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## Attitudes regarding gang affiliation of select adolescent boys residing in group homes

Gina Michelle Aguirre

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ATTITUDES REGARDING GANG AFFILIATION OF SELECT  
ADOLESCENT BOYS RESIDING IN GROUP HOMES

---

A Project  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

---

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Social Work

---

by  
Gina Michelle Aguirre

June 2009

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A Project  
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by  
Gina Michelle Aguirre


June 2009

Approved by:

  
Dr. Stanley Taylor, Faculty Supervisor,  
Social Work

6-5-09  
Date

  
Sharon Heaston, MFT,  
Group Home Support Services

  
Dr. Janet Chang,  
M.S.W. Research Coordinator

## ABSTRACT

This study contains a program evaluation of a four week series of group sessions, involving a variety of group activities, including role plays, exposure to a former gang member, and group dialogues on a variety of topics, to determine whether the program caused a change in the attitudes of adolescent males residing in group homes regarding gang affiliation.

The study quasi-experimental in design, and took place over a four week period. It was conducted at two affiliated group homes, each with five to six participants. One group home contained the experimental group, while the other group had the comparison group. Both group homes were equivalent in nature, with similar clientele, residing in a similar geographic location.

The experimental group's intervention consisted of four weekly sessions, each between one and two hours in duration. A pre-test and post-test survey questionnaire was administered. The comparison group received the pre-test and post-test, without the intervention.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge the support and tremendous insight of Dr. Stanley Taylor, who helped to breathe life into this study. Our dialogues about research into gang life and interventions kept me on track, and helped provide depth to my inquiry.

I would also like to express deep appreciation to Ms. Sharon Heaston, M.F.T., who permitted me work with group home clients, under her therapeutic supervision. I will forever be indebted to her for the trust she placed in me.

I also wish to thank Mr. Arby Fields, who opened his group homes to me, and allowed me to work with his boys for purposes of this research.

Lastly, I wish to thank Cal State University San Bernardino, for creating a forum where I could conduct research, within a field close to my heart, as a consequence of my first year internship at group homes.

## DEDICATION

I wish to dedicate this research to all adolescent male clients living in group homes, particularly those who are gang affiliated. You are the future. You will each grow into capable men, who will understand the youth of tomorrow, because of the adversity you are overcoming today.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### Problem Statement

Youth gang affiliation/gang violence is a problem for communities across the nation. Andres-Hyman, Forrester, Achara-Abrahams, Lauricella, and Rowe (2007) suggest that, although official reports of youth violence rates have reportedly decreased in recent years, the numbers are misleading, and may represent significant under-estimations of the problem. Problems relating to gang affiliation are magnified for adolescent boys living in-group homes. In addition, for such boys, familial support systems are either diminished or non-existent, due to an array of problems in clients' families of origin, ranging from substance abuse, to family violence/gang affiliation, poor parenting skills and/or lack of supervision.

Consequently, adolescent boys residing in group homes are being raised by changing shifts of group home staff, who are typically untrained, poorly educated, low wage employees, with few skills for dealing with the

myriad of behavioral, emotional and psychological problems these clients have.

In addition, often recreational and extracurricular activities are minimal in group homes housing gang affiliated youth due to, among other factors, behavioral problems the clients exhibit which prohibit them from participating in such activities, as well as the inability of staff members to adequately supervise such activities. Thus, for boys living in group homes, it is often the gang they are affiliated with which provides a persistent sense of family for them, as opposed to their actual care takers or any outside extracurricular group.

According to a survey on gangs by the Department of Justice in 2006, there are approximately 785,000 gang members in the United States, with an estimated 26,500 active gangs across the nation (as cited in Egley, 2008). An earlier study by the Department of Justice indicated that 94% of U.S. cities with populations over 100,000 have gang problems (as cited in Egley, 2002).

To further magnify the problem, youth culture today is rampant with sensationalized images of gang lifestyles, which permeate the music youth listen to, the clothing they wear, and their manner of speaking to one

another. This transmission of imagery and iconography associated with the gang lifestyle through the media causes gang membership to become normalized. This is particularly true in the case of adolescent males, who are searching for identity and a place to belong as a natural consequence of their developmental stage. The National Gang Crime Research Center indicates that the majority of gang members become affiliated between the ages of 12 and 15 (Egley & O'Donnell, 2008).

For adolescent males living in-group homes, the majority of whom come from troubled families, the need to belong somewhere is even more compelling than in the typical adolescent male. Almost without exception, adolescent males living in-group homes have backgrounds of upheaval and disruption in their families of origin, including the death of a parent, divorce, parental drug abuse, poverty, incarceration, and parents who are members of gangs themselves. These factors make them particularly prone to the allure of gang membership.

Consequently, it is quite common for adolescent male group home residents to be gang-affiliated. Frequently, such youth think of and refer to their fellow gang members as family. Gang affiliated youth often recounts

stories detailing loyalty to the gang with great pride and bravado. This is one among many reasons that the task of gang de-affiliation is challenging. Simply helping such young men to reflect upon the immoral, illegal activities they have been a part of, and guiding them toward alternatives is not enough. Their emotional and psychological realities must be addressed as well. Gang affiliated youth in-group homes who do make the choice to deaffiliate must deal with the reality of losing yet another "family."

In addition, often gang-affiliated youth see no feasible possibility of deaffiliating from their gang, for safety reasons. In order to leave the gang, they realize they must relocate somewhere outside of their city of origin. Even in the event of relocation, many youth believe that they will be found by members of their gang, and coerced into gang activities once again, or worse, rival gang members will find them and assault them, or perhaps even take their lives, due to their prior gang affiliation. In addition, many youth perceive that the pressures to join a gang in a new location will be similar to those they faced in their original location.

Gang intervention specialist, J. Franklin, relates that, in listening to experiences of youth who are affiliated with gangs, it is clear that they do not see gang membership as a choice that they could feasibly say "no" to. Rather, they perceive gang membership as an imperative, sometimes related to their physical safety and survival, at other times viewed as a means of attaining much yearned for respect from others. Of significance to child welfare agencies, the most serious or "hardcore" gang members generally either come from family backgrounds of upheaval, with absent, deceased, or drug addicted parents, or they come from families with parents or other closely related family members who are already gang-affiliated (personal communication, April 18, 2008).

Franklin continues, one of the biggest challenges in working with gang members is that they have tough questions about why society is the way that it is. They are often well educated by their peers about their disenfranchisement as a population, and the socioeconomic realities that they face, such as inferior educations, poverty, lack of employment opportunities, communities rampant with drugs, and racism within the dominant

culture. Often they have created walls between themselves and society as a consequence of these social realities (personal communication, April 18, 2008).

For all of these reasons, youth who seek gang affiliation are often lonely, longing for connection with others, and searching for someone they can look up to. At the same time, due to their awareness of societal inequities and racism, they often carry distrust for institutions such as schools, law enforcement, and social services. Gangs, however, provide apparent solutions to many of their needs and concerns, where such institutions have fallen short.

Understanding these realities at the outset provides a foundation for gang intervention specialists working in-group home environments to reach the hearts of such youth. In order for an intervention to be effective, one of the first things that must be established is mutual respect, as gang-affiliated youth often describe respect as the most important element of any relationship in which they become a part of.

In addition, because of the familial discord, disconnection and disappointment that gang-affiliated youth have experienced, they are particularly sensitized



to discerning whether a gang intervention specialist, or anyone else for that matter, truly cares about them or not. Often, they carry a core belief that no one cares about them; no one besides their "homies" or gang affiliates. For this reason, the initial rapport-building stage of the therapeutic relationship is particularly important. In addition, rapport must also be continuously re-established and nurtured in order for the therapeutic relationship to progress.

With regard to the effectiveness of gang intervention, Klein (1995) explains that, based upon his many years of research, both gang prevention and suppression programs have been largely ineffective, and sometimes even destructive. Thus, it is important to study the effectiveness of interventions with gang members, in an effort to find a program that creates change.

#### Purpose of the Study

This study investigated the effectiveness of a gang de-affiliation program, in terms of its effect on the attitudes of adolescent males living in-group homes towards gang affiliation. The supervisory agency of this

research project, Group Home Support Services, had already been providing weekly individual and group therapy to the adolescent males residing in the two group homes participating in this research project on an ongoing basis.

The research design was a quasi-experimental, quantitative study, utilizing a pre and post survey instrument to measure attitudes toward gang affiliation before and after youth participation in a four-week gang de-affiliation program.

Group Home "A" housed the experimental group, where the de-affiliation program took place. The gang de-affiliation program consisted of four one-hour group sessions, held weekly within the group home, over the course of a one-month period. Group Home "B" housed the comparison group, which did not receive any intervention.

The survey instrument, intended to measure attitudes toward gang affiliation, was administered at Group Home "A" and Group Home "B" prior to the four-week de-affiliation program at Group Home "A," and again afterwards, or four-weeks later.

Both group homes are six-bed facilities, housing male adolescents from the age of 13 to 17, some of whom

were on probation and required close monitoring, and others of whom had been placed within the group home by a child welfare agency due to problematic behaviors in other less restrictive living arrangements, such that they required close group home supervision. Within the group home, there are generally two staff present whenever the clients are home, except when they are sleeping, when staff size is reduced to one. Staff change shifts at eight-hour intervals.

The majority of the youth had limited or no relationships with their families of origin, for various reasons, ranging from parents unable to adequately supervise their child on probation, to parents with substance abuse problems and/or gang affiliation, to parents who are deceased, leaving no appropriate relatives to care for their child. Sometimes, boys had previously been placed in foster care settings, however, their destructive or problematic behaviors had caused them to be moved to a "higher level of care", or to a group home.

This study has increased knowledge relative to attitudes toward gang affiliation of adolescent boys living in-group homes, and shed light on whether or not

their attitudes can be affected through a specific gang de-affiliation program. At the outset, it was expected that their attitudes would become more positive toward de-affiliation from gangs, and that they might begin to see other possibilities for their lives as a consequence of participation in the one-month gang de-affiliation therapy program.

#### Significance of the Project for Social Work

It is important to understand gang affiliation among male adolescents in group homes further. Without sufficient intervention, such youth will leave group home environments, only to return to their former environments unchanged. They become once again immersed in the same types of situations, and people exhibiting the same problematic behaviors that contributed to their placement within the group home in the first place. In order to survive in environments outside the group home, gang affiliated youth often perceive that it is necessary to behave as their peers do, making the problem of recidivism a continuous challenge.

Importantly, the lives of gang-affiliated youth in-group homes continue to be endangered due to their

gang affiliations. If, while in the group home environment, such youth undergo transformative experiences in terms of their attitudes toward gang affiliation, rather than simply being housed for the duration of their, then one aspect of the root of the problem has been addressed. It is possible for such transformative experiences to occur during gang de-affiliation therapy, which can provide youth with an opportunity to question their realities, and reinterpret their experiences. Gang-affiliated youth can be exposed to new realities, giving them hope for a future outside of gang involvement.

In terms of the "generalist model" of social work, this gang de-affiliation program began with engagement of the clients, to establish mutual respect and rapport between the clients and therapist. Next, during the assessment phase, it was important to hear from each youth, and learn about their experiences relative to gang affiliation. This was followed by a discussion of specific topics planned for discussion, coupled with activities deemed relevant to the youth. Upon completion of these four helping stages of the generalist model, the evaluation/post-test was administered, at which time it

was determined to what extent the program affected attitudes toward gang affiliation. Finally, after evaluation, termination occurred, wherein the therapist spent some time processing any feelings the youth had pertaining to the intervention being completed.

Outcomes which indicated that gang affiliated youth were more positive toward de-affiliating equated to an effective use of funding being utilized in the care of group home youth. This study suggests that, rather than merely warehousing gang affiliated youth in group homes, as is sometimes the case, with effective therapeutic intervention, they have an opportunity to experience pro-social change during their time living in group homes.

Importantly, child welfare agencies' goal of increased pro-social behaviors is advanced through effective therapeutic interventions. In addition, when intervention works, the Department of Probation for Juveniles' stated goals of "client rehabilitation and community protection" (Legislative Analyst's Office, 2008) can be advanced as well.

All of these agency goals were advanced through the four-week gang intervention program being studied herein.

In addition, child welfare agency tenets, such as client well-being and safety, were promoted through the intervention, which was ultimately found to be effective at changing clients' attitudes toward affiliation with gangs.

The success of this gang de-affiliation program can conceivably contribute to social work policy, in that such a program may be considered for continuous use within group homes by group home therapist and/or MSW interns. The positive outcomes of gang de-affiliation therapy support the overarching goals of the field of social work itself, which aims to promote the well being of clients.

Social workers, like the gang de-affiliation therapist, believe in the inherent value of each individual. Both understand the importance of viewing gang members as people who, given encouragement and motivated by hope, can become active creators of value within the community rather than perceived as a delinquent enemy of society.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of literature pertaining to gang affiliation, including the scope of the gang problem in the United States, as well as theories which guide the current research. Lastly, general gang intervention strategies will be explored toward the end of the chapter.

#### Scope of the Problem of Gangs in the United States

In the last several decades, the face of gang violence has changed dramatically, due to a number of factors. Before the 1970s, gangs were typically made up of white ethnic groups, who fought with somewhat innocuous weapons, such as fists, sticks and knives. Today, however, gangs are largely people of color, particularly Latino and African American, with firepower that rivals the military (Vigil, 2003).

Hagedorn suggests that today's gangs exist as a consequence of the postindustrial period, wherein gangs have adopted economic functions, and the use of violence,



including firearms, to regulate their illegal commercial activities. In addition, Hagedorn cites the influence of the postindustrial prison complex on neighborhood gangs, as well as the postindustrial cultural value of financial wealth, coupled with the limited opportunities afforded impoverished youth (as cited in Vigil, 2003). The postindustrial prison complex has created generations of male youth whose fathers have been or are incarcerated. This prevalence of male role models in prison only tends to increase the trend of incarceration among younger generations. It has become a normal expectation by the gang affiliated youth that he will ultimately end up either incarcerated or dead within a matter of time.

In addition, the postindustrial cultural value focused on accumulation of wealth creates an urgent desire for disenfranchised youth to achieve immediate status and wealth. Without resorting to criminal activities, such as gang involvement, this achievement would be impossible.

Youth gang affiliation and its consequent violence against others is a serious problem in the U.S. According to Brookmeyer, Fanti, and Henrich (2006), violent crime has been found to increase during adolescence, with 27%

of the perpetrators in all serious violent victimizations across the country being youth under the age 18.

Brookmeyer found that parent and school connections were protective buffers against violent behavior. However, it would follow that, since gang-affiliated youth living in group homes generally do not have the benefit of having a strong connection to either institution, they are more vulnerable.

In particular, within San Bernardino County, where this research was conducted, it is estimated that there are nearly 300 gangs, and around 13,000 gang members. Sergeant Galen Bohner of the High Desert Regional Gang Team states, "We still have a bunch, and we're still getting more" (Orr, 2007, para. 7).

#### Theories Guiding Conceptualization

This study will be guided by a number of theorists who have added to the body of knowledge pertaining to youth gang affiliation. To explain the formation of gangs in general, Cohen's status deprivation theory explains how status deprivation leads to the creation of subcultures, which bring people into conflict with the dominant culture (as cited in Reiss & Rhodes, 1963). This

delinquent subculture serves as an alternative status system.

Cohen's ideas can be transposed onto youth gangs, where a subculture is created to serve the function of providing youth with an opportunity to achieve status. This theoretical underpinning is consistent with the words of gang members living in-group homes, who speak often about the importance of respect and status as a driving force in their gang activities.

In addition, Maslow's well-known hierarchy of needs theory (Simons, Irwin & Drinnien, 1987) helps to explain not only why gangs are formed, but also why intervention within group homes is effective. As Maslow indicates, while youth are focused on the need for survival, a most fundamental human need, all other higher needs are placed on a back burner, so to speak. In the case of youth who have become gang-affiliated, often survival on the streets is their primary concern. Once youth begin living in-group homes, their survival is no longer an immediate issue. Thus, it may become possible at this point to address needs which fall higher up on Maslow's hierarchy, such as love and belonging, self esteem, and self-actualization.

Another explanation for gang formation comes from Staub, who argues that, when certain cultural and societal conditions frustrate the psychological needs of youth, violence becomes a more likely outcome (2003). The implications of Staub's research, coupled with Maslow's theoretical hierarchy of needs, are that youth growing up in environments where their basic needs are not met, where their opportunities are stunted, and where their safety is at risk, will be more inclined toward violence and aggression, based on their frustration at not having such needs met. Gang-affiliated youth living in-group homes have often grown up in environments of impoverishment and disenfranchisement, at the hands of parents who have suffered through similar upbringings, and have diminished capacities to offer their children nurturance, guidance, or hope for the future.

Hirschi espouses social bonding/social control theory, which suggests that delinquent peers have no direct effect on delinquency when social bonds inhibiting delinquency are taken into account (as cited in Chriss, 2007). Hirschi argues that unattached youth with similar backgrounds drift together into delinquent groups because

weak social bonds fail to prevent both an association with delinquents, as well as the delinquency itself.

Hirschi's research counters the prevailing belief that delinquent youths are primarily to blame for the delinquency of other youth. In fact, it is the absence of caring, supportive adults and other significant positive social bonds, which create the space for delinquency to occur. Hirschi explains further that youth are in danger of delinquency when they have weak relationships with significant others and with society itself. Youths who are strongly attached to parents are less likely to commit criminal acts, and youths who maintain weak and distant relationships with people tend toward delinquency, continues Hirschi (as cited in Chriss, 2007).

Brumble's analysis of the autobiography of infamous gang member, Monster Kody, incorporates the principles of both status deprivation theory and social bonding theory. Brumble emphasizes Kody's unending quest for status and respect, which supports status deprivation theory. However, in keeping with social bonding theory, Brumble depicts Kody continuously making reference to his gang associates as "family," as well as his sense of

disenfranchisement from mainstream society (Brumble, 2000).

Another recent study finds that, with strengthened involvement of family members, as well as increased individual resiliency, gang involvement is less likely (Li, Stanton, Pack, Harris, Cottrell, & Burns, 2002). This research supports the idea that gang affiliation is one potential consequence of weak familial connections, and corresponds to statements of gang-affiliated youths that gangs often function as replacement families.

Another study indicates that societal factors, such as poverty, family violence, and social and economic inequities are largely responsible for youth gang affiliation. This research surmises that gangs are actually necessary, functional social institutions for low-income male youths, serving vital needs not adequately met by family, school or the labor market (Spergel, 1990). Spergel's research is aligned with and validates both social bonding theory and status deprivation theory in that, when families break down, a suitable replacement is required. In addition, when economic factors prevent youth from perceiving opportunities for their future, alternative means of

acquiring such opportunities must emerge, such as the gang subculture.

A multiple marginality framework (Vigil, 2002) is most useful for examining gang affiliated adolescents, in that it reflects the complex factors leading to gang affiliation. Multiple marginality refers to the manner in which pressures and forces on multiple levels, such as economic insecurity, lack of opportunity, fragmented institutions, poverty, and various psychological and emotional barriers, relegate members of street gangs to marginalization, resulting in a state of powerlessness.

Vigil's multiple marginality framework encompasses macro-historical factors, such as racism, repression and fragmented institutions, with other micro factors, such as street socialization, and being raised in highly stressful and marginalized families. He then conceptualizes the linkages that are cumulative among all such factors as making up the multiple marginality framework (Vigil, 2002).

In addition, points out Vigil, the most violent gang behavior can be found among adolescent males aged 14 and 18 (Vigil, 2003). Such youth find themselves, quite naturally, in a developmental stage facing uncertainties

with respect to their identities as they transition into adulthood. Their developmental task, then, is to find older peers as guides during this difficult period. Gangs provide an environment filled with peers, willing to take such youth into their fold. According to Vigil, the literature is lacking in qualitative data to explain why youth become violent. His multiple marginality theory suggests that, rather than oversimplify an explanation, the overlap of multiple factors be taken into consideration.

Rodriguez (2008) conveyed that if youth do not believe they have choices, then they truly do not have them. He also shared that those who stay away from gangs do so because they have strong families, and some purpose in their lives, such as music, sports, or some other outlet to focus on. Youth must, he stated, find ways to express themselves, and have a sense of purpose.

Rodriguez also discusses something he coined the "empties", which youth in gangs, and indeed many youth in general, have. The first of his five "empties" is a feeling of rootlessness or disconnection. According to Rodriguez, this is one of the primary reasons youth join gangs, to connect to something, to have somewhere to



belong. Youth, says Rodriguez, need at least one person in their lives who will never give up on them. Other "empties" are helplessness, hopelessness, powerlessness and meaninglessness. Many of these factors are contributed to by socioeconomic factors, such as poverty and lack of opportunities (Rodriguez, 2008).

### Intervention Strategies

As can be seen from the literature, reasons behind gang affiliation, particularly among youth residing in group homes, is multi-faceted, and cannot be easily explained by one factor, or even one theory. Nor can the problem be addressed through a simplistic, one-dimensional intervention strategy.

Andres-Hyman et al. (2007) focused on recommendations for designing a violence prevention initiative in disenfranchised communities. Their study noted the fact that traditional violence prevention interventions had limited success, for a variety of reasons, including mistrust of those in authority, and lack of grassroots community buy-in. Their intervention involved the use of improvisational role playing, following an initial group discussion about violence,

which included personal experiences, ideas about what violence is, and what motivates violence. The role-playing involved individuals who played themselves in a variety of problem situations. Group members were allowed to co-create the scenes, along with the individuals playing the role.

What emerged from these role-plays was the fact that youth saw violence as a function of social ills, including economic inequality. They often felt hopeless in the face of such realities. The research builds on prior findings that low levels of social efficacy are related to resource deprivation, and that this has a strong positive correlation with increased violence. The researchers found that, in spite of youths' unwillingness to accept suggestions of alternatives offered in the face of their problem situations, they were, however, very interested in finding ways of their own to get around violence. Ultimately, the researchers found that the improvisational role-play was a valuable research tool, as well as an effective intervention, allowing participants to increase their sense of self-efficacy through imaginative responses to the problem of violence (Andres-Hyman et al., 2007).

Hughes' (1998) qualitative study on turning points in the lives of young inner-city men who have ceased criminal behaviors found four main factors such men had in common. The factors were 1) respect and concern for children, 2) fear of physical harm and/or incarceration, 3) time for contemplation, and, lastly, 4) support and positive modeling. The last point, support and modeling, was described as people with genuine concern, who behaved in a caring manner.

Rodriguez (2001) espouses creative techniques for intervention with gang affiliated youth, to allow their innate potential to emerge. For example, Rodriguez describes an exercise entitled "What You Be About" for building rapport, which allows gang affiliated youth to tell their life stories, in an environment of trust, dignity and careful attention to each participant and their words.

In the instant study, a rapport building exercise similar to this allowed for open discussion about group members' lives, without the formality of an awkward, interview-style session. Since the group spent only four weeks together, it was necessary to have an exercise that

got to the heart of matters relatively quickly, in a manner that allowed for opening, rather than withdrawal.

A current therapeutic practice planner (McInnis, Wanda, Myers, Sullivan, & Jongsma, 2002), guiding work with juveniles living in residential care, provides specific therapeutic interventions for gang members, beginning with identifying reasons for joining the gang, and discussing whether there is a willingness to leave the gang. Importantly, therapeutic intervention includes identifying what needs the gang is fulfilling in the life of the youth, as well as developing a relationship with a positive adult and/or mentor. The practice planner is a beneficial template, upon which to build any intervention program, and is being used as such in the instant research.

Yablonsky (1997) describes practical techniques for success with this population. In particular, Yablonsky focuses on psychodrama as the most beneficial therapeutic technique with "gangsters." The individual is considered the "star" of his own psychodrama, and also plays auxiliary roles of significant others who are contributing to the problem or dilemma. According to Yablonsky, such psychodramatic sessions allow for

increased insight into emotions, as well as an opportunity to practice the actions, both negative and positive, and evaluate their consequences, both individually and as a group process. Ideally, such interventions serve as a deterrent to the actual commission of violent gang crimes. In addition, such role-plays allow individuals to see themselves through the eyes of others, enhancing the potential for self-insight.

#### Summary

Chapter two provided an overview of the scope of the problem of gang affiliated youths in the United States, as well as various theoretical constructs to help explain gang affiliation. The overriding theme of the theories underpinning this research is that of youth gang affiliation being related to unfulfilled needs in the lives of such youth, such as the need for family, for belonging, for status, and ultimately for love. Lastly, the chapter focused on various interventions with gang affiliated youth, all of which supported the construction of the gang de-affiliation intervention conducted within the present research. The most promising of these

interventions centered on role playing or psychodrama as effective means for increasing insight into the self, as well as personal expression.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODS

#### Introduction

This section outlines the methods utilized in conducting this study, including a description of the study's design, and the sample from which data was obtained. In addition, the chapter outlines how data was obtained, including instrumentation. This section also explains how the confidentiality of human subjects was protected, and provides a description of the informed consent process. Lastly, the procedures for data analysis will be explained.

#### Study Design

The study's purpose was to conduct a program evaluation of a four-week series of once-per-week group sessions, to determine whether participation in the program caused a change in attitudes toward gang affiliation of adolescent males residing in group homes. The program was aimed at increasing insight into gang involvement, and the research question was whether attitudes toward gang affiliation became less positive as a consequence of participation in the program.

The study utilized a quasi-experimental design, and took place over a four-week period, conducted at two affiliated group homes, each housing six potential participants. One group home housed the experimental group, and the other group home housed the comparison group. Both group homes were equivalent in nature, in that they housed similar clientele, and were located within a similar geographic location.

The experimental group's intervention consisted of four weekly sessions, each approximately sixty (60) to ninety (90) minutes in duration. During the first group session, participants completed an initial written quantitative Survey Questionnaire, entitled "A study on attitudes about gangs", which consists of general background information, prior experiences relative to gang affiliation, and current attitudes toward gang affiliation.

During this first session, participants were invited to engage in a dialogue regarding their past experiences relative to gang affiliation, as well as their current feelings and expectations for the future in this regard. During the second, third and fourth week, participants in the experimental group participated in a variety of



activities, including role-plays, exposure to a former gang member, and group dialogues. At the end of the study, participants completed the Survey Questionnaire for a second time, following the conclusion of the fourth/final session.

Similar to the experimental group, the comparison group also received the pre and post-test, Survey Questionnaire, entitled "A study on attitudes about gangs". The comparison group, however, received no intervention.

A quantitative approach was used in analyzing the data for this program evaluation, to allow the researcher to more clearly discern whether attitudes toward gang affiliation changed as a consequence of participation in the program. By having both the experimental and comparison groups each complete the Survey Questionnaire, it became possible to more clearly determine the cause of any changes in attitude within the experimental group.

One possible limitation of this method of measuring attitudes stems from the initial successes during the rapport building stage of the program. It is conceivable that participants in the experimental group might have chosen to alter their answers, in anticipation of

perceived researcher expectations. To counter this limitation, the researcher attempted to convey to participants that there was no correct or desired answer to any of the questions, and that honesty was valued above all else in this regard.

### Sampling

The research utilized a convenience sample, utilizing male residents of Fields Comprehensive Group Homes, between the ages of 15 and 18, residing at one of two affiliated locations. Each location housed six adolescent boys. One group home was randomly selected as the experimental group, and the other became the comparison group. In general, male adolescent group home clients are at high risk for gang affiliation, and oftentimes 50% or more of group home residents are gang involved.

Utilization of a convenience sample was necessary for this research in that, due to time and resource constraints, obtaining a random sample of adolescent gang members from the general population to conduct a four week program was not possible, nor were there resources

and time available to select a random sample of participants from a large number of group homes.

#### Data Collection and Instruments

The dependent variable in this research was attitudes toward gang affiliation, and the independent variable was the four-week program of activities, which were aimed at increasing insight into gang affiliation, and decreasing positive attitudes toward gang affiliation. The pre-test/post test, a written Survey Questionnaire, "A study on attitudes about gangs", was administered to members of the experimental group and the comparison group at the beginning of the research period, as well as four-weeks later, at the conclusion.

The survey consisted of general background information, including age, ethnicity, and grade in school. A second section inquired as to participants' gang affiliation history, and consisted of questions relating to past experiences, relationships, and prior actions, indicative of the strength of past gang affiliation and relationships with gang members. The third section measured current attitudes toward gang affiliation, and included questions that address current

relationships with gang members, feelings toward gang members, feelings about being a gang member, and expectations for the future with regard to gang involvement.

There was no intervention with the comparison group. They were given the pre-test and post-test with the same four-week interval in between as the experimental group. Conversely, the experimental group was exposed to four weeks of activities aimed at increasing insight into gang involvement prior to taking the post-test at the end of the research period.

The first session began with an explanation of the research project, and the taking of the pre-test, followed by a rapport building session.

The second session's theme was the power of hope/having a dream. In this session, the group leader first gave brief biographies of Martin Luther King, Mahatma Gandhi, and Barak Obama. Next, the youth participated in a group dialogue about hopes and dreams, followed by a role play activity, which focused on the ways outside influences can either hinder or bolster hopes and dreams, in order to create an awareness of such factors in the lives of participants.

During session three, a former gang member spoke to the group about his life. He shared his life story, which included repeated setbacks, including incarceration, in relation to his efforts to change his life. The guest speaker also shared his longstanding determination not to give up on transforming his life. This was followed by an emotionally intense group dialogue, where group members responded in a reciprocal manner to the guest speaker's openness by sharing their own life stories, in moving detail, with poignant expressions of emotion, including sobbing and crying.

At the end of this third session, the impending termination of the group was touched upon, in preparation for the following week, which would be the final session. The theme of the final session was power, and the various ways it can be obtained and manifested. Six different types of power were explained by the group leader, and later acted out in role plays by group members.

Afterwards, the four-week program was summarized by the group leader, and group members reflected on what they had learned and gained from participating. Lastly, the post-test was administered, and the program was

concluded with a discussion of any feelings participants had around the intervention coming to a conclusion.

In terms of the study's limitations, importantly, the Survey Questionnaire was not empirically tested for reliability, validity, or cultural sensitivity. In addition, an ethical issue of potential bias exists, in that the researcher also conducted the therapeutic intervention. For this reason, it was important for the researcher and therapist roles to be distinct from each other, and for the researcher role not to influence the manner in which the intervention was conducted.

The pre and post-test were created before implementation of the program, and was not influenced by or reflective of any information that emerged within the group sessions. In addition, the therapist made efforts to ensure there were no leading questions or suggestions made about what types of attitudes the youths should have toward their gang affiliation. The study was described to the youth participants as an exploration of their attitudes. Care was taken by the therapist not to convey more value on less positive attitudes toward gang affiliation.

Importantly, the instrument was pre-tested with a small group of high school males, to ensure that items on the survey were clear and understandable to participants. Of note, this research is not generalizeable to the entire population of adolescent male gang members, in that the sample size is too small for generalizability.

### Procedures

Permission was obtained from Group Home Support Services, and their client, Fields Comprehensive Group Homes, to conduct the four-week gang de-affiliation program, along with research to determine whether the program affects the attitudes of the group home's clients residing at two of their group homes. It was explained that only one of the group homes would receive the gang de-affiliation intervention, but that both group homes would fill out a Survey Questionnaire (pre-test and post-test).

Starting the second week of January 2009, the study collected data by way of the Survey Questionnaire. The Group Home Administrator signed a guardian consent form, authorizing subject participation in the research.

Each participant filled out the Survey Questionnaire, in a group setting, at their respective group home, with the researcher present and available to answer any questions. The researcher then collected the surveys upon completion. The surveys required approximately 10-15 minutes to be completed.

During the following four weeks, members of the experimental group participated in the gang de-affiliation program, consisting of group sessions at their home. Following the fourth week, they once again completed the Survey Questionnaire, at the end of the fourth group session.

Members of the comparison group did not participate in a gang de-affiliation program. They completed the pre-test and post-test, within the same four-week timetable as the experimental group.

#### Protection of Human Subjects

The confidentiality of human subjects was protected in a variety of ways. Firstly, research participants were asked not to write their names on the Survey Questionnaires. Rather, a master name list of all participants was kept by the researcher, with



identification numbers assigned to their names. These numbers will be written at the top of the Survey Instrument they are asked to complete.

In addition, during the course of the research, all materials, including the master name list and completed surveys, were kept in a locked drawer, which was not accessible to others not involved in conducting the study. Upon completion of the research, all study materials were destroyed.

All research participants were read an oral Youth Assent Form, which was explained by the researcher. Participants were then given an opportunity to ask questions of the researcher. The form explained the purpose of the study, namely, to find out more about teenage boys' attitudes regarding gang affiliation, as well as an explanation of what being part of the study entailed. The assent form also detailed possible risks of participating in the study, and explained that all participants were free to leave the study at any time.

The form also described remuneration for participants of a \$10.00 gift card, and explained how the confidentiality of participants would be respected. Lastly, a contact number was provided in the event

participants had questions. Members of the comparison group were read an oral Youth Assent Form with slightly different wording, indicative of the different level of their participation, however, the same basic information was provided.

In addition, the legal guardian for the study participants was asked to complete an Informed Consent document. This document explained the purpose of the research being conducted, and the procedures for conducting it. In addition, it provided information about where and when research results could be obtained, as well as the voluntary nature of the research. The consent also outlined the potential benefits of participating, as well as the risks. A phone number to direct any questions to was provided. Lastly, since no deception was used in this research, there was no debriefing statement necessary.

### Data Analysis

The data obtained in this study from the Survey Questionnaire was analyzed using a quantitative data analysis method, to assess the relationship between

participation in the program (independent variable) and attitudes toward gang affiliation (dependent variable).

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize participants' demographic information, including their age, ethnicity and grade in school, using measures of central tendency (e.g., mean, median, and mode) and measures of variability (e.g., standard deviation). Data pertaining to past experiences with gangs was also measured, utilizing descriptive statistics and frequency tables.

Lastly, data pertaining to attitudes toward gang affiliation was analyzed utilizing a Chi-Square Test of Independence, to compare pre and post test responses within the same group. The Chi-Square Test of Independence was also utilized to perform a comparison of the experimental and control groups, in order to test the one-tailed research hypothesis, which predicted that participation in the program would cause positive attitudes toward gang affiliation to decrease.

#### Summary

This chapter served to outline methods for conducting this research study, and included a

description of the study's design and justification for the convenience sample. In addition, the chapter discussed how data was obtained, and described the survey instrument. The manner in which confidentiality of human subjects was protected was explained, along with a description of the youth assent process, and informed consent procedures, as well as data analysis.

Table 1. Ethnicity

|                        | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|------------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid Hispanic         | 7         | 58.3    | 63.6          | 63.6               |
| African American       | 2         | 16.7    | 18.2          | 81.8               |
| White                  | 1         | 8.3     | 9.1           | 90.9               |
| Asian/Pacific Islander | 1         | 8.3     | 9.1           | 100.0              |
| Total                  | 11        | 91.7    | 100.0         |                    |
| Missing System         | 1         | 8.3     |               |                    |
| Total                  | 12        | 100.0   |               |                    |

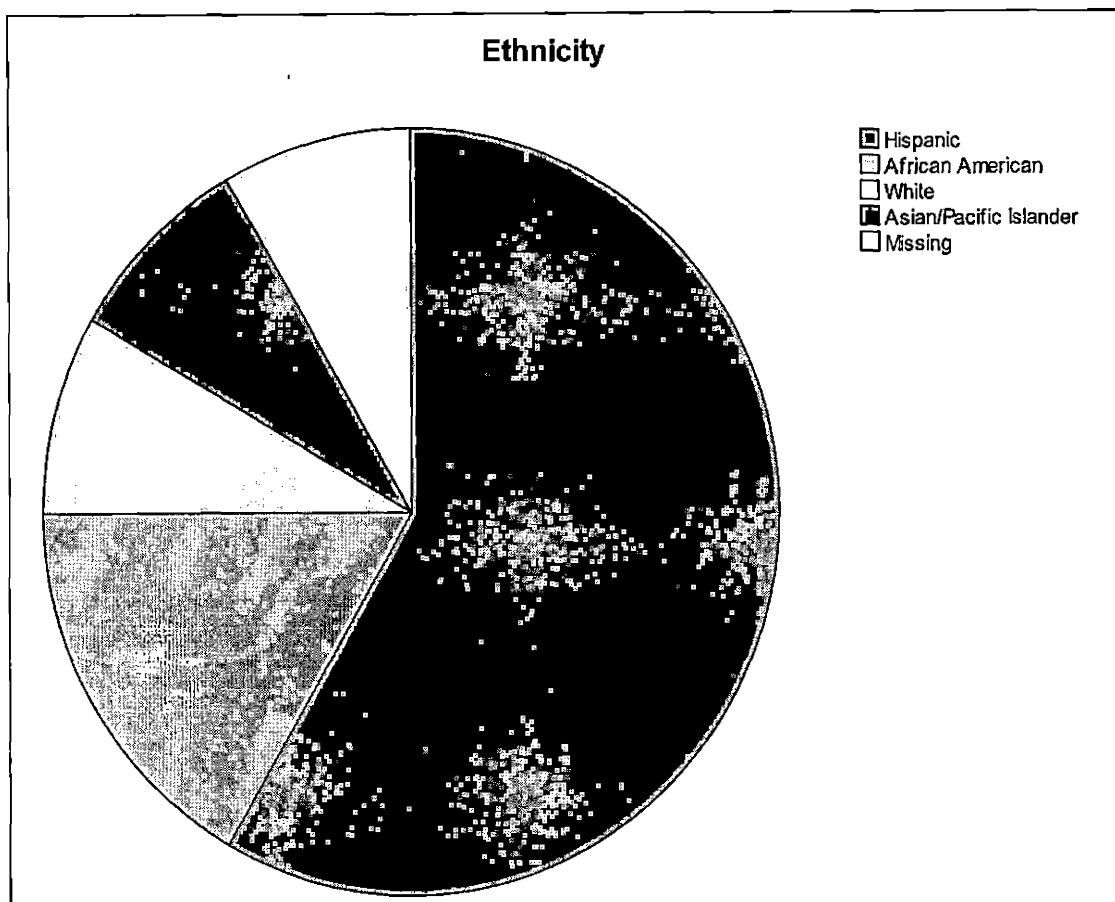


Figure 1. Ethnicity

Table 2. Participant Age

|                | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|----------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid 15       | 4         | 33.3    | 36.4          | 36.4               |
| 16             | 6         | 50.0    | 54.5          | 90.9               |
| 18             | 1         | 8.3     | 9.1           | 100.0              |
| Total          | 11        | 91.7    | 100.0         |                    |
| Missing System | 1         | 8.3     |               |                    |
| Total          | 12        | 100.0   |               |                    |

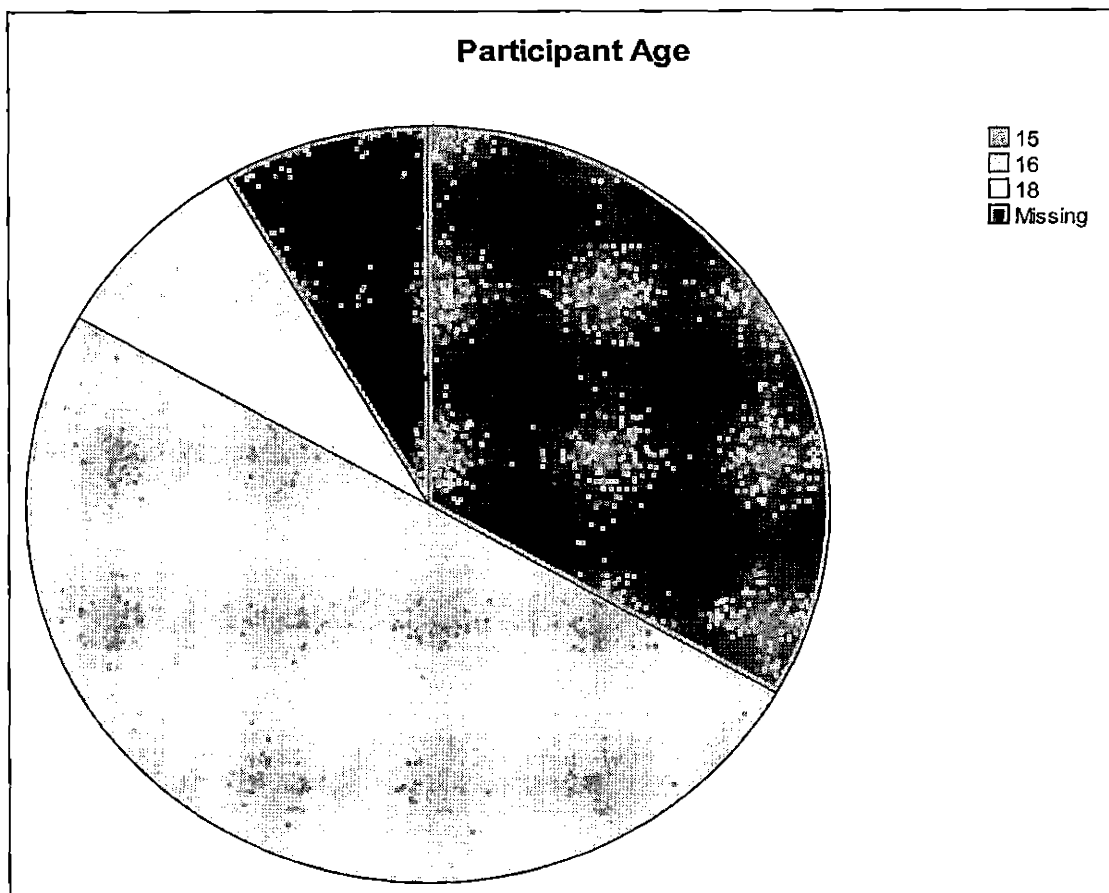


Figure 2. Participant Age

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

This chapter will discuss the research results, including a description of the sample, and relevant statistical findings.

#### Presentation of the Findings

The sample being utilized for this research was a convenience sample, age 15 through 18. Study participants were clients within one of two affiliated group homes. The sample size was small, with only 11 participants, due to the nature of the research, which consisted of a four week gang deaffiliation intervention, and the related funding and time constraints.

In terms of age breakdown, half of the sample was age 16, 36.4% of them were age 15, and 9.1% were age 18. Ethnicity breakdowns were 63.6% Hispanic, 18.2% African American, 9.1% White and 9.1% Asian/Pacific Islander. All participants were in high school, either as sophomores (63.6%) or juniors (36.4%).

The survey response data was analyzed utilizing quantitative procedures for nominal variables. For each

survey question that measured attitudes, a Chi-Square test of Independence was conducted. Degrees of freedom was 2 for each of the 13 questions.

Significance levels for the pre-test and post-test responses between the control group and experimental group varied from .179 to .974, none of which were found to be statistically significant. Importantly, the data did not lend itself to meaningful statistical analysis, due to the small sample size. Thus, no significant statistical relationship was found. However, some meaningful trends were observed which differentiated the experimental group from the comparison group.

In general, pre-test versus post-test answers for the comparison group tended to either stay the same, or change in the direction of attitudes more strongly positive toward gang affiliation. In contrast, pre-test versus post-test answers within the experimental group tended to change in the direction of being less positive toward gang affiliation.

For example, when answering the question, "I feel more like myself around gang members", one experimental group respondent agreed, and two indicated they were not sure. Post test results for the experimental group



contained no "agree" answers to this question, and four "do not agree" responses. Conversely, the comparison group responses stayed the same.

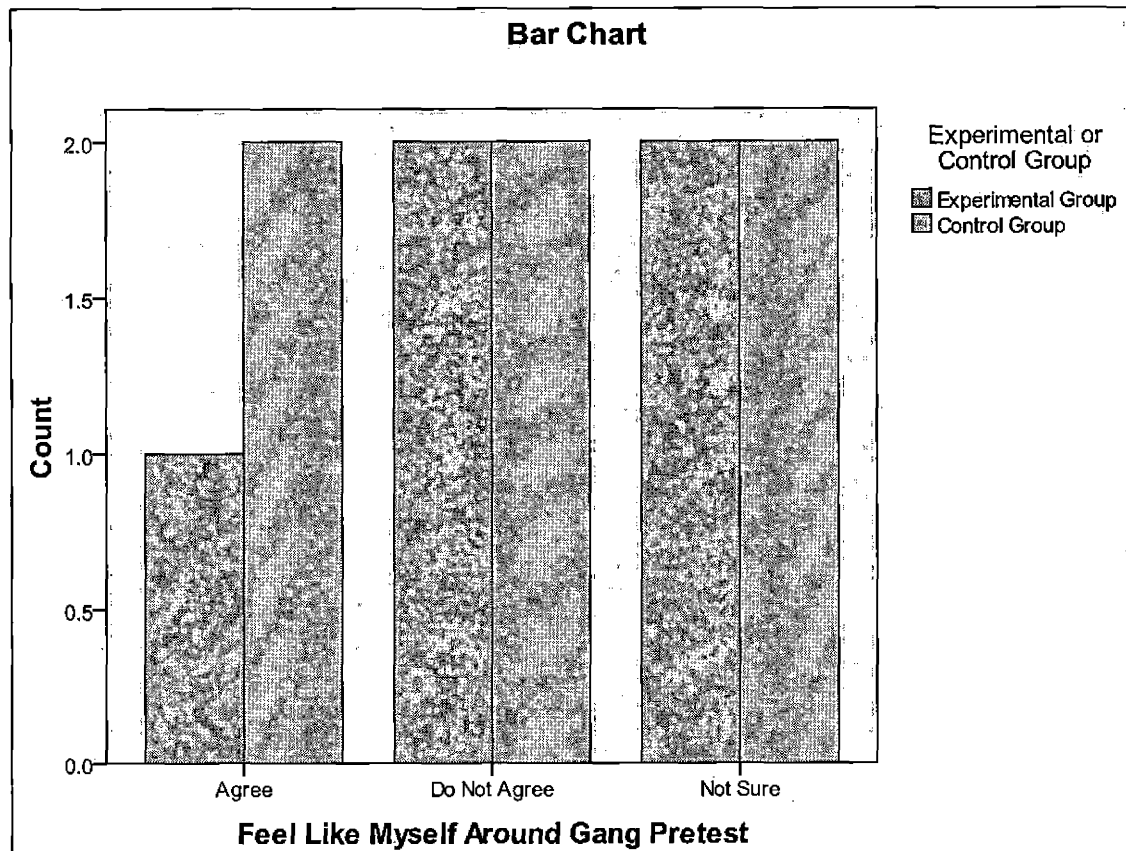


Figure 3. Feel Like Myself Around Gang - Pre-Test

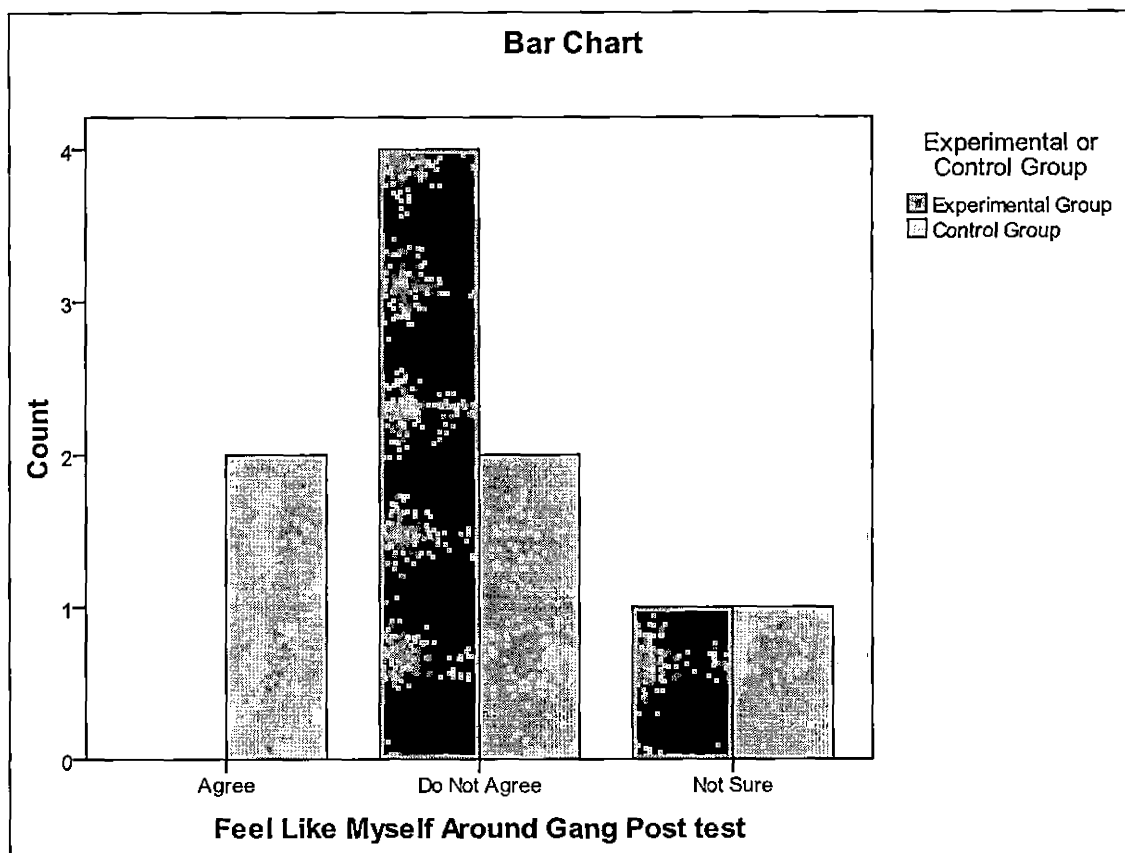


Figure 4. Feel Like Myself Around Gang - Post-Test

Similarly, with regard to the prompt, "There is nothing wrong with being in a gang", three out of five experimental group pre-test respondents agreed with this statement. No respondents from the experimental group's post-test agreed with this question.

Comparison group members tended not to agree or to state "not sure" to this statement during the pre-test, however, two respondents switched to "agree" during the post-test.

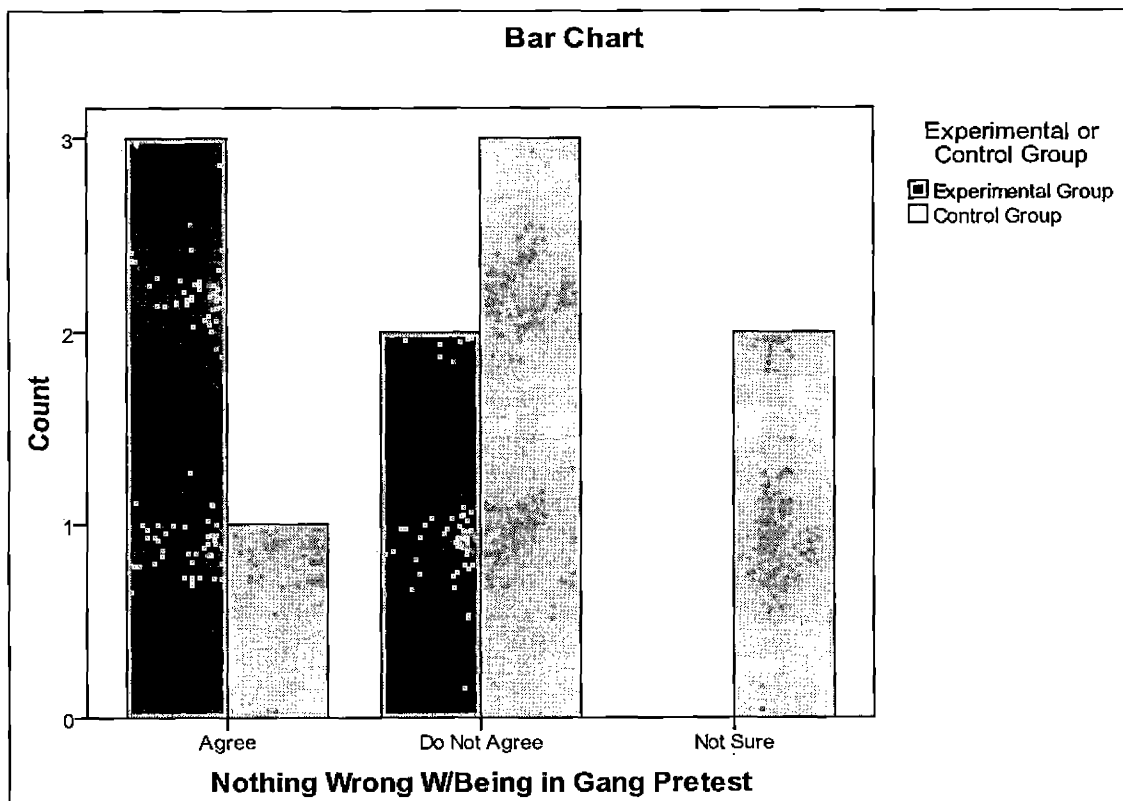


Figure 5. There is Nothing Wrong with Being in a Gang -  
Pre-Test

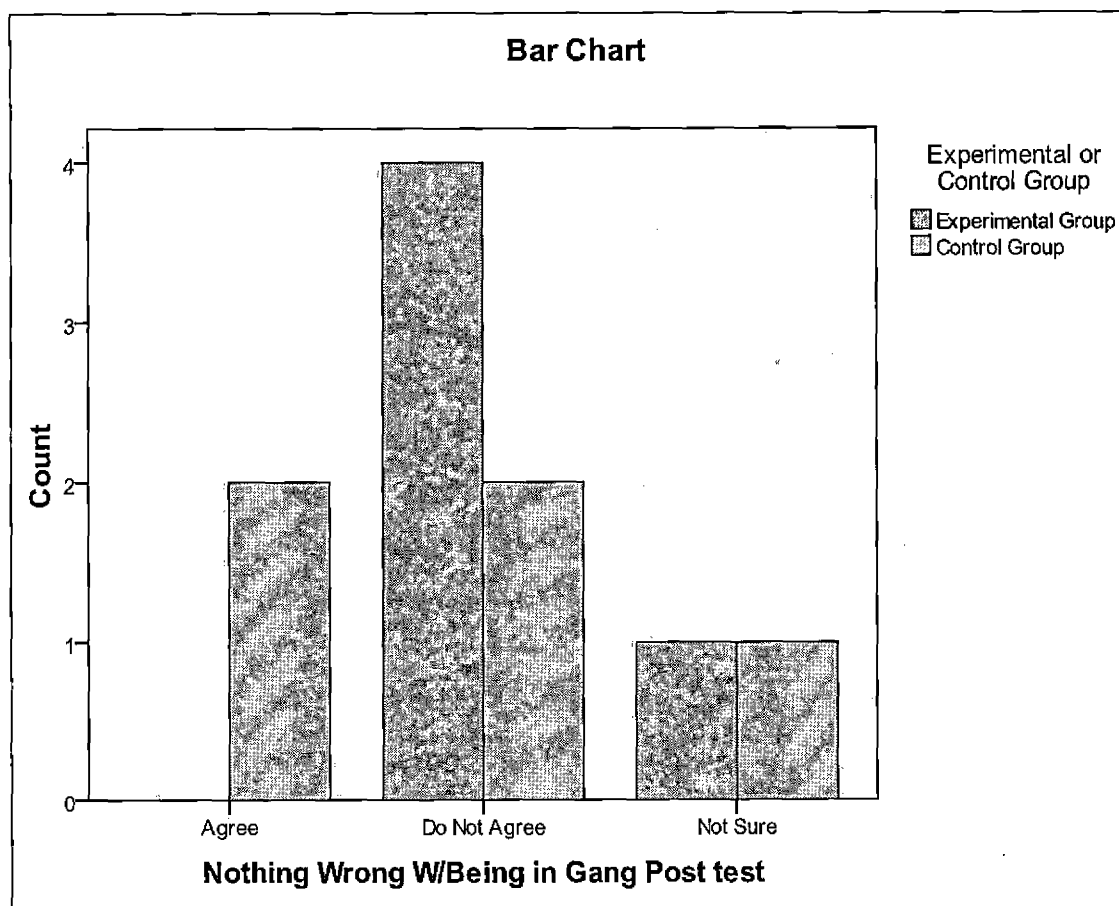


Figure 6. There is Nothing Wrong with Being in a Gang -  
Post-Test

In addition, similar results were contained in responses to the statement, "I will probably 'gang bang' after I get out of the group home." Pre-test versus post-test respondents from the comparison group tended toward stronger support of gang affiliation in the post-test.

Respondents from the experimental group all disagreed with this statement during the post-test, after having one respondent agree and one respondent state "not sure" during the pre-test.

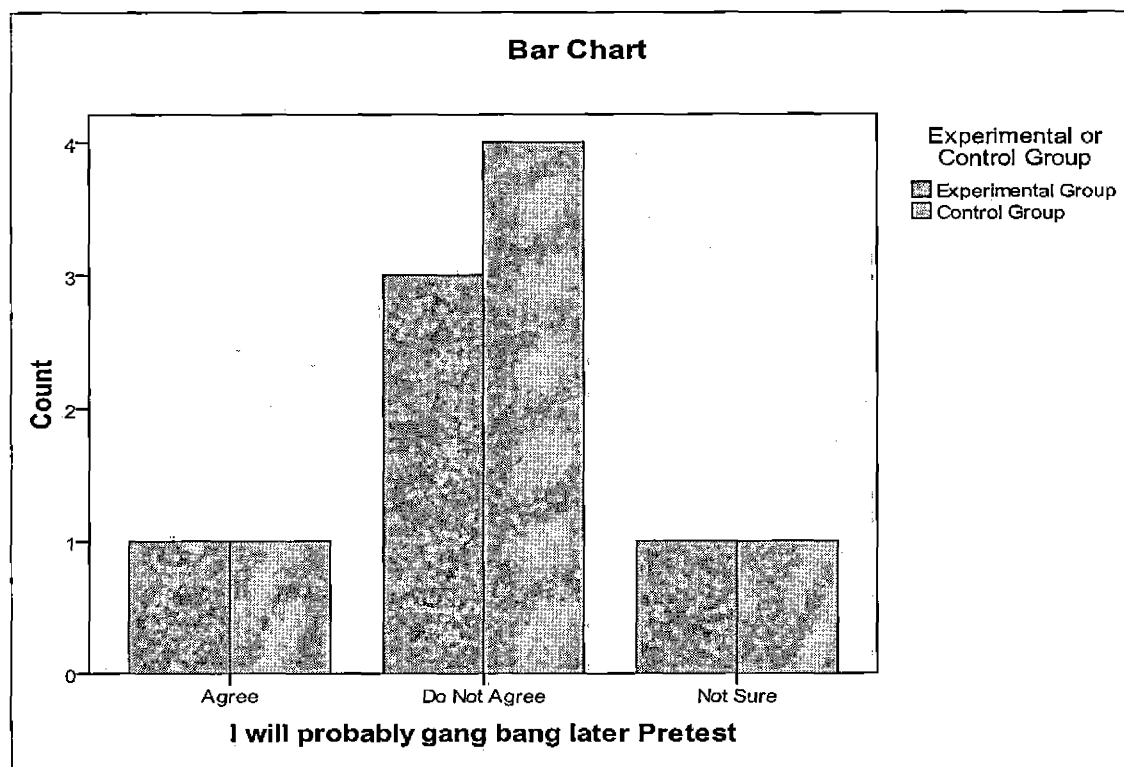


Figure 7. I will Probably Gang Bang after Leaving the Group Home - Pre-Test

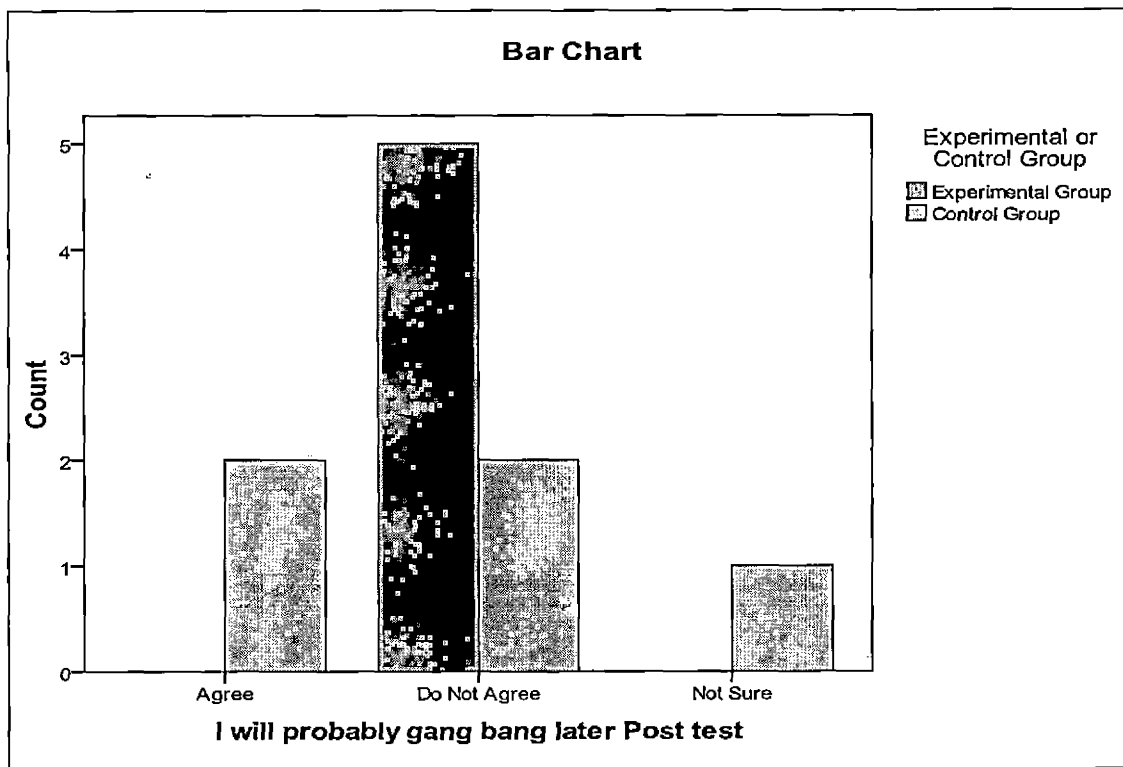


Figure 8. I will Probably Gang Bang after Leaving the Group Home - Post-Test

Lastly, responses to the statement, "Being in a gang is the best choice for me" bore similar results with relation to the comparison group, in that no respondents agreed to this statement from either group during the pre-test, however, post-test results indicated that one of the "do not agree" respondents changed his response to "agree".

This is consistent with other post-test question results, where comparison group responses tended to

become more positive toward gang affiliation over time, while experimental group responses either stayed the same or became less positive toward gang affiliation.

#### Summary

This section described the study participant demographics, as well as the significant findings of the study. Although the sample size was too small to reach findings of statistical significance, important trends were nonetheless uncovered. The comparison group members tended to have attitudes that stayed the same, or became more strongly inclined toward gang affiliation, whereas, the experimental group member cumulative responses indicated less positive attitudes toward gang affiliation.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

#### Introduction

This chapter will cover a discussion of the research findings, including a detailed analysis of interactions within the group sessions, as well as the study's limitations. Lastly, this chapter will discuss recommendations for social work practice, policy and research, and concluding thoughts.

#### Discussion

The research hypothesized that attitudes of adolescent male group home clients would become less positive toward gang affiliation after participation in a four week gang deaffiliation program. Although statistical analysis was made difficult due to the small sample size, there is clear anecdotal evidence that participants began to change their opinions about gang affiliation as a consequence of participating in the group sessions.

Each of the four group sessions contained in this research design were distinct in content. The first session was primarily focused on establishing rapport



between the research participants and the researcher/therapist. Informed consent of the participants occurred. During this process, the researcher explained the nature of the research, to explore the attitudes of participants toward gang affiliation. In addition, the researcher provided participants with the option of non-participation at any point, for any reason. Some potential reasons for non-participation were suggested, such as painful emotions, or any other feelings of not wanting to continue.

During the first session, the researcher also explained confidentiality to the participants, and told them that although their survey responses would be analyzed and reported in the research findings, the results would be in the form of "group data", and that no individual responses would be reported upon. In addition, participants were informed that any remarks made during the sessions might be reported as research findings, however, their names would not be associated with any remarks or mentioned at all in the research.

Prior to taking the pre-test survey questionnaire, participants were advised that there were no wrong or

right answers, but that the researcher was simply interested in knowing the honest truth about their attitudes and experiences. Participants were also informed that if they chose to participate for the entire four weeks, they would be given a \$10 gift card at the conclusion of the fourth session.

During the first, rapport-building session, two group members self-identified as being gang affiliated. Each of them described difficulties they had experienced with relation to deaffiliation, with one participant stating:

"[w]hen I'm around other gang affiliated people I get sucked in to what I once was... When I get sucked in, then I reminisce about the past, and it makes me feel strong and powerful that I got into a 'hood' and that I can do damage to people. But then when I think about it, I am just a person, hiding under a mask."

This statement sheds light on the difficulty of deaffiliation from the gang for youth, as well as the tendency to lose one's true identity under the guise of gang member.

Another insightful comment made during the rapport building stage, shows the importance, when attempting to assist gang members in deaffiliating, of having an alternative outlet, or something to replace the important role that gang affiliation plays in the life of a youth. The following statement was made by the other participant who strongly identified as gang affiliated:

"Sometimes I feel like I want to go back to my hood and put in work, but sometimes I feel like I don't want to be a gang banger because I am a skateboarder too. When I am not gang banging I skateboard. But I can't skateboard here [at the group home]. But to tell you the truth if I had a skateboard, I wouldn't think about banging. It's just hard. Sometimes I'm scared. If someone comes up to me and asks where I am from, I am not just going to say nowhere. I am going to tell them my hood."

Both young men expressed a certain level of ambivalence at the outset with regard to their gang affiliation, and readily shared both their strong feelings about affiliation, as well as their conflicting desires with regard to deaffiliation.

Other participants described ways that their lives had intersected with gangs in the past. Some had familial ties to gangs, with fathers, mothers, aunts, uncles, cousins and/or siblings already affiliated. Participants referred to this type of situation as "Legacy". One participant remarked:

"My uncle said 'it's time for you to get jumped in. Your dad was jumped in. Your brother was jumped in. Now it's your turn.' But I was scared, and didn't want to be put on. These fools came up to me - they were way bigger than me... They said, 'Where you from?' I said, 'Nowhere. My mom and dad are from [gang name].' They said 'Oh really?' Then they jumped me in."

This same participant recalled being a small child, and having his father introduce him to gang member friends. He declared, "My dad used to tell all the homeboys '[t]his is the future' when I was a little boy." When asked how he thought his father would perceive his current gang affiliation, he stated, "He wanted me to be in a gang." For adolescents living in group homes, this issue of "Legacy" gang affiliation must be addressed, in and of itself, as well as in conjunction with the loss of

family such adolescents have experienced as a consequence of events leading up to their placement.

Other gang members shared prior recruitment attempts or past affiliation. One participant talked about having been recruited to sell marijuana on behalf of a gang from his neighborhood when he was eight years old. While he was never "jumped in" or inducted into the gang through violent initiation, he had nonetheless experienced a certain level of affiliation through being a runner for them. Several group members remarked that this type of affiliation is relatively common, and a strategy among gangs, to utilize young children who will receive lighter penalties if caught. One participant remarked, "They make little kids smuggle it so they don't have to take the fall for it."

Common themes from this first session were that gang affiliation, for them, had occurred in one of two ways. Firstly, it occurred through pressure from gang affiliated friends or acquaintances, and secondly through "Legacy" or family members who were already affiliated. Only one participant stated that he had no prior affiliation with gangs, and no firsthand knowledge with regard to gangs or gang members. He shared that living in

the group home was the first time he had ever had a face to face encounter with a gang member.

In addition, after further discussion as to personal motivations for becoming affiliated with gangs, group participants agreed that two common themes had emerged. Firstly, some of them had joined gangs for safety reasons. They perceived themselves as being under the protection of the gang once they had been jumped in. Secondly, participants who were gang affiliated stated that had sought improved status, such as the social acceptance and respect from their peers that came along with gang affiliation.

One participant reported no gang affiliation, and stated that he had made a conscious decision to avoid gangs. He shared his point of view that being a gang is a risk that not worth taking, remarking that being a gang is "stupid" because "you are going to get hurt in some way." However, he acknowledged that none of the group participants were stupid, and agreed that sometimes there were complicated reasons for becoming affiliated with a gang.

Lastly, one participant shared that, although he is a "tagger", or someone who writes gang-related graffiti

on walls, he would never consider joining a gang, because it would disappoint his grandmother too much. The group then discussed that family can function both to encourage or discourage gang membership, depending on the circumstances.

This first session created a valuable platform upon which to build the next three sessions. Trust and mutual respect were established, and group members were valued by the researcher for their opinions, whatever they were. Group members were also encouraged to be understanding of one another, to maintain a positive atmosphere of openness and honest communication.

The second group session was designed to allow participants to explore their dreams and goals for the future, and also to discuss the value and power of having such dreams and goals, and the effect of various decisions upon one's ability to achieve them. The session began with a rap artist music video, whose theme was "I have a dream", from the famous speech by Martin Luther King. This video was chosen since it not only fit the theme of discussion, but because it also allowed participants to enter into a creative mode, more amenable to self-exploration. Immediately following the video, one

participant excused himself to get a piece of poetry from his room that he wanted to share with the group entitled "A Gangster's Prayer", which he read aloud to the group. He then shared that this poem was given to him by his deceased uncle, before he died due to gang related violence. This spontaneity added to set the tone of the group session, causing participants to feel free to express their dreams and goals openly.

Participants each shared their goals, and their dreams for the future, followed by an exploration of the concept of hope. Participants were asked to discuss the difference between having hope and not having hope, and describe feelings that go along with each of those states. Common themes that emerged among the youth included a desire to graduate from high school, and perhaps to attend college. Most participants expressed a desire to marry and have children of their own one day, and some hoped for forgiveness for acts they had committed in the past.

The researcher/therapist then shared biographies of several historical figures who had achieved seemingly impossible dreams, including Martin Luther King and Barak Obama. The last biography was of a former gang member



turned author/poet and gang intervention specialist, Mr. Luis Rodriguez. Surprisingly, one of the youth was already familiar with Mr. Rodriguez, and was in the process of reading his autobiography, *Always Running*. This biography seemed to have the most impact on participants, in that he was someone they could relate to - someone like themselves, who had overcome the very hurdles they were currently attempting to jump. Certainly, the inclusion of Mr. Rodriguez made the discussion of achieving dreams and goals more tangible and applicable to their lives.

Lastly, group members participated in a role play, with three characters. The central character played "the dreamer", or the person who had a dream. The person on the left of him was the "supporter", or the person who cheered them on, saying positive things about their ability to achieve the dream. The person on the right played the "opposition" role, saying negative things, and declaring that there was no way they could achieve their dream. Each person had a chance to play a role, and then the group discussed how it felt to be in each role. The activity's main purpose was to convey that the people around oneself can have a great impact on whether or not

we accomplish our goals and achieve our dreams. Session two ended with participants reflecting on the significance of the choices they had made in the past, and might make in the future, with regard to friendships and influences.

Session three had a different format, with an adult former gang member, Mr. Melvin Joyner, coming in to share his story with participants. He spent approximately 45 minutes discussing his life, recounting tales tremendous pain, setback after setback, and an unyielding determination to change his life over the years. His detailed personal story evoked a discernable level of emotions in participants, who each, in turn, reciprocated by sharing details about their hardships and dreams with Mr. Joyner. One participant cried as he reflected upon his relationship with his father, stating tearfully, "[m]y dad's name is bad boy, and I'm little bad boy." He concluded his story by stating that "Now, what I want is to be a gang counselor." Mr. Joyner praised each one of the participants, stating that they were far ahead of him at their age, because at least each one of them had learned to talk about their feelings and express themselves. Joyner stated that this was something he did

not learn to do until much later in life, and that they had a clear advantage over him.

Certainly this type of encounter cannot necessarily be easily replicated. There is an element of "chemistry" that occurs when a speaker with life experiences that resonate with participants engages the group. This was particularly true in light of Mr. Joyner's expressed inner desire to reach the hearts of each participant. However, what was most important about this session was the first-hand encounter with someone who was once in circumstances similar to their own, who had changed his life for the better.

This sort of "actual proof" is far more likely to leave an impression on listeners than a second hand biographical account. Proof of this impression was conveyed when, one week later, during the fourth and final session, participants were still talking about their encounter with Mr. Joyner in excited tones. The third session ended with a discussion of the impending fourth and final session, and issues around termination were briefly introduced.

The fourth and final session centered on the theme of power. First, participants held a discussion about

times in their lives when they felt powerless. Next, participants each stated their own personal definition of what power means. Participants were invited to explore the question of whether power was possible without violence. There were mixed responses, ranging from absolutely not to maybe.

This was followed by six different types of power being presented by the researcher/ therapist, namely, 1) reward power; 2) legitimate power; 3) coercive power; 4) expert power; 5) referent power; and 6) information power. Examples of each type of power were given, and a discussion was held with group members as to how they might have experienced or observed this type of power in their own lives. After the presentation, the group played a game, where the therapist acted out each one of the types of power, and asked group participants to identify which type of power was being displayed. Candy prizes were handed out to each participant as they took turns responding.

Moments of spontaneous levity were not discouraged by the researcher, such that the participants could feel comfortable and be themselves throughout the four week intervention. For instance, during the fourth session, in

order to demonstrate "Reward Power", the researcher addressed one group participant and asked him to please do 10 jumping jacks. He was instructed that if he completed these 10 jumping jacks, he would receive a bag of candy. Afterwards, when the researcher asked him what type of power was being displayed, he replied, "jumping jack power", at which point the group all laughed together. This type of light atmosphere was purposefully maintained throughout the entire four weeks, in order to strengthen bonds of trust and openness amongst the group.

#### Limitations

The primary limitation of the study was the small sample size. In order to conduct a meaningful statistical analysis, a sample size of at least 20 in both the experimental and comparison group would have been needed. Since statistical analysis was relatively insignificant, we can only rely upon the anecdotal evidence, or statements made by participants during and after the intervention, coupled with an individual analysis of survey responses.

Secondly, although the researcher/therapist made efforts to explain to participants that there were no

right or wrong answers, experimental group participants may still have intuited that the researcher hoped to see changes in the direction of less positive attitudes toward gang affiliation as a consequence of participation. Importantly, the researcher/therapist had a prior therapeutic relationship with two of the group home clients who participated in the intervention within the experimental group. While it is not suspected that this prior relationship biased the research results, it should be noted that rapport was much more easily established due to these prior relationships.

However, there was no discernable lack of genuineness on the part of participants during the sessions, and they seemed to feel comfortable honestly stating their opinions and feelings. In future research designs, it might be important to have a separate therapist and researcher, such that the two roles do not overlap, and it will be less likely that participants would want to please the researcher by providing responses they anticipate are desired.

## Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy and Research

This research suggests that gang affiliated youth residing in group homes would benefit from access to specialized gang deaffiliation therapy, since many of the behavioral issues that caused them to be placed in a group home setting are related to their gang affiliation. While there are many similarities between gang affiliated youth and non-gang affiliated youth, those with gang affiliations have unique needs, based upon their gang sub-culture.

It is important that a gang deaffiliation counselor have knowledge of gang terminology and practices, and that they be open to learning from clients in this regard. Gang members are sensitized to issues of respect as part of their culture. For this reason, a gang deaffiliation therapist should always take great care to show basic respect for gang affiliated clients, such that positive rapport can be established and maintained.

Similarly, when making placement decisions for gang affiliated youth within the child welfare system, it is important to take their gang affiliation into account, for a number of reasons. Wherever gang affiliated youth

are placed, they will be contending with the ever-present pressures to identify with a particular gang. Oftentimes, that identification will result in conflict with other rival gang members. Gang affiliated youth require a network of support in order to deaffiliate, because the pressure to claim a gang, or join a new gang, is lurking in every encounter within the community. Ideally, staff members within group homes will have an opportunity to be trained and/or participate in question and answer sessions with the gang deaffiliation therapist, such that they can become more effective at caring for such youth.

### Conclusions

Anecdotal evidence obtained during this research, supports the premise that it possible for gang affiliated male youth residing in group homes to deaffiliate from gangs. Important factors to support their deaffiliation include the presence of knowledgeable, non-judgmental, sincerely caring professionals.

This research intervention was created based upon themes, such as the significance of power, dreams and goals, and mentorship, which emerged during the researcher's prior role as a group home gang



deaffiliation therapist. However, clearly a four week intervention is not sufficient to sustain change in the lives of these youth. Rather, a committed, continuing therapeutic relationship is necessary for lasting change and gang deaffiliation to occur.

APPENDIX A  
QUESTIONNAIRE

**Survey Questionnaire**  
A study on attitudes about gangs

This is a study about your history with gangs, and how you feel about gangs. Your participation in this study is CONFIDENTIAL. That means that your answers will not be shared with anyone, other than the researcher.

**Part A: Background**

A1. How old are you? (Please write your answer:)

\_\_\_\_\_

A2. What is your ethnicity?  
(Please circle the category or categories you identify with. If your category does not appear below applies, circle "Other", and write down your ethnic group's name.)

1. Hispanic
2. African American
3. White
4. Native American
5. Asian/Pacific Islander
6. Other (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

A3. What grade are you in?

1. 7<sup>th</sup>
2. 8<sup>th</sup>
3. 9<sup>th</sup> (Freshman)
4. 10<sup>th</sup> (Sophomore)
5. 11<sup>th</sup> (Junior)
6. 12<sup>th</sup> (Senior)

**Part B: Your History with Gangs**

|   | Yes                      | No                       |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| B1. In your neighborhood (before living in the group home), were there gangs?         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| B2. Have you ever been asked by a gang member to join a gang?                         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| B3. Were you ever beaten up by a gang member because you did not want to join a gang? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| B4. Have any of your friends joined a gang?   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| B5. Is anyone in your family a member of a gang?                                      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| B6. Are you or a member of a gang?  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

- |      |  |                          |                          |
|------|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| B7.  | Have you ever worn gang colors on purpose?     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| B8.  | Have you ever made gang hand signs on purpose? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| B9.  | Have you ever fought, representing a gang?     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| B10. | Were you ever a leader in a gang?              | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**Part C: Your Attitudes Toward Gangs**

(This section has to do with how you feel right now, today).

- |  | Agree                    | Do not<br>Agree          | Not Sure                 |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| C1. Some of my closest friends are gang members            | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| C2. Gang banging is my way of life                         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| C3. I feel more like myself around gang members            | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| C4. Gang members have more power than others               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| C5. You have to do whatever your gang says                 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| C6. I really have no choice but to be in a gang            | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| C7. The people who help me most are gang members           | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| C8. There is nothing wrong with being in a gang            | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| C9. I will probably gang bang after leaving the group home | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| C10. The only way I can have power is by being in a gang   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| C11. Being in a gang is the best choice for me             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| C12. Gang banging is the best way to survive               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| C13. I will probably be a gang member forever              | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

APPENDIX B  
PARENTAL/LEGAL GUARDIAN INFORMED CONSENT



College of Social and Behavioral Sciences  
Department of Social Work

### Parental/Legal Guardian Informed Consent

The residents of Fields Comprehensive Group Homes (Napa House/Eddington House) are being asked to participate in a research study, to investigate attitudes toward gangs. This study is being conducted by Gina Aguirre, under the supervision of Professor Stanley Taylor, Assistant Professor of Social Work. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board of California State University, San Bernardino.

**PURPOSE:** To investigate effects of a four week group intervention relating to gangs on attitudes of youth.

**DESCRIPTION:** Discussions and group activities to explore attitudes toward gang affiliation.

**PARTICIPATION:** Participation in this study is voluntary. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which youth are otherwise entitled for not participating. Participants are free to withdraw at any time during the study.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** Information conveyed by participants will be confidential. Participant names will not be reported with the data, which will be reported in group form only. Group sessions will be tape-recorded as a tool to enable the researcher to better recall what occurred during the sessions. However, the tapes will not be transcribed, and will be destroyed upon completion of the research.

**DURATION:** At the beginning, study participants will complete a written survey, which should take about 10-15 minutes to complete. Members of the experimental group (Eddington House) will also participate in four weekly group sessions, approximately 1-1/2 hours in length. Members of the comparison group (Napa House) will not receive an intervention. Both groups will again complete the 10-15 minute survey after four weeks. At that time, the comparison group will have a one hour discussion about gangs, so that they may receive some benefit from participating in the research study.

**RISKS:** There are no major foreseeable immediate or long-term risks to participants in this research. Minor risks include the potential for emotional discomfort due to the nature of the discussions that will be held. If such feelings arise during the study, participants can meet individually with the researcher, an MSW intern-therapist, or with their therapist from Group Home Support Services, to discuss their feelings.

**BENEFITS:** Participants may experience an increase in self-insight regarding gang affiliation. They may also benefit from participating in positive social interactions within group sessions, as well as exposure to educational materials on gang affiliation. All participants will receive a \$10.00 Target gift card upon their completion of the post-test survey.

**CONTACT:** For questions/concerns, please feel free to contact Professor Stanley Taylor at (909) 537-5584.

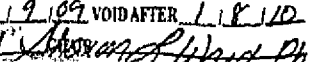
**RESULTS:** Group results of this study may be received upon completion after September, 2009 at the Pfau Library, California State University, San Bernardino, as well as through Sharon Heaston, M.F.T., of Group Home Support Services.

**SIGNATURE:** I acknowledge that I have been informed of and understand the nature and purpose of this study. I freely give consent for the minors in my care to participate.

  
Signature of Guardian  
Arby Fields, Legal Guardian  
Fields Comprehensive Youth Services

Today's Date: 1-9-09

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN BERNARDINO  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD COMMITTEE

APPROVED 1/9/09 VOID AFTER 1/18/10  
IRE# 08064  Sharon Heaston, Ph.D.



College of Social and Behavioral Sciences  
Department of Social Work

### Youth Oral Assent Form - "Attitudes About Gangs"

The purpose of this study is to explore your attitudes about being part of a gang. I may be asking you to participate in four group sessions, about one and a half hours each, with other residents of your group home, and to write answers to a short survey. Or, I may only ask you to complete the survey, without participating in group sessions. The survey will ask you some questions about yourself, and your thoughts and feelings about gang membership. Your answers will be confidential, which means that no one other than me will know which answers are yours.

Also, I will not talk about our conversations with group home staff, group home therapists, teachers, parents, friends or others in your life. If you participate in group sessions, I will be tape recording them, but only to help me remember what happens. No one else will listen to them, and after the research is completed, the tapes will be destroyed. I will ask participants not to talk about what happens in the group outside of the sessions.

Sometimes talking in a group or participating in activities might make you feel uncomfortable. You will not be forced to participate. There is no penalty from group home staff or anyone else for not participating in the study. If you need to talk to anyone during the study about feelings or concerns, both myself and your group home therapist will be available for you.

At the end of this study, you will receive a \$10.00 gift certificate to Target for your participation. If you have any questions about being in this study, you or group home staff can call Professor Stanley Taylor at (909) 537-5584.

#### Assent:

By nodding your head or saying "yes," you indicate that you understand this study and what I have talked with you about, and that you are willing to be in this study.

Gina Aguirre, MSW Intern

Name of Person Conducting Informed Assent  
Discussion / Investigator (printed)

Gina Aguirre

Signature of Person Conducting Informed Assent  
Discussion / Investigator

1-16-09  
Date

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN BERNARDINO  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD COMMITTEE

APPROVED 1/9/09 VOID AFTER 1/8/10

IRB# 08064 Sharon A. Ward, Ph.D.

909.537.5501

5500 UNIVERSITY PARKWAY SAN BERNARDINO, CA 92407-2303

The California State University, San Bernardino Institutional Review Board (IRB) is a committee of faculty and staff members who review and approve research projects involving human subjects. The IRB is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of human subjects of research. The IRB is composed of members from various disciplines and backgrounds. The IRB meets regularly to review and approve research projects. The IRB is located in the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, Department of Social Work, 5500 University Parkway, San Bernardino, CA 92407-2303. The IRB can be reached at (909) 537-5501.

APPENDIX C  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL





Academic Affairs  
Research and Sponsored Programs • Institutional Review Board

January 9, 2009

Ms. Gina M. Aguirre  
c/o: Prof. Stanley Taylor  
Department of Social Work  
California State University  
5500 University Parkway  
San Bernardino, California 92407

**CSUSB  
INSTITUTIONAL  
REVIEW BOARD**  
Full Board Review  
IRB# 08064  
Status  
**APPROVED**

Dear Ms. Aguirre:

Your application to use human subjects, titled, "Attitudes Regarding Gang Affiliations of Select Adolescent Boys Residing in Group Homes" has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Your informed consent document is attached. This consent document has been stamped and signed by the IRB chairperson. All subsequent copies used must be this officially approved version. A change in your informed consent (no matter how minor the change) requires resubmission of your protocol as amended.

The CSUSB IRB has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk to the human participants and the aspects of the proposal related to potential risk and benefit. This approval notice does not replace any departmental or additional approvals which may be required.

Your responsibilities as the researcher/investigator reporting to the IRB Committee include the following requirements. You are required to notify the IRB of the following: 1) submit a protocol change form if any substantive changes (no matter how minor) are made in your research prospectus/protocol, 2) if any unanticipated/adverse events are experienced by subjects during your research, and 3) when your project has ended by emailing the IRB Coordinator. Please note that the protocol change form and renewal form are located on the IRB website under the forms menu.

Your project is approved for one year from the letter approval date listed above. If your project lasts longer than one year, the investigator/researcher is required to notify the IRB by email or correspondence of *Notice of Project Ending* or submit a *Request for Renewal* at the end of your approval end date. Failure to notify the IRB of the above may result in disciplinary action. You are required to keep copies of the informed consent forms and data for at least three years.

If you have any questions regarding the IRB decision, please contact Michael Gillespie, IRB Coordinator. Mr. Michael Gillespie can be reached by phone at (909) 537-7588, by fax at (909) 537-7028, or by email at [mgillespie@csusb.edu](mailto:mgillespie@csusb.edu). Please include your application identification number (above) in all correspondence.

Best of luck with your research.

Sincerely,

  
Sharon Ward, Ph.D., Chair  
Institutional Review Board

SW/mg

cc: Prof. Stanley Taylor, Department of Social Work

909.537.7588 • fax: 909.537.7028 • <http://irb.csusb.edu/>  
5500 UNIVERSITY PARKWAY, SAN BERNARDINO, CA 92407-2393

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Maritime Academy • Monterey Bay • Northridge • Pomona • Sacramento • San Bernardino • San Diego • San Francisco • San Jose • San Luis Obispo • San Marcos • Sonoma • Stanislaus

APPENDIX D  
AGENCY APPROVAL LETTER



November 26, 2008

Sharon Heaston, MFT

Psychological Counseling & Education

Dr. Teresa Morris

School of Social Work

California State University, San Bernardino

5500 University Parkway

San Bernardino, CA 92497-2397

Re: Attitudes Regarding Gang Affiliation of Adolescent Boys Residing in Group Homes

Dear Dr. Morris:

This letter serves as notification to the School of Social Work at California State University San Bernardino that Gina Aguirre has obtained consent from Group Home Support Services to conduct the above-referenced research project at two group homes owned and operated by Fields Comprehensive, under this agency's supervision. Group Home Support Services currently provides therapeutic services to the clients of Fields Comprehensive.

She has permission to work with the adolescent clients of the group home via their legal guardian, Arby Fields, Fields Comprehensive Youth Services,

If you have any questions regarding this letter of consent, please feel free to contact myself, Sharon Heaston, MFT, at (909) 945-8894.

Sincerely,

Sharon Heaston, MFT

GROUP HOME SUPPORT SERVICES

Arby Fields

FIELDS COMPREHENSIVE

637 Arrow Route  
Building #4, Suite A  
Sancho Cucamonga, CA 91730

Telephone: (909) 945-8894  
Facsimile: (909) 945-2855  
sheaston.mft@gmail.com

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