person got killed out there. Before that we was just all friends hanging out. One night everybody drinking and a car rolled back and some Slobs got out and started shooting. The person who got shot is dead. When he got killed, that's when it all originated. From that one incident. (Female #046, "Lady Tee," sixteen-year-old 74 Hoover Crip)

Because we get together and everybody drinks and then we want to holler at some girls. Some girls don't want to talk so we disrespect them or call them a name. After that they go get they brothers or whatever and they be the opposite from us and they hurt one of us and we go hurt one of them. (Male #056, "Tony," seventeen-year-old 19th Street Hoover Crip)<sup>4</sup>

The observation by Thrasher that conflict with other groups often was combined with the pursuit of "thrills" is echoed in the following quote.

Somebody was playing around in the car but we knew them. They cut they lights off and started driving down. We started shooting at they car and then they came out. We seen them duck down and then they got back up and we knew them and they was just playing around. (Male #074, "Shon," sixteen-year-old Crenshaw Mob Gangster)

Every act of violence by gang members embodies a salient characteristic of St. Louis gangs — protection from real and apparent threats of physical violence and revenge or retaliation for real or perceived injuries and insults. "Jumping in" an initiate not only replicates a real event often committed against gang members; it also experientially shows the new member what he will be protected from and what he will be revenged for. This ritual also reassures old members that the initiate has the courage

and ability to defend or revenge them if it is ever necessary. Other violent acts by gang members — drive-bys, drug turf protection, beating up welshing customers — serve as deterrents and warnings. These acts advise to all that the gang intends to protect its own and how far its members will go in standing up for each other.

Finally, violence is endemic in a third arena, their individual status and role behaviors as gang members. Members are expected to always be ready to commit violence, to participate in violent acts, and to have engaged in some sort of violence in their initiation. Several measures support this assertion. Fewer than five subjects (all female) had never been in a gang-related fight of some sort. Thirteen subjects, at the time of our interviews, volunteered that they had been shot.<sup>5</sup> Three subjects, in fact, had each been shot twice in their lives to that point. Even more startling, eleven of the ninety-nine active members we interviewed are no longer alive — victims of homicide. Eleven dead out of ninety-nine yields a homicide rate of more than 11,000 homicides per 100,000 population — a rate more than 1,000 times greater than the U.S. rate. Even annualizing that rate over the five years since we started interviewing (2,222 per 100,000), this is a startling statistic. By comparison, the 1992 uniform Crime Reports show a national homicide rate of 9.3 per 100,000, a rate of 15.7 for the St. Louis Metropolitan area, and a rate of 57 per 100,000 for St. Louis City. The most relevant comparison group would be the national population of gang members, unavailable for obvious reasons. The best available comparison to our subjects is young black males of similar ages. In 1990 the homicide rate for black males aged fifteen to nineteen was 116 per 100,000 and for black males aged twenty to twenty-four it was 162 per 100,000. The rate of violent death for our subjects is thus thirteen times greater than the rate for twenty to twenty-four year-old black males if we annualize, and *sixty-eight times higher* as an annual rate. A grim statistic indeed.

In the remainder of this chapter we discuss the violence and violent criminality engaged in by our subjects. We start with a statistical overview of what interviews tell us about the kinds and frequency of violence and the possession and use of weapons. We then provide a qualitative discussion of kinds, causes and circumstances of violent acts committed by our subjects followed by an examination of levels and frequency. We conclude with our subjects' views on violence, responses that convey a sense of fear, fatalism, and enjoyment.

**"We Just Grew Up Fightin'."** Violence is an ordinary part of most of our subjects lives, although it obviously intensifies once they joined a gang and

become more involved in gang activities. One subject described why he joined the gang in this way.

We just grew up like that. We grew up fightin, if, I don't know, we just grew up fightin and everybody hangin around so they decided to call they self somethin since we hung around like that went out doin things and stuff. (Male #002, "Eric," sixteen-year-old Thundercat)

Violence in and by the gang starts early for our subjects: seventy subjects said they were "jumped in" for their initiation.

Well, first we talk to them about what we do all that type of stuff. The next day he's gotta wear all blue and stand in a circle and everybody just rush him all at one time and then back off of him and see if he still standing. If he drop he got to get back up and take it again. That's how you initiate a man. I say about nine people around and just rush him with heads and if he fall he's got to get back up. If he want out he want out, let go of the circle and walk out. (Male #003, "Jerry," eighteen-year-old Thundercat)

A group of niggers, you in the middle of a circle, then all the sudden they rush you and you have to fight back. They have to beat you until you bleed. If you survive, you win. Then they give you hugs and stuff and call you Cuz. (Male #044, "Paincuzz," sixteen-year-old Rolling 60's Crip)

"Beating in" has different levels of intensity and often may only be the start of internal gang violence.

No, see we got older people. They tied them down to a telephone pole and beat the hell out of them. Fuck that. Yeah, tied to a telephone pole. There be about six niggers, sometimes more than six. The younger ones just take a little beat down, not like what they go through. At least we didn't get tied down. [To become a full fledged member] you got to get a tattoo on your arm and then you got to get your Blood name carved in your left arm. Sometimes they get the end of a hangar, the hook, and they put it up under the fire for real long time and then they carve that shit in your arm. Yeah, I got one. (Male #068, "CK," sixteen-year-old Piru 104 Blood)

Eight subjects said they had to shoot someone for their initiation.

I met these Bloods and they said do you want to get in? I had to get these Crabs and that type of stuff. I ran and got my .38, I ran by, I'm a Blood so I said what's up Fuz and they said no Cuz, I started shooting, pow, pow and we drove off. And that's how I became one. I don't know if I hit them or not. (Male #057, "Smith & Wesson," fifteen-year-old Neighborhood Posse Blood)

His name was Eliminator. He was 13. We asked him how he wanted to get in and he said he wanted to do a ride-by and shoot the person who killed his brother. So he did a ride-by shooting and killed him. (Male #069, "X-Men," fourteen-year-old Inglewood Family Gangster)

Pop somebody. Not no ride-bys, you walk up to them and you pop them. You got to do it, just get it over with no hesitation. (Male #086, "Gunn," nineteen-year-old Rolling 60's Crip)

And several subjects mentioned other kinds of violence involved in joining a gang.

To be a Crip you have to put your blue rag on your head and wear all blue and go in a Blood neighborhood that is the hardest of all of them and walk through the Blood neighborhood and fight Bloods. If you come out without getting killed that's the way you get initiated. Another set say you got to swim across some river or something like that. If you make it back you in there or you got to smoke somebody in your family or something like that. (Male #084, "Rolo," fifteen-year-old Rolling 60's Crip)

These acts at initiation serve to legitimate and normalize violence within the gang.

Not every gang member we interviewed was excessively violent.

I had to rob somebody but I didn't do it. I just told them a lie. (Male #052, "Jonathan," fifteen-year-old 107 Hoover Crip)

Well first somebody had to pick a fight and get in trouble with a teacher but I didn't get in trouble with the teacher because it was a sub and they don't do nothing to us really. Just picking a fight with somebody and getting in trouble with a teacher and stuff. (Female #078, "Tina," fifteen-year-old Treetop Blood)

Eighty-four subjects mentioned "fighting" as "something they did with their gang," while nineteen said it was what they did the most with their fellow members. Seventy-six subjects said that a good reason to belong was to "defend their neighborhood," and eighty-four said that they belonged for "protection." And if their neighborhoods are unsafe and in need of protection, the supervised confines of educational establishments were not much better. Seventy-eight subjects said there were gang fights at their schools, eighty-three said that weapons (usually guns) were brought to school, and thirty-eight said that weapons were used at school.

Gun possession and use is another window into our subjects' violent propensities and opportunities. Guns were the overwhelming weapon

and he hit him, he cut him all up in his rear. (Male #092, "Derone," twenty-one-year-old Rolling 60's Crip)

Our subjects most recent arrests also show how commonplace violence is: Seventeen were for assault, six for peace disturbances, three for weapons violations, two for obstructing police, and one was for homicide. Nine subjects had an assault conviction; six had weapons violations convictions; one had a manslaughter conviction. Ten subjects had done time for assault, four for weapons violations, and one for manslaughter.

**"We Be Fighting All The Time": Causes and Kinds of Violence.** While we would like to report that our subjects sharply differentiate their use of lethal versus nonlethal violence according to targets, too many subjects' descriptions invalidate the distinction. It is our impression that violence that lacks a gang motive or is unrelated to the gang is less likely to be lethal.

Yeah, I, uh close as I shot somebody was on the forty-one Lee, cause an old man got on the bus, no the man wasn't old, but he was drunk, and he kept on playing wit me, and I told 'em he better get away from me, then he kept on hittin on me, I say hey man, you better go on man, and I kept tellin' the bus driver and the bus driver wouldn't do nothin, and then so he grabbed me like this but he was standing up and I was sittin down and he grabbed me and had me in a hold, and I pulled out the gun, a .32 and popped him in his stomach. Naw. I jumped off the bus. The bus driver wouldn't let me off the bus, so I said you don't let me off the bus you gonna get shot, so he opened up the bus. (Male #002, "Eric," sixteen-year-old Thundercat)

We were at the White Castle one day and one of my partners stepped on this guy's foot. He said excuse me and he had his friend with him and my partner said I said excuse me, I'm sorry just like that. He punched my partner in the face and we just got to fighting. I didn't know my partner had this pistol in his pocket and shot him in his leg, paralyzed him. (Male #040, "Knowledge," twenty-one-year-old Compton Gangsters)

Violence by and towards gang members seems to lurk around every corner. Sometimes it is a sudden unexpected eruption, sometimes the result of long simmering feuds or disagreements that are not seemingly gang motivated or related.

I was down in the projects, Vaughn, this girl was [performing oral sex]. She was doing this to everybody. The next day my brother came and got me and we went on the south side. She was there. I got out of the car, I asked her could I have it. She got to swinging on me. I hit her a couple of times, my

of choice for gang-motivated and gang-related violence. Eighty subjects said they owned guns (two subjects reported they owned over one hundred guns), and the mean number of guns reported was four and a half (the mode was one). Only 192 guns were specifically identified by our subjects, and 75 percent of those were handguns of one sort or another. Subjects also mentioned owning other kinds of weapons besides firearms.

Hand grenades? I got about fifty of them. (Male #001, "Mike-Mike," twenty-year-old Thundercat)

Sixty-six subjects said they had used their guns at least once. When we asked what caused them to use their gun most recently, forty-seven gave no answer. Of the fifty-two subjects who answered, three gave the relatively innocuous answer of "celebrating the New Year." Twenty-six subjects had last used their guns in a gang fight, four in a drive-by shooting; four because a drug customer tried to rob them; four because they were attacked by a stranger; and eleven subjects gave a variety of miscellaneous answers (e.g., robberies, shooting at gang rivals who were passing by, etc.).

Other weapons besides guns were mentioned, though infrequently. Eighty-eight subjects (97 percent of those who answered this question) said that gang violence involved weapons, and the same number said that "guns" were the weapons used in violence (only two subjects mentioned that gang violence involved bats or sticks). Nevertheless, one subject mentioned rather unusual weapons involved in gang conflicts:

Guns, knives, we even had a boy that had arrows. I ain't bullshitting you. He come up there with motherfuckin' arrows, thought he was Rambo. Sat in a motherfuckin' tree started shooting at us. Hit one of my boys dead in his leg, went right through it. The last fight that broke out was the time that cat was sitting up in the tree. He was sittin' in a distant tree. He had a three-string bow, real powerful. He sat up there and had a scope on it and everything. I don't know who he was tryin' to tag. The first time we heard it I said I could have sworn I heard something. It missed us. The second time it hit my boy dead in his leg and went right through it. It was like the end with the feathers was sittin' right at the top and the rest was sticking way out. He ran and he broke it then he fell. I said damn, somebody's shootin' arrows at our ass. So then my boy got up and he started looking around, looking everywhere, looked up in the tree and saw him shooting arrows. He climbed in the tree, swung that nigger down and beat him with his own bow and shit. (Male #092, "Derone," twenty-one-year-old Rolling 60's Crip)

The only time that we have killed this one boy named Kevin. He was a Treetop and he was runnin' through the woods and my boy had a machete



brother hit her a couple of times. I got tired of whupping her. I got tired of hitting her so I shot her. I didn't kill her though. She still live around the corner. [I shot her] in the side. (Male #034, "Lil Gene Mack," eighteen-year-old 19th Street Rolling 60's Crip)

[The last fist fight] that was yesterday at the community center. It was just talk about one of the guys in the neighborhood. The crazy thing about it was it was amongst us. One of the guys said that he had fucked this guy's sister and he heard it and they got to fighting. It was harmless. He was just defending his sister's name. He can't keep her pants up. (Male #040, "Knowledge," twenty-one-year-old Compton Gangster)

Just hanging around with gang members can lead to violence:

INT: How old were you when you first started hanging out with them?

MALE #053, "Jimmy," eighteen-year-old 107 Hoover Crip: About 14.

INT: How old were you when you first became a member?

053: Not too long ago, when I turned 18.

INT: They let you escape that long without really joining up?

053: Yeah. When I used to hang with them about four years ago some dude threw some gasoline on me and set me on fire.

INT: That's how you started hanging out with them?

053: Yeah, been shot twice.

INT: So they threw gasoline on you and shot you a couple of times and that's one of the reasons you started hanging out with the 107s?

053: Yeah.

Gang membership – claiming or perpetrating – increases the potential and actuality of violence. Initiations are violent. Colors make a person a target, a victim, and a victimizer.

MALE #050, "John," nineteen-year-old Rolling 60's Crip: One day I was on the Kingshighway bus and I was going to go get my Social Security card. I was walking down Kingshighway. I wasn't into no gang and these dudes walked up to me. They was Bloods, we call them Slobs. They walked up to me like what's up Blood. You in the wrong hustle. I ain't with that gang stuff cuz. So they was gonna fight me. So I say fuck that. Went back on the north side, got drunk and then got up with the Crips. Just like that.

INT: Because the Bloods wanted to beat you up?

050: Yeah. I wear blue so I'm going to get beat up anyways so I say I just deal with the Crips.

Even going out to meet interviewers can be dangerous.

I got shot by a guy two weeks ago. I was walking out the door to meet Dietrich on the corner and I got shot. I was out front of the door and some of my boys was behind me. I don't know who it was. It had to be somebody outside of the neighborhood. Over in the city, the city is about three blocks from us, no North Side Bloods. It must have been somebody from over there. We was meeting Dietrich on the corner, we was walking out the door. I heard a gun shot and I got hit and I knew it. I had walked back in the house like I forgot something and raised my shirt up and it was bloody and I said I got shot. So my brother called an ambulance and I went back on outside and put my head down. I thought I was going to faint. [I got shot] at the bottom of my heart. It went through my liver and my stomach and my diaphragm. Someone from the city, I figure whoever walked out the door first was going to be shot. There's Bloods in the city, it had to be Bloods. (Male #024, "Hamilton," sixteen-year-old 107 Hoover Gangster Crip)

Disrespect has to be corrected and answered – physically. And drug turfs are defended; customers who cheat you are violently punished.

A guy came in, he had the wrong colors on, he got to move out. He got his head split open with a sledgehammer, he got two ribs broken, he got his face torn up. We dropped him off on the other side of town. If he did die, it was on the other side of town. (Male #013, "Darryl," twenty-nine-year-old Blood)

I had to pistol whip a guy, I shot him in the knee. Since then he never came back. (Male #017, "Billy," twenty-one-year-old North Side Crip)

If a member becomes a victim, revenge is necessary. And this revenge is schismogenic, resulting in an increasing cycle of retaliation and revenge.

INT: What happened yesterday?

MALE #039, "Kaons BIC," seventeen-year-old Compton Gangster: This dude had beat up one of our friends. He was cool with one of my friends but he had beat up another one of my friends before. They came back and busted one of my friend's head. We was going to get him.

I was standing on Sarah somewhere and three Bloods walked up to me. I knew I was on Blood territory but that's the route I have to go to get to my aunt's house. I was standing outside and on the corner and then they approached me. They didn't say not one word. They just hit me. I went back like this and then they ran. I just went pow, pow and shot it three times. I hit one of them in the leg. He fell down so I just ran on up to my auntie's house and called the fellas. Then they came on down and had it out. (Male #020, "Lil Thug," sixteen-year-old Gangster Disciple)

About two weeks ago some group called \_\_\_\_\_ but they Crips too, they had it out with one of our boys and stuff. We had a little argument and they came and got us. There was about ten of us walking around seeing what was up. We got to shooting at them and stuff. Some of them got to fighting and stuff and threw my friend down. He got shot in the chest twice. My boy got shot yesterday, T.J, he got shot yesterday. Some dudes drove up on him. (Male #053, "Jimmy," eighteen-year-old 107 Hoover Crip)

Getting out of this violent cycle is not easy. One subject told this story of how his brother left a gang.

My big brother. He was in the 38s. They say to get out of the 38s you got to kill your parents, kill one of your parents. My brother was making good grades, got him a scholarship and everything and he was like I'm leaving this alone. They tried to make him kill my mother. He was like, you must be crazy and I was on his side. So the leader, \_\_\_\_\_, big husky dude, him and my brother got into it. They was fighting and he pulled a gun out so I stabbed him in the back. I thought he was going to shoot my brother, which he was so, I stabbed him in the back. He paralyzed now. (Male #037, "Big Money," twenty-two-year-old Compton Gangster)

Cowardice is highly disapproved, since standing up for your friends and fellow members is almost a sacred duty (and a *raison d'être* for being in a gang).

One time I had a fight, this dude was supposed to be down with me, dude named Steve. We went around the corner on Becker, that's the next street up from Genivieve. I was up there, I had beat up four Bloods up there on Lillian and everybody seen it. So the next day I went around the corner. I was standing right there and a Blood came and I said what's up man. Me and him got to banging and stuff and after that he ran and brought a whole bunch of dudes with him. The dude that was supposed to be with me, Steve, I said you down with me man? He said yeah man. So I'm up there fighting and I turned around looking for him and he was gone. Then I was fighting all by myself. I was messed up. I had six stitches right here, my two ribs is broken right here, I got cracked in the face with a 40-ounce bottle. There's still a piece of glass in my eye right, it's just stuck up in there. When I seen him [Steve] I beat him down. Male #053 "Jimmy," eighteen-year-old 107 Hoover Crip)

Gang members also get involved in gang violence through serendipity (or stupidity) as this story of the death of Hit Man T — a Blood leader — illustrates:

Somebody disagrees and then they wind up fighting each other. That's how Hit Man T got killed. It was a disagreement with the Crips. They was gonna fight and Hit Man T came between them. It was two sets, Rolling Sixties and 19th. A 60 came to a party and a 19 was on this side of St. Louis Avenue. Our side had all the pistols, they ain't have none and Hit Man T drove up to the light and he had on all red, his boys in the back seat had on red, they had their hats turned to the left. A dude shot the car up. Hit Man T pulled off to the side, why you all shooting, man? They got to hitting on him. The police came and couple of young dudes shot him in his face. Everybody was out there fighting and the police was coming up to them and dudes was popping and the police was ducking by they cars and had they thing out telling everybody freeze. Everybody run. They couldn't shoot the crowd. Him and his boy got shot but his boy never did make it to the hospital. He went and they say he had his old lady take the bullet out. Hit Man T was still alive, he got shot with a .380 in his face. He was still alive and telling the police to fuck his leg. The police was telling him he had to wait till the paramedics came cause he got shot in the leg first but he was fighting back. He shouldn't have did what he did. . . . If somebody shot you car up and you ain't got no weapon it's no sense in getting out for real. He was in his car, the car was running, the light was green and there was about 100 people on that side and about 300 people on our side, gang people and people that wasn't in no gang. People on phones, getting gas, just walking around cause it's hot outside. He should have kept going. (Male #056, "Tony," seventeen-year-old 19th Street Hoover Crip)

Another similar example of misdirected behavior illustrates further stupidities.

There was some cats from Illinois. Vice Lords. They came to us, what's up, you all some Bloods? Fuck no, I ain't no Slob. What you all Crips? No, I ain't no Crips. You all Disciples? No. Then they pulled out they little .22s and shot at us. So we went and got guns and rolled down on them. We seen them at the bus stop so we went and parked in the alley. Come out and shot them, whupped they ass. All of them got shot. That was dumb what they done. They went and tried to catch the bus. They just shot at us and then go catch the bus right down the street from where we hang out. (Male #036, "NA," eighteen-year-old Compton Gangster BIC)

Unfortunately, gang members are not the only victims of gang-related violence. Several subjects mentioned having their houses shot up.

My bedroom window, man, they shot through the wall. I was up there with one of my little gals, my baby's mamma. My son was up in there. I said get down and pushed her on the bed and rolled him out of the bed. I reached

under the bed. I was so mad, my son was up there. I reached under my mattress, dude, I was so mad I went on the south side and smoked like three niggers up in the projects. You can jack with me, mess with me I don't care what you do to me, don't mess with my kid. (Male #033, "Larry," eighteen-year-old Thundercat)

Others mentioned fights and/or killings with police and security guards, and with guns around there are bound to be accidents.

I had a uh little cousin got shot in the chest. Everybody was in the house playin wit a gun and uh my cousin Kenny had shot her in the uh chest. Hey man she was thirteen, yeah uh, pulled the gun back but he didn't know it was no bullet or nothing when he shot her, shot her in her chest. We was all cryin and stuff but she didn't have no funeral or nothin and then we all went to jail but they knew it was an accident so they just let em go and stuff. (Male #002, "Eric," sixteen-year-old Thundercat)

**"We Don't Go Looking for It; If It Happens, It Happens": Attitudes Towards Violence.** Although we began this chapter with a statement reflecting a "love" of violence, most of our subjects do not revel in confrontation to quite the degree that subject boasted of (to be fair, he was probably bragging and exaggerating both his love of violence and his involvement in it). The most common attitude toward the possibility of violence and actually initiating it was more fatalistic and commonplace.

INT: When do members of your gang use violence?

MALE #092, "Derone," twenty-one-year-old Rolling 60's Crip: Only when violence is necessary. Like at a confrontation or somebody talk crap or if somebody throw up the wrong sign then we fuck they ass up.

If a Blood would shoot me and I happen to get hit, I get hit. Then I be dead. (Male #025, "Tony," seventeen-year-old Hoover Gangster Crip)

There is, in fact, something of "a man's gotta do what a man's gotta do" about our subjects' responses to violence, perhaps because it is a normal and expected part of their lives. At times there was also a rather chilling, matter-of-fact attitude in our subjects' descriptions of violence and killing.

Oh man, you shoot somebody and they don't die they shoot you and you be feuding until one of you all dead. A dude named Scotty and Kevin. Every time they see each other. They done shot a pregnant girl at Saints a few months ago. Kevin was trying to hit him. They will go on with it. (Male #012, "Lance," twenty-year-old West Side Mob member)

INT: What's good about being in your gang?

MALE #028, "Killa 4 Ren," fifteen-year-old 187 Crip: People are killed, that's good.

INT: People are actually dead now?

028: Yeah. Paralyzed one dude two weeks ago.

INT: Tell me about the last drive-by shooting. That was two weeks ago right?

028: Yeah. We shot that guy.

INT: When was the last time that somebody was killed?

028: Last month. I tore that dude up, had to shoot him.

INT: What was it about?

028: He was a Blood so we shot him. No that wasn't last month, that was on a Sunday.

INT: So he was a Blood and that was the reason he got shot. He was killed right?

028: His brother was in the paper talking about how we killed him.

INT: He's dead though right?

028: Yeah, he dead. Yeah. The only reason we shot him was cause he threatened him in Union Station. Called him a little Crab and stuff like that. Had to shoot him. They was talking about who going to shoot him. I said I'll do it.

Other subjects seem also bored with violence, or talking about violence, and some gave the impression of being tired with that whole scene.

MALE #034, "Lil Gene Mack," eighteen-year-old 19th Street Rolling 60's Crip: We haven't had any problems for awhile now but it's been hot. It's going to come. There's going to be a lot of deaths.

INT: How come?

034: Colors.

INT: What kinds of things have you done to defend your turf?

034: I did a lot. I have did a lot. I shot people, I've been shot, I've gang banged. It's getting old, man, it's getting old. You do it so much it don't faze you no more. Every time I go out now I'm killing me somebody. It don't hurt, it don't faze me no more.

Several subjects also tried to point out that what they do is not all that terrible and that there are, after all, far worse gangs in the world (Los Angeles gangs are especially favored in this regard).

We never killed nobody that I know of. We have put people in a coma, paralyzed them stuff like that but we ain't never killed nobody. Gave them brain damage. (Male #036, "NA," eighteen-year-old Compton Gangster BIC)

INT: How are gangs on the east side different from over here?

MALE #044, "Paincuzz," sixteen-year-old Rolling 60's Crip: Worsen.

INT: Worse in what ways?

044: Over here we kill Bloods and Crips but over there they will kill your mother, your father, and your little baby sister.

And a sufficient number of subjects mentioned fear or the psychological effects of being on the receiving or giving end of violence.

I've had dreams about it. It scares me sometimes. I used to walk by myself all sagging and all blue on. My girlfriend say aren't you scared some Bloods gonna drive past and start shooting? I didn't trip off of it, just walked. (Male #050, "John," nineteen-year-old Rolling 60's Crip)

When, when you shoot a person it seem like everybody watching you. I always thought somebody was after me. Everytime I'd hear a police car I'd jump. Every time my mother call me I say WHAT! cause the cops was bothering me but it was an accident. I shot him though. (Male #003, "Jerry," eighteen-year-old Thundercat)

This evidence leads to an important question, "Why is the level of violence so high among gang members, higher even than their race/age/sex cohort?" Three answers have been proposed. On the one hand, it can be argued that gangs are organized for violence. Like the military, they provide the training, weaponry, ideology, motive, discipline, and leadership for engaging in violence. From this perspective, gang violence can be viewed as the outcome of a group whose formal purpose is to organize violence for instrumental purposes. An alternative perspective argues that gangs amplify violence; that is, gangs provide a collective process that weakens ties to social institutions and increases interactions with and attachments to individuals already involved in crime.

A third explanation is that gang membership is selected for violence. Individuals who are already prone to violent behaviors, and who have such a history, select each other as compatriots, and since violence is the initial bond of their relationship, they continue these behaviors as their group coalesces and grows. Although we did not systematically probe for information on pre-gang levels of violence, we assume that it was at very high levels for our subjects. The neighborhood rates of assaultive violence discussed in this chapter and Chapter 2 are just the tip of the iceberg and point to an endemic culture of violence in our subjects' neighborhoods. Many of them had witnessed or been affected by lethal assaultive violence (not to mention that all had probably been witnesses to or been involved in nonlethal violence) by their early teens. By the time they joined the gang, most of our subjects were veterans of playground and street fights — which did not usually involve weapons or lethal consequences. But we assume

that individuals with violent proclivities select themselves (and are selected by others) for gang membership. They both create and attract threats within their social circle and neighborhood and thus are more likely to be in need of protection. They both seek out like-inclined individuals (existing gang members and other violence-prone adolescents) and are sought out by the same.

The last two views (contagion and selection) are far more consistent with the data reviewed here, data that shows gangs lack ideology, discipline, and formal structure, and that gang violence is primarily expressive and retaliatory (or situationally spontaneous), hardly the product of a formal organization employing rational means-ends chains.

**"It Don't Hurt, It Don't Faze Me No More."** Not all subjects, of course, are as blasé as "Lil Gene Mack" tried to be in our interview. Eight subjects, after all, could not say when their gang used violence and eleven subjects said that violence did not involve the use of weapons. Nevertheless, violence is the force that creates and holds St. Louis gangs together. Starting with threats inside and outside the neighborhood creating the need for protection and culminating in endless repetitions of revenge and retaliation, violence permeates the lives of our subjects. And it appears to be getting worse. Our subjects recognize the pervasiveness of violence in a variety of ways. Fifty-eight subjects said that the gang scene had become more violent in the year prior to their interview, and seven said there was more use of guns (only twelve said that the gang scene was less violent).

Violence comes in many forms for these gang members and their neighbors and friends. Some of what gang members do serves "functional purposes" — protection of home turf and favored hangouts, protection of drug turfs and disciplining customers, defending members and neighbors from "outsiders." But much of the violence we have recorded in our interviews seems "expressive." Gang members proving their manhood, their toughness, their hardness through initiations, trespassing on rival territories, and beating or shooting the opposition's colors. Though it contains elements of self-protection, the expressive character is evident in efforts to establish dominance or identity. Viewed in this light, violence that erupts over what appear to be petty acts — disrespecting a color, stepping in front of another person, flashing hand signs, driving through a rival neighborhood — takes on a deeper and more serious meaning. These "petty" acts represent symbolic threats to the existence of the gang and its members, as they challenge its prime values.

Some of this violence also arises from the routine interactions of our subjects as they carry out their daily activities. The inevitable frictions of

daily life, especially when individuals are pursuing criminal careers, can quickly get out of hand and lead to escalating confrontations. And since our subjects are often armed, violently prone, and structurally less powerful than many of their interlocutors, their reactions are just as likely to be violent and potentially deadly (Tedeschi and Felson 1994). Fundamental personal identity is also involved. Most of the gang members portrayed in our study are proud, insecure, tough teenagers and young adults whose self-esteem, self-worth, and identity appear to be constantly at risk. Toughness, manliness, not backing down, are important values of their world and their psyches – to be upheld even at the cost of their own or others' lives.

Whatever the "purpose" of violence, it often leads to retaliation and revenge creating feedback loops where each killing requires a new killing. And too often the targets of such attacks are not even the perpetrators of the previous action – just some generalized Slob or Crab or an innocent bystander. In 1993, for example, the Fairgrounds Park neighborhood, in the middle of our subject recruitment area, had a population of 3,026. From 1991 through 1993, the Fairgrounds neighborhood averaged just under 9 homicides per year, or an annual rate of 286 per 100,000 citizens, four times higher than the city rate and thirty times the national homicide rate. Rates for serious assault in this neighborhood are also astronomical; for the same three year period, Fairgrounds Park averaged nearly 6,000 assaults per 100,000 residents, five times higher than the city of St. Louis and thirteen times higher than that for the United States.

Gangs do not really resemble the stereotype presented at the beginning of the chapter. Most of our subjects do not revel in assaultive and lethal violence against each other, innocent bystanders, and any who attempt to thwart them. Nor is gang violence as common as the public may think. Yet it is far too common and far too lethal to be dismissed easily or waved away. Eleven homicides out of ninety-nine interview subjects represents a high level of mortality, both for social science research and in the lives of most Americans.

But gang members live in a culture apart from most of us, a world in which violence is endemic and ever present. Gang members are radically separated from both public and private institutions of society, as we discuss in the next two chapters on public institutions and the family. Nevertheless, because of their involvement in criminality and violence, gang members still remain intimately connected to one American institution – the criminal justice system.

## “Doing Time” in School and Elsewhere: Gang Members and Social Institutions

I used to be a nerd. Read, honor roll student. But that stuff was getting boring. I was looking for something good to do. (Male #021, “40 Ounce,” sixteen-year-old 107 Hoover Gangster Crip)

HANGING OUT, DRINKING BEER, looking for excitement, committing crimes – these activities increasingly become the focus of our subjects' lives once they join a gang. As we reported in Chapter 5, involvement in legitimate social institutions or with nongang peers and relatives drops dramatically following gang initiation.<sup>1</sup> In most cases, gang life has an obsessively deadly attraction for our subjects, one which constricts and diminishes their life to the friendship group of the gang. Indeed, nearly two-thirds of our subjects could not or did not identify any activities they participated in outside of the gang.

This chapter focuses on our subjects' involvement with four social institutions: schools, the criminal justice system, the job market, and community groups (including church, recreational, and neighborhood organizations). Eighty of our subjects said that prior to joining a gang, they belonged to one or more legal groups (of a social, religious, or recreational sort), while only nineteen denied any previous involvement in such groups.<sup>2</sup> But a startling reversal occurs after joining the gang, only twenty subjects said they currently belonged to any group besides their gang, while seventy-nine subjects were affiliated only with the gang. Put differently, three-quarters of those involved in legal groups dropped out after joining the gang.