Gangs in school: Exploring the experiences of gang involved youth

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Abstract

This study explores three questions: 1) what are the criteria that current or formerly gang-involved youth use to identify the presence of gangs in school; 2) do gang activities produce incivilities and victimizations within the school context; and 3) what is the impact of a gang presence on youth in the school, specifically with respect to the presence or absence of fear. We examine the influence of gangs in schools through qualitative analysis of 180 in-depth semi-structured interviews. The sample includes youth with varying levels of gang involvement who attended schools across the United States. Youth relied on personal knowledge and visual cues to identify gangs in their school. Despite the occurrence of vicarious victimizations and incivilities at the hands of gang youth, respondents indicated that gangs did not impact their school life. These youth frequently used normalization and delimitation processes to deal with gangs in their school.

Introduction

Concern regarding the presence of gangs and gang activity in America's schools is not a new phenomenon. Reports of the existence of gangs in urban schools (including Philadelphia, Chicago, and Los Angeles) began appearing in the 1970s and 80s (Miller, 1975; Moore, 1991; Spergel, 1995; Vigil, 1988). Official data, however, indicate that the prevalence of gangs in schools has been decreasing since the 1990s. According to the School Crime Supplement of the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), in 2013, about 12 percent of students in the United States reported that gangs were present at their school, down from the 1995 estimate of 28 percent (Zhang, Musu-Gillette, & Oudekerk, 2016). These results mirror research on school-based victimization and delinquency in general, noting a steady decline since the 1990s.

In spite of these reported decreases, the presence of gangs in school remains a concern of school officials and policy makers as gangs are associated with a number of safety issues and disruptive activities. Their occurrence is correlated with higher levels of school-based delinquency/violence and victimization (Bouchard, Wang, & Beauregard, 2012; G. D. Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 2001; Kupchik & Farina, 2016; Wynne & Joo, 2010), substance use and drug sales (Decker & Van Winkle, 1996), as well as fear of school-based crime (Alvarez & Bachman, 1997; Bachman, Randolph, & Brown, 2011; Randa & Wilcox, 2012; Schreck & Miller, 2003). The link between gangs and school-based crime is expected given that schools act as a staging area where identities and reputations are established, thus making schools an extension of the street (Anderson, 1999; Brunson & Miller, 2009; Garot, 2010; Lauger, 2012).

Concern among school administrators about violence and victimization in school has resulted in the adoption of school-based security measures including metal detectors, dress codes, security guards, and school resource officers. Likewise, schools have banned gang

symbols, colors, and gang-like behaviors (Arciaga, Sakamoto, & Jones, 2010; Garot, 2010). In recent years, however, the utility of these security enhancements as well as the presence of zero-tolerance policies has been questioned by academics and school administrators alike. Specifically, research identifies several unintended consequences of these measures on the student body, most notably increased contact with the juvenile justice system (i.e., the school-to-prison pipeline) (Kupchik, 2010; Rios, 2011; Wang & Dishion, 2012). Zero-tolerance policies, for example, have also led to a marked increase in suspensions and expulsions (Hirschfield, 2008; Kupchik, 2010), which are frequently associated with negative outcomes such as educational disengagement, drop-out, as well as delinquency and drug use (Kupchik, 2010; Skiba et al., 2011; Sweeten, 2006). For our purposes, it is important to point out that enhanced security and zero-tolerance policies in schools, which result in increased suspension and expulsion rates, are likely to differentially affect gang youth either as a result of their increased visibility to school officials or because of their racial or ethnic minority status (Noguera, 2008; Skiba & Peterson, 1999). Additionally, gang research tells us that suspensions and expulsions drive youth further into gangs (Howell & Egley, 2005; Pyrooz, Decker, & Webb, 2014).

While the threat of gangs has resulted in school administrators instituting policies that impact the lives of both gang and nongang youth, there remains little research assessing the activities in which gang youth are involved at school. In fact, the limited research on gang activities at school finds that their behaviors in school are generally innocuous (Decker & Van Winkle, 1996). This is in line with research finding that the behaviors of gangs and gang members in the community largely involve noncriminal endeavors (Klein, 1971; Lauger, 2012). That is, violent crime, while serious and more likely to come to the attention of the police and public, remains a relatively infrequent part of the daily or weekly behavioral repertoire of gang

4

members and most of their time is spent hanging out, engaged in behavior customary to their same aged peers (Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Esbensen, Huizinga, & Weiher, 1993; Klein, 1971; Lauger, 2012). In the current study, we examine the various activities of gangs in school as told through the eyes of youth with varying levels of gang involvement. We are particularly interested in understanding activities that impact students through direct or vicarious victimization or alter their perceptions of school disorder (i.e., incivilities). Additionally, we know little about how the presence of victimization and incivilities impacts youth in these schools, particularly as it relates to fear.

To date, research that has explored the impact of gangs in school has been quantitative in nature and consistently identifies a direct link between gang presence and school-based delinquency, victimization, and fear of crime, but it tells us little about the nuances of these relationships. We believe that the current state of research would benefit from qualitative assessment of the impact of gangs on youth in America's schools. To do so we rely on 180 in-depth semi-structured interviews with youth either suspected or confirmed as being involved with a gang at one point in time[1] across seven geographically diverse cities. Our goals in this study are threefold. First, we explore the ways in which youth of varying levels of gang involvement are able to identify a gang presence in their schools. Second, we examine the perspectives of gang-involved youth regarding the various victimizations and incivilities that students may experience in a school setting due to the activities of gangs and gang-involved youth. Finally, we examine how these youths negotiate gangs in their schools, particularly with regard to the presence or absence of fear. We acknowledge that our reliance on youth with some level of gang involvement is not representative of the entire youth population. However, youth with some exposure to gang life are, perhaps, best suited to speak on their activities in school,

how gang youth are identifiable in school, and the reactions of students to the presence of gangs. Moreover, research suggests that youth gang affiliation is more common than generally believed with national prevalence rates of 2 percent, which is 2.2 times greater than those reported by the National Youth Gang Survey (see Pyrooz & Sweeten, 2015). Additionally, school-based samples taken from schools in large cities find even higher prevalence rates. Data from the two national evaluations of the G.R.E.A.T. program, for example, have found that gang members make up 13 to 17 percent of their school-based samples (Esbensen & Carson, 2012; Esbensen, Peterson, Taylor, & Freng, 2010). Moreover, Thornberry and colleagues (2003) found that 31% of their Rochester sample had been gang-involved by the end of high school. Given the prevalence of gang affiliation and the perceived impact on U.S. schools, we believe that it is time for a more nuanced understanding of these issues, which will be able to inform research and policy in the area of school violence and the role of gangs in school settings.

Identifying Gangs in School

Given the concern about gangs in school, researchers have been measuring their presence in school for decades. Yet we know little about how students identify gangs and gang members in schools as the bulk of our knowledge on the prevalence of gangs comes from self-report studies which rely heavily upon a single item measure of gang presence (e.g., are there any gangs at your school?) (Bouchard et al., 2012; Howell & Lynch, 2000; Kupchik & Farina, 2016; Randa & Wilcox, 2010, 2012; Schreck & Miller, 2003; Wynne & Joo, 2010).[2] In other words, students are typically asked to report on whether or not there are gangs in their school based on their own perceptions. Student perceptions, of course, may be based on media depictions of gang members, gossip about who is in a gang, as well as visual cues such as identifiable clothing and graffiti (Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Esbensen & Tusinski, 2007; Howell & Lynch, 2000). While both

gang and nongang youth may rely on these strategies, it is possible that youths' own personal experiences with gangs, either as a member or associate, shape their views. Lauger (2012), for example, argues that the media and gang folk-lore have contributed to the dilution of the term "gang", which has altered perceptions of who or what constitutes a "real" gang or gang member. His work examining gangs in Indianapolis found that members are in a constant battle for legitimacy and that the status of a "real" or legitimate gang member is commonly challenged by others, particularly those who are gang involved. Gang members themselves may misidentify the presence of gangs in schools if what they observe is inconsistent with their own perceptions of "real" gang members.

It is also possible that gangs and gang members may be hesitant to advertise their affiliation while at school (Decker, 1996; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Horowitz, 1983). This reluctance could be either to avoid drawing attention to themselves or to comply with school policies that mandate uniforms and/or prohibit any potential display of gang insignia (Arciaga et al., 2010; Garot, 2010). These factors can make it difficult, if not impossible, for students to rely on visual cues when determining the presence or absence of gangs. Overall, inaccurate perceptions of what constitutes a "real" gang or gang member and an inability to rely on visual cues could produce inaccurate estimates of the prevalence of gangs. We believe that a qualitative assessment of youth's perceptions of gang problems in their school can help inform future research by further specifying the characteristics used to identify gang members and the presence of gangs in U.S. schools.

The Impact of Gangs in School

Research suggests that gangs and gang members contribute to experiences with direct or indirect victimization on school grounds as well as perceived incivilities (i.e., gang dress, graffiti, etc.)

among other students attending these schools. Within the school context, the presence of gangs is correlated with levels of verbal, physical, and cyber bullying (Kupchik & Farina, 2016; Wynne & Joo, 2010), general victimization (Wynne & Joo, 2010), and violence (Bouchard et al., 2012), particularly fighting (Decker & Van Winkle, 1996). Apart from victimization, gangs also contribute to a number of perceived physical and social incivilities within the school. This is unsurprising as the presence of gangs is often cited as an indicator of disorder in the community setting (Sampson, 1993; Sampson & Groves, 1989) and is often used as a proxy for school disorder (Bachman et al., 2011; Bouchard et al., 2012; Burrow & Apel, 2008; Kupchik & Farina, 2016; Schreck & Miller, 2003; Wynne & Joo, 2010). In fact, many of the visual cues used to identify a gang presence in school, such as tagging and graffiti, are often considered physical incivilities as they represent a lack of informal and formal social control at school. Additionally, the presence of drug selling and substance use on school grounds could be considered a form of incivility. The occurrence of victimizations and incivilities in school (i.e., school disorder) has been associated with higher levels of fear of crime in school as well as the use of avoidance strategies (Alvarez & Bachman, 1997; Bachman et al., 2011; Randa & Wilcox, 2010, 2012; Schreck & Miller, 2003), partially due to increased feelings of vulnerability and perceived risk. All else equal, we would expect the presence of gangs and the victimizations and incivilities they produce should lead to fear among the student body. However, fear is a complex notion and it does not always manifest itself in the way that would be expected. For example, people living in high-crime, high disorder areas are not proportionately more afraid than individuals in other neighborhoods (Rountree, 1998; Taylor & Shumaker, 1990; Wilcox-Rountree & Land, 1996). There are two factors that may contribute to the *absence* of fear among youth in schools with a gang presence. First, despite the link between gangs and school-based crime and fear, qualitative

research finds that the most common activities reported by gang youth during school hours are rather innocuous. Decker and Van Winkle (1996) note that gang youth regularly attempt to skip school or avoid class. Gang youth also state that they spend a large portion of the school day looking for girls,[3] roaming the halls, and chatting with their peers (Decker & Van Winkle, 1996). Given the variation in activities in which gang youth participate while in school, we may expect similar variation in their impact on each other and other students in the school.

Second, fear of crime research has demonstrated that individuals make assessments regarding the amount of risk posed by their immediate surroundings. Individuals who perceive low levels of risk will have proportionately lower levels of fear. In other words, as a person's perceived risk decreases so too does their fear (Ferraro, 1995; Melde, 2009; Melde & Esbensen, 2009). These assessments of risk, however, can be altered by the commonality of crime, violence, and victimization. Those who live in high crime communities or attend schools with high levels of disorder recognize that crime is a relatively common, even banal, event, which may reduce their perceptions of risk for victimization and, thus, fear (Carvalho & Lewis, 2003; Melde & Esbensen, 2009; Taylor & Shumaker, 1990).

If the commonality of crime and disorder can alter fear and perceived risk, then we would expect that those involved in a highly delinquent lifestyle would also be less fearful. In fact, individuals who are involved in a delinquent lifestyle (i.e., most likely to be victimized) do report the lowest levels of fear (Lane, 2006; Melde, 2009; Melde & Esbensen, 2009). This finding extends to gang members who report lower levels of fear than their nongang counterparts (Lane & Fox, 2012; Melde, Taylor, & Esbensen, 2009). While examining fear among those involved in a delinquent lifestyle, Melde (2009) argued that youth who engage in offending recognized that they are at increased risk of victimization, but simply view the risks as being less salient. This

lower perception of risk could occur for a number of reasons. First, criminally involved youth could be less forward thinking due to reduced levels of self-control (M. Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990), and are, thus, unable to accurately assess their risk. Second, these youth may also make distinctions between serious and non-serious victimization (Lane, 2006) and consider serious victimizations to be less common and, thus, have less fear. Finally, youth involved with crime, especially gang youth, may view themselves as being more "streetwise" than those not involved in crime and, thus, have less fear (Anderson, 1999; Lane, 2006). Relatedly, gang youth may feel that their increased status as well as their gang attachments will afford them a certain amount of protection (Melde et al., 2009).

Experiences, whether past or present, with a delinquent lifestyle are likely to alter perceptions of risk as well. Individuals with delinquent backgrounds (e.g., gang members), may have a heightened understanding that crime and disorder are associated with certain places or certain people (i.e., social and physical delimitation). This allows for the neutralizations of perceptions of fear and perceived risk. Crime and incivility are often most common among certain groups of people or during certain times of day and individuals negotiating areas of high disorder tend to maintain their distance (Carvalho & Lewis, 2003). This process of delimitation serves to reduce feelings of fear and perceived risk because it reduces the random nature of criminal acts (Carvalho & Lewis, 2003). Additionally, the normalization and familiarity with crime and disorder leaves room for other emotional responses. So rather than feeling fear in the face of victimization and disorder, individuals may feel annoyed or angry (Ditton, Bannister, Gilchrist, & Farrall, 1999; Madriz, 1997).

Overall, more research is needed to understand the concept of fear in relation to crime and disorder, especially in the school setting. This study will help to fill this gap in the literature

by exploring youth's personal experiences with and reactions to gangs in their school to understand their assessments of the presence or absence of fear. Like communities, schools are diverse places comprised of delinquent and prosocial youth and experiences with victimization and incivilities may not affect every student in the same way. The current study uses qualitative interviews with 180 youth of varying levels of gang involvement. While certainly not a representative sample of students, these youths are in a unique position to help researchers and practitioners understand the impact on America's schools. The use of qualitative interviews gives us the ability to provide a more holistic look at the perceptions of these youth with regards to identifying gang members in school, the activities and behaviors of gangs in school, as well as the impact on one another and other students. Finally, the sample selected includes a wide range of youth from different geographical regions, gender, and varying races and ethnicities.

Methodology

Data for this study were collected as part of the Multi-Method, Multi-Site Study of Gang Desistance – an extension of the National Evaluation of Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.) program. As part of this evaluation, longitudinal self-report surveys were collected from approximately 3800 youth across the country including: Albuquerque, New Mexico; Chicago, Illinois; Greeley, Colorado; Nashville, Tennessee; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Portland, Oregon; and a Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas suburb (please see Esbensen et al. 2013 for more information on the G.R.E.A.T. evaluation).[4] Following completion of the evaluation and with additional funding, a subsample of youth was selected to participate in qualitative interviews. Youth who reported being in a gang (i.e., answered affirmatively to "are you now in a gang?" question) (n = 512) or who met the Eurogang definition[5] (n = 439) at one or more time points in the longitudinal evaluation were eligible to participate in the second study. A central

component of the research design was to compare stable (i.e., reported membership at two or more consecutive waves) and transient (i.e., reported involvement in at least one non-consecutive wave) gang youth.[6] The sampling frame was developed via a combination of purposive sampling of all stable gang youth (n = 131) and a random sampling of transient (n=198) and Eurogang defined gang youth (n = 97).[7] This strategy led to a sampling frame of 426 gang and Eurogang youth.

Sample selection was driven by several factors. First, we wanted to be able to examine city-specific issues. We focused our efforts, therefore, in four of the seven cities (Albuquerque, a DFW suburb, Nashville, and Philadelphia) and, based on extant literature, estimated that 30 interviews in each site would produce saturation. A second consideration was to explore potential differences by gang definition (e.g., reliance on self-nomination versus the Eurogang criteria as well as stable versus transient). Finally, the funding agency (blinded for review) requested that we include interviews in all seven sites. To meet these criteria and stay within funding constraints, we planned to interview 15 stable and 15 transient gang members in the primary cities, five self-defined gang youth in the three secondary sites (Chicago, Greeley, and Portland), as well as five Eurogang-defined gang youth in each of the seven cities. This quota sampling framework would ideally produce 35 interviews in 4 sites and 10 interviews in three other sites yielding a total of 170 interviews. The actual results produced a range from 30 to 36 interviews in the primary sites and 13 to 18 in the secondary sites for a total of 180.[8] Figure 1 provides a graphical representation of our sampling design.

---FIGURE ONE ABOUT HERE---

The G.R.E.A.T. evaluation ended when the majority of youth in the sample were in their sophomore year of high school (surveys were completed during the fall 2010 semester). The

qualitative interviews were completed in the summer of 2012 meaning that most youth had completed their junior year and were under 18 years of age at that point in time; it was therefore necessary to obtain parental consent for the majority of youth in the study. Trained interview staff approached participants by visiting their home addresses (provided as part of the G.R.E.A.T. evaluation) after parents were sent an initial contact letter. Youth who were given permission participated in an in-depth, face-to-face interview. All interviews were conducted in a confidential location, lasted approximately one hour and youth were paid $20 for their participation. Recorded interviews were later transcribed by a project interviewer. While few parents and/or youths declined to participate (5.3%; n =23), the interview staff was unable to locate youth for a number of reasons including residential moves (27.7%; n=118) and no contact after repeated visits to the address (20.2%, n=86).[9] These mobility rates are not surprising given the almost two-year gap between survey completion (fall 2010) and administration of the qualitative interviews (summer 2012).

While all of the youth selected for participation in this study were identified as gang-involved in at least one of the survey administrations, it was important to note that during the qualitative interviews, the interviewer did not impose the status of gang membership on the respondents. Self-identification as gang involved emerged organically during the interview process. The interviews were retrospective in nature and, in some cases, youth had reported gang membership during wave 1 of the G.R.E.A.T. evaluation in 2006. Some youth, however, did not acknowledge during these retrospective interviews that they had been gang-involved (n = 53).[10] Project staff reviewed and discussed the statuses of the remaining 127 youth.[11] The focus of the interviews was peer group transitions, including gang desistance and the majority of youth self-reported that they were no longer gang involved at the time of the qualitative interviews (n =

107).[12] As seen in Table 1, the analysis sample is comprised of mostly males (62%), minority youth (76%), and ranged in age from 15 to 19 (mean = 17 years). There were no significant differences in race/ethnicity and age across gang status, but males were slightly more likely to report they were currently gang members. In the subsequent analysis of interview data, we categorize respondents by their gang status: youth who claimed to no longer be gang involved (gang desisters – GD; n = 107), current gang youth (G; n = 20), and suspected gang youth (SG; n=53) – those who did not acknowledge prior gang affiliation although they had self-reported gang membership on at least one occasion during the G.R.E.A.T. evaluation.

----TABLE ONE ABOUT HERE----

While this sample is not generalizable to the population or to U.S. schools in general, these narratives are able to provide insight into the experiences of youth in settings where gangs have been known to exist. We also think it is important to highlight the geographical diversity of our sample, which is relatively rare in qualitative gang research. The youth in our sample spoke about 75 unique schools and reported that 54 (72%) of them had an identifiable gang presence either in the form of gangs or gang members.[13] Similar to quantitative research we relied upon youths' own assessments of the presence/absence of gangs in their school. It was common for youth in our sample to give a definitive response when asked about the presence of gangs in their high school. These responses were typically as simple and definitive as "yes" and "oh yeah."[14] Prevalence rates of gangs in schools vary across prior research and are also dependent upon the sample. Student reports, like the ones presented here, are typically higher than those of school administrators, but still represent relatively low prevalence rates in a national sample (i.e., 12% in the most recent NCVS). The comparatively high prevalence rate in this study is likely due to the nature of the site selection procedures in the original G.R.E.A.T. evaluation and the fact that

the current sample was selected based on youth who had indicated that they were gang involved at some point during their school years. The youth in our sample typically attended schools that were located in urban areas (77.3%), had a population of approximately 1,300 students (SD = 735.35), with a student to teacher ratio of 34.12 to one. The schools were public (i.e., not charter or magnet) and were comprised primarily of minority students (76%) and those eligible to receive free and reduced lunches (65%).[15]

While the interview guide focused heavily on peer group transition, it also included questions about gangs in a youth's city, neighborhood, and schools. This current work draws specifically upon a group of questions asking youth about gangs in their high school.[16] This portion of the interview guide allowed for a considerable amount of probing, but centered on the presence or absence of gangs in their school, the effect of gangs on day-to-day life at school, and how students dealt with gangs and gang activity in their school. These narratives were particularly valuable because they allowed us to learn about the issues surrounding gangs in school from both current and former gang members' perspectives. In addition, they are able to reveal the meanings that youth give to their experiences with gangs and gang members in their school. Importantly, 180 transcribed interviews resulted in 5,766 pages of transcript (32 per interview); therefore, we completed an initial organization of broad topical areas explored in the interviews (e.g., gangs in the neighborhood, gangs in middle school, gangs in high school, etc.) using NVivo software. Following this initial categorization, the narratives within each topical area were analyzed via line-by-line open coding, which allowed us make use of inductive analyses to identify and shape emerging themes using a modified grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). We were careful to ensure that the themes that developed represented the most common experiences of youth in our sample schools. This was

done by searching and analyzing deviant cases and inconsistencies both within and across all the interviews (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). While themes emerged organically during the open coding process, they were categorized and labeled based, to some extent, on previous research. For example, themes surrounding avoidance of gangs and gang members were labeled as delimitation based on prior work by Carvalho and Lewis (2003). Following the initial coding, all passages were reread in order to refine the themes and identify any inconsistencies. We believe that the repeated readings were essential to the coding process given the large amount of data. The results presented below represent the most common patterns that emerged from these narratives. Table 2 presents information on the commonality of key themes for the full sample as well as gang status.

Identifying the Presence of Gangs in Schools

The mechanisms employed by youth in the sample to determine the presence of gangs in their schools is consistent with the idea that schools are simply extensions of the street for gang youth (Anderson, 1999; Brunson & Miller, 2009; Garot, 2010; Lauger, 2012). In order to build status and respect, gang youth must make their status known to those around them. Evidence of these displays, such as visual identifiers, was commonly used to identify a gang presence among the full sample of youth (42%). It was most common for gang desisters (43%) and suspected gang youth (45%) to identify the presence of gangs through visual cues such as gang colors, symbols, or hand signs. Brandi (SG) discussed that gang youth "…have flags in they back pockets and stuff. So, you'll know, you know, when they're gang related." Felicia (GD) was able to explain the visual cues, "Because, like, they represent what they are…like, they be throwin' up their signs, colors."

Schools are also places where youth often come into contact with gang culture as well as gang members (Brunson & Miller, 2009). Youth, regardless of gang status, are interacting with gang members in the classroom, hallways, and during lunchtime, which can lead to familiarity with the names of gangs in the school (35%) as well as first- and secondhand knowledge of who is a gang member and who is not (33%). Both current (29%) and former gang members (39%) frequently named the gangs that were present in their schools. Harry (GD), for example listed the names of the different gangs representing in his school: "…Bloods, Crips, Gangster Disciples, BP [Brown Pride], MS13 [Mara Salvatrucha]." Similarly, Raul (G) named, "Uh like East Side, Bloods and Crips, And1, that's it." Eric (GD) explained that secondhand knowledge, such as gossip, may reveal who is in a gang and who is not, "'Cause I knew they jumped in. You just know when someone's jumped in, 'cause it might go around." It was common for current gang members (47%), to make use of first and secondhand knowledge to identify members. As an active gang member, Francisco, discussed that the best way to find out if a fellow student is in a gang is to ask because it can be difficult to differentiate between gang members and affiliates:

> I don't think you can tell. 'Cause there's gang members, but they can kick it with other people like they grew up with not not like the whole that's a gang member set, I don't know. Like you just got to know ya know, hit 'em up you got to tell 'em, "Hey where you from, what you bang?"

There were, of course, cases in which multiple indicators of gang affiliation were available. Adam, a former gang member, relied on both firsthand knowledge and visual indicators stating that: "'Cause you go to class with one of them and they'd be like, you know, they'd eventually mention it. Like 'Oh, I was hanging out with my friends.' And then you, like, see it in, like, their tattoos or the clothes they're wearing."

Of course, interpretation of a gang presence is based on subjective accounts of what/who is a real or legitimate gang member, these same visual and behavioral cues can also be used to

delegitimize gang members (Lauger, 2012). The reports of fake gangs or wannabes were comparatively less common in our school-based sample (14% of entire sample). Heather (SG) discusses her perception of gang youth at her school:

> Like they'd act like all tough and everything and, you know, they dress the part, but like they weren't tough enough for it…like when they'd pick a fight with someone, but they'd be like too scared to do like anything. So it's like you say you're in a gang, you act like you're in a gang, but it really doesn't look like you are…

Hector (GD) discusses how students at his school misrepresent their status: "They just say, 'I'm in a gang.' Throw signs, you know…wannabe gangsters that's what I call them." When asked why he refers to them as "wannabes," Hector goes on to explain, "…if you actually [in it] you wouldn't care about your life, you would like get out of school, drop out, do something." This seems to indicate that the mere act of attending school can bring about perceptions of an illegitimate gang member.

These themes indicate that youth most commonly rely upon visual cues to determine if there are gangs in their school, followed by knowledge of gang names and gang members. These identifiers varied somewhat across gang status with both desisted and suspected gang members relying more heavily upon visual cues. Conversely, current gang members were most likely to rely upon their first and secondhand knowledge of who is in a gang. These categories are not mutually exclusive and youth in these schools often relied on multiple sources when discussing the presence of gangs in schools. Importantly, it was not common in our data for youth to question the legitimacy of the gangs and gang members in their school. We now turn our discussion to the various activities of gang members while in school as it relates to the production of incivilities as well as victimization.

<div align="center">----TABLE TWO ABOUT HERE----</div>

Victimization and Incivilities in the School Context

The presence of gangs in school is commonly associated with disorder due to participation in violence and incivilities (Bachman et al., 2011; Bouchard et al., 2012; Burrow & Apel, 2008; Kupchik & Farina, 2016; Schreck & Miller, 2003; Wynne & Joo, 2010). When discussing the activities of gangs and gang members in school, the youth in our sample overwhelmingly discussed fighting (68% of the entire sample). The majority of both gang desisters (72%) and suspected gang members (67%) spoke of the commonality of fighting, while less than half of the current gang members discussed these incidences. Moreover, these fights occur with some degree of regularity as, Tina (GD), for example, mentioned, "there's usually fights every day." Guadalupe (GD) concurred stating that "Uh we'd always have fights…like every day we'd see a huge fight and it wasn't like a one-on-one fight it was like five people on five people like you know five different fights at one time." Among the reasons given for why fights occurred at their school, some youth pointed to rivalries between different gangs (23%). Rachel (SG) affirmed that, "…they hate each other, like, rival gangs." Alejandro (G) expounded on the rivalries from gang youth on two sides of his city:

> …there was conflict against the west and south…You know, there was fights almost every day cause, just you're from a different side, you know. I'm gonna beat you up cause you're from that side and I'm gonna beat you up cause you're from this side.

While the occurrence of fights can be considered vicarious victimization, which may have a strong impact on students, youth in the sample rarely spoke about personal experiences with victimizations at the hands of gang youth (11%). Experiences with direct victimization and violence were more common among current (12%) and desisted (13%) gang youth, than suspected gang youth (6%). These discussions of personal experiences with violence and victimization generally arose when the narrative turned to fighting in school. Angel (GD) discussed his experiences with fighting as a tool for building status during his time in the gang,

19

"Like, you just kick everybody's ass and say, 'You know what? This is our school.'" Other

youth described their own violent encounters, Gabriel (GD), for example, explained his mutual

brawl with a gang youth at school:

> ...right when he pushed me and that's when I knew I pretty much hadda defend
> myself...so I just so I just started fighting with him. I got him down on the ground
> quick, grabbed him by his collar and just started hitting him (punches into his
> hand).

Along with the vicarious and direct forms of victimization just described, youth also

discussed a number of physical (55%) and social (43%) incivilities associated with the presence

of gangs in their school. Incivilities include not only the same physical identifiers that youth use

to identify a gang presence (i.e., graffiti, symbols, colors, etc.), but also social incivilities such as

disruptions in and between classes as well as loitering in certain parts of the school. Alex (GD)

discussed how tagging behavior can impact students: "if they were tagging and stuff sometimes

we couldn't go like to the basketball courts or stuff like that." Additionally, some students,

largely suspected gang and gang desisted youth, discussed the territorial nature of gangs in their

school. Amber (GD), for instance, explained that, "…at school there is um, certain parts where

they hang out…just like all the Westsiders hang out over here and the Southsiders hang out over

here." Brandi (SG) discussed the segregation at her school as well, "Yea…everybody has their

'lil clique. You got Bloods sitting on one rail. Then Brown Pride sitting on one. And KP's

[Kurdish Pride] sitting in one hallway. Like, they all segregated." Navigating these areas of

school may cause discomfort for some youth, for example, Allison (SG) states, "It's um honestly

intimidating like going to class 'cause they like line up on the…skinny hall…[and] just like sit

there like this and like stare at you." In addition to these distractions, youth not currently

involved in a gang discussed the negative influences gang members can have on the learning

environment, largely due to disruptions and distractions in the classroom. Stephan (SG), for

example, described gang youth as "…trouble-makers…they're gonna be loud, obnoxious, and doing a bunch of stupid stuff." Similarly, Jared (GD) added, "Oh they're just real loud and they're goofy…they're interruptin' class. But that's all they do it's just some of them disrespect teachers. But it's not like somethin' crazy, it's not."

Overall, these themes represent the commonality of victimizations and incivilities present in schools. While youth, regardless of gang status, overwhelmingly discussed experiencing vicarious violence, such as regular fighting on school grounds (68%), this narrative was significantly more common among desisted and suspected gang youth. Additionally, the presence of social and physical incivilities was more regularly discussed among those suspected of gang membership and desisted from gang life. We now turn our attention to how students responded to these victimizations and incivilities.

Reactions to Gangs in School

While it would be expected that experiences with victimizations and incivilities, such as the ones identified above, would increase fear of crime (see Lane et al., 2014 for a review), only eight youth in our sample reported feeling fearful themselves. Alejandra (GD) explains how hard it was for her to watch people fight:

> I would come home crying...like when I would see people fighting, like one time, I even had to go the nurse, because I think I got an anxiety attack like I started shaking a lot like 'cause there was like blood everywhere and it was raining, so it kinda made the blood look worse.

Apart from being personally fearful, it was only slightly more common for youth to express that their fellow classmates were afraid (13%). Josh (GD), for example, believed that, "…yea…probably some kids were probably like scared to go to school." Jose (GD) was able to articulate how he believed his fellow students dealt with fighting in the school:

21

> …when they're in fear, you can see it in their eyes. Some of 'em kinda get pale, but it's not too crazy, like where, they're calling for their parents to come pick 'em up or nothing, like, they just stay by an adult or like by a teacher and whatever. Others they just ya know whatever happens happens they just sit around.

While fear as a result of gangs and fighting cannot be considered a theme in these data, it was mentioned by a few students, although no current gang members mentioned being fearful. The instances in which a respondent expressed feeling fearful or intimidated were usually in the context of feeling vulnerable. When discussing his altercation with a gang youth, Brian (SG) remarked that "…the bigger kids…fight back." Conversely, Gabriel (GD) explained that his lack of vulnerability empowered him to stand up to gang youth: "…kinda like depends who you were…I'm not the kinda person who's gonna let somebody sit there and bully me…but they [gang youth] like to push their weight around with some people." Physical vulnerability, then, played a role in the feelings of fear among our respondents. Youth who are able to physically defend themselves may be less fearful overall and opt to stand up to gang youth. Conversely, those youths who view themselves as more vulnerable, experience more fear.

Fear is not the only possible emotion resulting from gangs in schools. Approximately 18 percent of students reported other emotional responses such as being entertained by the gang fights or annoyance at the disruption caused by such incidents. Mitch, an ex-gang youth, elaborated on how gangs affected his life at school by saying: "It's annoying. I mean I used to be affiliated with Crip, I'm not anymore, but it's just, it's annoying. Just too much drama." Dalton (GD) explains that the fighting in school was, "…kinda scary, but it was kinda entertaining." Comments made by Ebony (SG) also captured the various emotions experienced by some students:

> Some students get mad, some they just like to see fights so they didn't care, they just be ready to see the fight. But then other, some kids they was upset. Well not

upset, they was mad 'cause we get, whoever's in a fight like a big group, everybody get in trouble like in our area. So it wasn't just for them [it was] for everybody. I mean they get suspended, but we got a lot of privileges tooken [sic] like this year they gonna stop us from doin' prom 'cause the kids wanna keep fightin' and stuff and not actin' good so.

There were a few discussions about fear and other emotions, but the youth in our sample largely viewed the presence of gangs as part of a normal school experience. Guadalupe (GD), for instance, had this to say about the fighting in school, "…you just get used to it kinda, which is kinda sad, you just get used to seeing fights and you just get, like, if the sirens went off you just get used to walking to class, it didn't feel like a panic after a while." While this normalization might be attributed to her prior experiences with gangs, prior research finds that normalization processes are also common among individuals who commonly navigate high crime high disorder neighborhoods (Carvalho & Lewis, 2003). Approximately 21 percent of the youth reported normalizing the presence of gangs in their school either through maintaining friendships with gang youth and/or treating them like they would another student. Youth who held friendships with gang youth typically reported positive interactions. Connor (SG) for instance highlighted his assessment that his gang friends are "good hearted people" while downplaying their gang affiliation: "I mean a lot of my friends that like say they're in a gang, maybe they've been beaten in or maybe they haven't and I don't really care 'cause either way they're still, a lot of them are just good hearted people." Similarly, Dan (SG) focused his comments on the fact that his gang friends are "nice." He states: "like it's cool, like I talk to them a lot 'cause I talk to their friends 'cause they're nice." Many youths also reported that they did not differentiate between gang and nongang youth. Jamal (GD) explained, "Oh we, like, I don't pay attention to it, mostly everyone I hang around doesn't pay attention to it, they just get to know them like the people that they are instead of like, instead of their gang background, we try to get their real background." This

23

ability to ignore a peer's gang status is also discussed by Amanda (GD): "Like, they act just like normal, I guess. [They're] not going around flaunting that they're in a gang and like threatening people."

The most common strategy used to negotiate gangs in the school setting is to simply avoid them (49%). This technique was more common among suspected gang youth (52%) and gang desisters (55%) than current members (18%). By identifying certain places or certain individuals to avoid, these students are representative of the delimitation process described by Carvalho and Lewis (2003). These students believed that victimization was limited to certain places in the school (physical delimitation) or to specific groups of people (social delimitation). To avoid the potential negative consequences of gangs in schools (i.e., fights, incivilities, disruptions), these youths separated themselves from gang youth either physically or socially. Ebony (SG) detailed a rather straight-forward approach to avoiding gangs and gang fights:

> …I just went on my own business did what I had to do and you don't, I mean
> when you talkin' about fightin', you don't literally have to go that way you can
> just turn around go [down] a different hall. But that's everybody else decision so
> it didn't really affect me.

It was common for youth in our sample to discuss distancing themselves from gang youth and trying to avoid them. Chelsea (SG) reported that, "I mean as long as I stay out of everything and, ya know, I just don't like talk to them or nothing they don't really affect me one way or another." Brad, a current gang member, discusses the use of normalization and delimitation processes by the other students in his school:

> They [other students] normally just tried, they tried to form friendships with other
> people and for the most part they, youth know, stayed out of people's ways…If
> they [gang members] didn't tell you that they were in a gang, you'd think they
> would just be pretty much any other person.

In addition to the commonality of avoidance on the part of non-active gang youth, it was also common for youth to point out instances in which active gang youth socially and/or physically avoided other students in the school (29% of the entire sample). This delimitation on the part of gang youth was evidenced by narratives which discussed that gangs typically do not associate with or inconvenience nongang students. Angel (GD), for example, discussed that, "Yeah, we didn't go pick on like, you know like other kids…that have nothing to do wit it, you know, like we don't go pick on those kids, we ain't bullies or nothin' like that, we just focus on, you know, other gangs and stuff." Similarly, Raul (G) had this to say about fellow gang members at his school, "…they'll get in fight[s] with literally with each other, that's it." It appears then that gang and nongang youth seem to mutually ignore each other's presence and that each are viewed as a tangential part of the school experience. Moreover, delimitation from nongang youth on the part of gang members may be a way for these youth to remain "under the radar" at their school. Jesse, a suspected gang youth, states "…they don't like run around the school telling people they, you know, like represent or whatever." Bruce (G) echoed this sentiment in regards to other gang members, "…they might have been afraid to do something in school, you know."

Despite evidence of victimization and incivilities, the majority of the youth in our sample reported that they coped with gangs in the school with little to no impact on their day-to-day life at the school. The distinct delimitation, both physically and socially, between gang and nongang youth was discussed across all gang statuses. These normalization and delimitation strategies typically worked well for students as they navigated everyday life at school. This status quo, however, can be fragile and a minor incident can quickly alter a peaceful situation. Brandi (SG), for instance, declared that "everybody's friends until somebody disses them, then they'll collide." Ryan (GD) provided the most thorough assessment of this:

Um honestly I'd say like in the hallways, if you're walking, and, ya know, they're cool, they're collected, they're nice and whatever but if someone says something' not really wrong, but just, ya know, maybe not in the right moment, or like nudges them in the shoulder by accident, then one of 'em would stop and like, ya know, give them a look and then it will just escalate.

The normalization and delimitation techniques described by youth in our sample provide a sense of complacency regarding the presence of gangs and gang youth in the school. As evidenced by comments provided by Brandi and Ryan, minor incidents can quickly shatter this situation.

Discussion and Conclusion

Three main objectives guided our analyses: 1) explore the markers or criteria that youth use to identify the presence of gangs in school; 2) explore gang activities that produce incivilities and victimizations within the school context; and 3) examine how youth negotiate gangs in the school as it relates to fear as well as mechanisms associated with the absence of fear. To address these goals, we relied on in-depth interviews conducted with 180 youth with varying levels of gang involvement who resided in seven diverse cities across the United States. The youth were asked a number of questions about the presence of gangs in their schools, and the effects, if any, of having gangs or gang-involved youth in their schools.

With respect to the issue of identifying a gang presence we found that the students had a more nuanced assessment of their presence in school than anticipated. Much of the quantitative work that has examined the presence or absence of gangs in a school setting has typically relied upon a single-item measure (i.e., are there gangs at your school?) (Bouchard et al., 2012; G. D. Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 2001; Howell & Lynch, 2000; Naber et al., 2006; Randa & Wilcox, 2010; Schreck & Miller, 2003). This approach assumes that respondents share a common understanding or definition of what constitutes a gang. In our qualitative interviews we found support for this assumption but also noted that students have rather nuanced views about gangs

and gang-involved youth. Their assessments were based on perceptions of what a gang member should look and act like (i.e., visual cues), but also on their personal knowledge about whether or not a peer is in a gang and the names of gangs in their school. It is possible that youth are basing their perceptions of what constitutes a gang member on media representations, including documentary-style programming such as *Gangland*. Moreover, given the nature of our sample, it is possible that youth's perceptions of other gangs were shaped by their own experiences or knowledge of what constitutes a gang member. While few youth argued that gang members in their school were simply posturing and not "real" gang members, this theme has some implications for measurement as it could lead to an underestimation of the presence of gangs in school when relying on a single-item measure. The very same cues used to identify a presence of gangs in schools, such as visual cues and gossip, can be attributed to youth who just "wannabe" gang members. Given these findings, it may be beneficial for future research to employ multiple measures tapping the presence or absence of gangs in order to enhance construct validity. For instance, the inclusion of questions inquiring about visual cues as well as personal interactions with gang youth may help to increase validity. Additionally, it remains unclear how and why youth make the distinction between "real" and "fake" gang members when the cues are so similar. Further research is needed to understand how youth, regardless of gang status, identify their peers as authentic gang members.

The use of visual cues and personal knowledge to identify gang youth as well as incivilities associated with gang youth such as graffiti, class disruptions, and loitering in the hallways can serve as a signal of fear and other emotions among students (Lane et al., 2014). Students in our sample discussed that gang youth disrupted their classes and clustered in certain areas of the school, which resulted in feelings of annoyance and intimidation. The most common

forms of behavior reported by youth in our sample were the regular fights that occurred among gang youth in the school. This finding confirms prior research that identifies schools as a staging area for gang youth and as a place where they need to demonstrate toughness and physical prowess (Anderson, 1999; Garot, 2010; Lauger, 2012). While the students in our sample did not identify a direct impact of these vicarious victimizations and incivilities, it is possible that they are impacting youth indirectly. Disturbances throughout the school day, whether it be classroom disruptions or fighting, have been shown to impact academic achievement, reduce perceptions of school climate, and influence teacher morale (D. C. Gottfredson, 2001).

Many of these behaviors that youth attributed to gang youth, however, are also common in general populations and are not specific to gang youth. Fighting, loitering, class disruptions and bullying are prevalent among the general student body and more research is needed to understand how much variation in these behaviors can be accounted for by gang youth. For example, previous research frequently connects the presence of gangs in school with high levels of victimization (Kupchik & Farina, 2016; Wynne & Joo, 2010). It remains unclear, however, the extent to which these victimizations can be attributed to gang youth. Our findings indicate that direct victimization at the hands of gang youth is rare, which implies that school-based victimizations should not be automatically attributed to gang youth. Future research is needed to identify the unique impact of gangs on the victimization experiences of youth in school. For instance, it is important to understand offender characteristics, specifically gang status, of school-based victimization experiences. Moreover, it is possible that the disorder synonymous with schools with a high gang presence is the cause of high levels of victimization, not the gangs or gang members. Future research, then, should explore the mediating and moderating

mechanisms between school disorder, gang presence, and school-based delinquency and victimization.

Gangs are, no doubt, a part of the school experience of many American youth and act as nuisances to their fellow classmates. However, the narratives presented here suggest that students are largely able to either normalize the impact and presence of gangs in the school setting or "delimit" the gangs. While personal experiences within or around gangs may have played a role, there is evidence to suggest that normalization and delimitation processes are utilized to reduce perceived risk in community populations (Carvalho & Lewis, 2003). In our sample, normalization was accomplished by either making friends with gang youth and/or treating them in a manner consistent with any other students. Youth who chose not to befriend gang youth would often make use of social and physical delimitation processes. Those respondents that spoke about fear generally did so in terms of fear among other students, not themselves. The few that discussed feeling fearful tended to emphasis vulnerability; therefore, it may be that gangs are not the cause of fear, but rather vulnerability (Madriz, 1997). These findings are consistent with community-based research which finds that youth who live in gang communities are not proportionately more fearful than youth in nongang neighborhoods because of the regular exposure to and normalization of gangs (Katz, Webb, & Armstrong, 2003). This raises the question, however, of whether or not the absence of fear is only present in youth samples given their immediate contact and experiences with gangs. Previous work has found that age can impact perceptions of gangs (St. Cyr, 2003) and future research would benefit from an examination of normalization and delimitation processes in community-based adult samples.

One significant finding from these interviews was the mutual delimitation present among both current and non-active gang youth. While gang youth may be responsible for a large portion

of the victimization and incivilities present in school, students did not indicate that there were major problems associated with the gangs or gang members. It seems that students are "going along to get along" regardless of their gang status. This mutual delimitation at work in the school setting combined with the overwhelming lack of fear present in the sample raises some concerns about exclusionary discipline policies that may differentially target gang members due to their visibility. Exclusionary policies, such as expulsion, may be counterproductive by cutting the youth's prosocial bonds and reducing their educational attainment (Pribesh & Downey, 1999; Rumberger & Larson, 1998; Siennick, Widdowson, & Ragan, 2016). This can be especially detrimental to gang youth who are already less committed to school (Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Esbensen et al., 2010; Pyrooz, 2014; Thornberry et al., 2003). Moreover, the youth in our sample often reported having positive interactions and friendships with gang youth, which is further evidence of prosocial ties that may be severed as a result of suspensions or expulsions. Desistance research also emphasizes the importance prosocial peers and positive social institutions, like school, in facilitating gang disengagement process (Carson, Peterson, & Esbensen, 2013; Carson & Vecchio, 2015; Decker, Pyrooz, & Moule Jr., 2014; Padilla, 1992; Vigil, 1988). It is favorable, then, for school administrators and teachers to use school-based disturbances as intervention points to help youth exit their gang, rather than simply exiling them from school. Moreover, given the number of gang desisters in the sample, school administrators should be wary of applying the gang "label" to youth as it is a very temporary status.

This work, however, is not without its limitations. First, as discussed in the introduction, the reliance on youth with some amount of gang involvement provides a unique, albeit unrepresentative, look at reactions to gangs in school. Prior research demonstrates that experiences with delinquency and gang membership can lead to reduced levels of fear

(Anderson, 1999; Lane, 2006). Therefore, the lack of fear and the use of normalization and delimitation processes highlighted in our findings may not extend to youth who are in no way enmeshed in gang life. That said, research that has sought to understand the absence of fear in neighborhood settings have identified the use of normalization and delimitation processes present among community members who are not involved in gangs (Carvalho & Lewis, 2003). While this lends some validity to the results presented here, it is still imperative for future research to examine the perceptions of youth who have not been involved with gangs. Second, the narratives discussed here are retrospective in nature; therefore, youth may be incorrectly recalling their experiences or reinterpreting their feelings as containing less fear. Some research, however, argues that retrospective accounts are particularly salient when examining perceptions and emotions (Baxter & Bullis, 1986; Metts, Sprecher, & Cupach, 1991; Surra, Arizzi, & Asmussen, 1988). Finally, as with most qualitative research, our sample, while geographically diverse, it is not nationally representative; therefore, the results presented here may not be generalizable to other cities and schools. We know, for instance, that many regions and countries have unique gang presences, and, thus, youth perceptions of what constitutes a "real" versus "wannabe" gang member or gang in their school may vary by location. Finally, these narratives focus only on high school youth. It would be beneficial for future research to explore differences between reactions to gangs in middle school versus high school. Despite these limitations, we believe that the results presented here are informative to academics as well as school officials with regards to the impact of gangs in a school setting.

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Table 1: Sample Characteristics and Differences in Gang Status

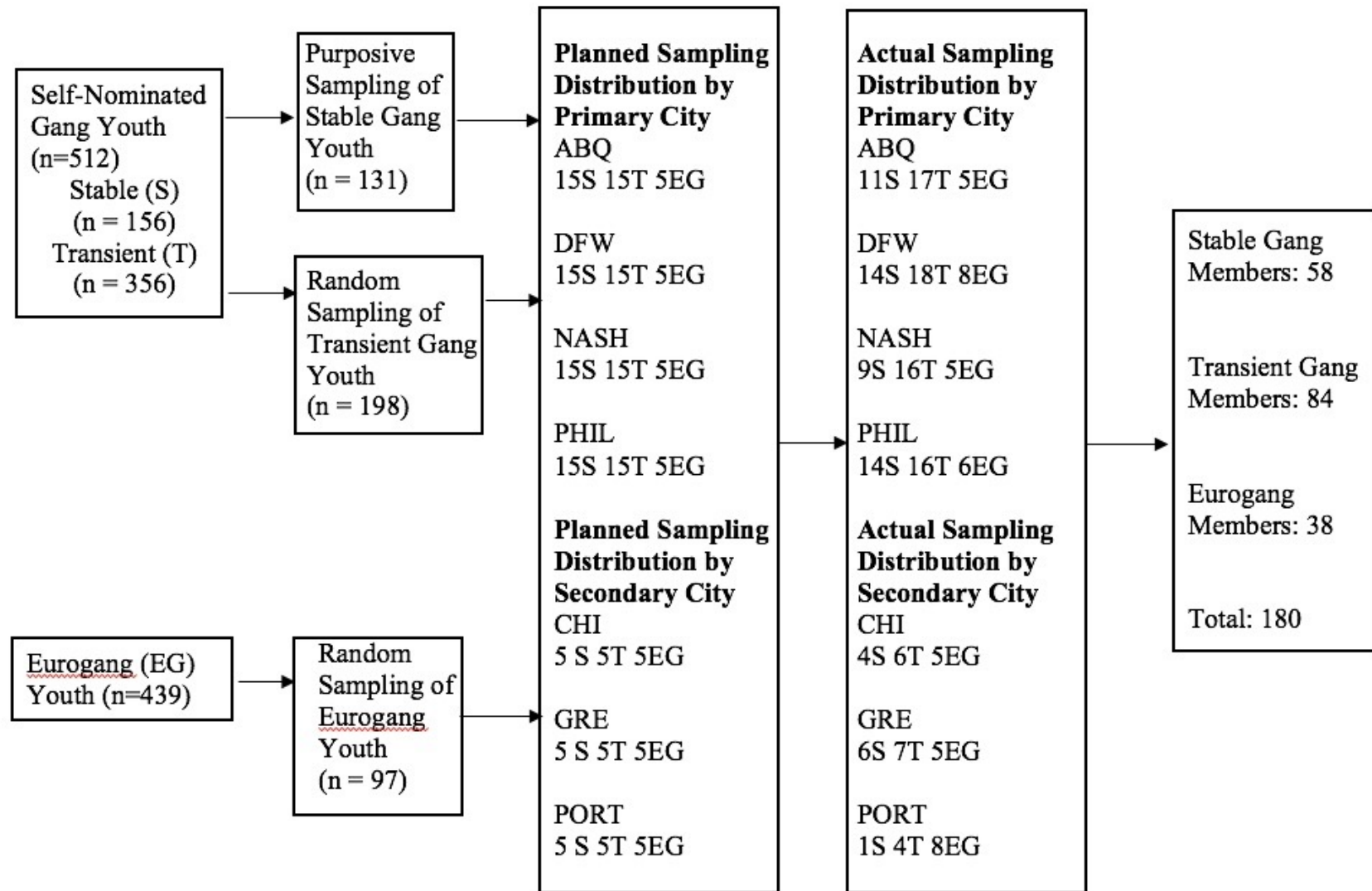|		Full sample	Suspected Gang	Current Gang	Gang Desister
		n = 180	n = 53	n = 20	n = 107
		% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)
Sex (Male)*		62.2 (112)	54.7 (29)	85.0 (17)	61.7 (66)
Race/Ethnicity					
	White	23.9 (43)	35.8 (19)	25.0 (5)	17.8 (19)
	Black	22.2 (40)	26.4 (14)	15.0 (3)	21.5 (23)
	Hispanic	40.6 (73)	26.4 (14)	40.0 (8)	47.7 (51)
	Other	13.3 (24)	11.3 (6)	20.0 (4)	13.1 (14)
Age		17.18 (0.75)	17.13 (0.56)	17.15 (0.98)	17.21 (0.79)
Gangs in School*		75.6 (136)	62.3 (33)	85.0 (17)	80.4 (86)

*Denotes a significant difference (p<0.05) across gang status based on Fisher's exact Chi-Square test

Table 2: Code Prevalence for Full Sample and Across Gang Status

	Full sample	Suspected Gang	Current Gang	Gang Desister
	n = 180	n = 53	n = 20	n = 107
	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)
Goal 1:				
Visual Identifier*	41.2 (56)	45.5 (15)	23.5 (4)	43.0 (37)
Named Gang	34.6 (47)	18.2 (6)	29.4 (5)	39.5 (34)
First/Second Knowledge	33.1 (45)	30.3 (10)	47.1 (8)	31.4 (27)
Wannabe Gang Members	14.0 (19)	21.2 (7)	23.5 (4)	9.3 (8)
Goal 2:				
Direct Victimization	11.0 (15)	6.1 (2)	11.8 (2)	12.8 (11)
Vicarious Victimization*	67.7 (92)	66.7 (22)	47.1 (8)	72.1 (62)
Rivalries	22.8 (31)	12.1 (4)	17.7 (3)	27.9 (24)
Physical Incivilities*	55.2 (75)	54.6 (18)	35.3 (6)	59.3 (51)
Social Incivilities*	43.4 (59)	48.5 (16)	5.9 (1)	48.8 (42)
Goal 3:				
Personally Fearful	5.9 (8)	6.0 (2)	0.0 (0)	7.0 (6)
Peers are Fearful	12.5 (17)	9.1 (3)	5.9 (1)	15.1 (13)
Other Emotions	17.7 (24)	15.2 (5)	17.7 (3)	18.6 (16)
Normalization	21.3 (29)	15.2 (5)	23.5 (4)	23.3 (20)
Delimitation by Students*	49.3 (67)	51.5 (17)	17.7 (3)	54.7 (47)
Delimitation by Gang Members	29.4 (40)	24.4 (8)	11.76 (2)	34.9 (30)

*Denotes a significant difference ($p < 0.05$) across gang status based on Fisher's exact Chi-Square test

Figure 1: Sampling Design for Multi-Method, Multi-Site Study of Gang Desistance.

| Self-Nominated Gang Youth (n=512) Stable (S) (n = 156) Transient (T) (n = 356) | Purposive Sampling of Stable Gang Youth (n = 131) | **Planned Sampling Distribution by Primary City** ABQ 15S 15T 5EG | **Actual Sampling Distribution by Primary City** ABQ 11S 17T 5EG | Stable Gang Members: 58 |

Flow diagram content:

Self-Nominated Gang Youth (n=512)
Stable (S) (n = 156)
Transient (T) (n = 356)

Purposive Sampling of Stable Gang Youth (n = 131)

Random Sampling of Transient Gang Youth (n = 198)

Eurogang (EG) Youth (n=439)

Random Sampling of Eurogang Youth (n = 97)

Planned Sampling Distribution by Primary City
ABQ
15S 15T 5EG

DFW
15S 15T 5EG

NASH
15S 15T 5EG

PHIL
15S 15T 5EG

Planned Sampling Distribution by Secondary City
CHI
5 S 5T 5EG

GRE
5 S 5T 5EG

PORT
5 S 5T 5EG

Actual Sampling Distribution by Primary City
ABQ
11S 17T 5EG

DFW
14S 18T 8EG

NASH
9S 16T 5EG

PHIL
14S 16T 6EG

Actual Sampling Distribution by Secondary City
CHI
4S 6T 5EG

GRE
6S 7T 5EG

PORT
1S 4T 8EG

Stable Gang Members: 58

Transient Gang Members: 84

Eurogang Members: 38

Total: 180

[1] Not all youth suspected of involvement in youth gangs were classified as such based upon their responses to a number of items in these interviews. Using responses in the annual G.R.E.A.T. Evaluation surveys, we compared these "non" gang youth with gang youth and it is worth noting that in the aggregate those who were ultimately classified as not having been involved in a youth gang shared many of the same characteristics with gang youth across a number of attitudinal and behavioral dimensions. However, given the inconsistencies in their statements we chose not to label them as "gang-involved" or "nongang," but rather as suspected gang youth.

[2] Other research has relied on the assessments of school administrators to determine the presence or absence of gangs in school (G. D. Gottfredson & Gottfredson, 2001; Naber, May, Decker, Minor, & Wells, 2006).

[3] Note that Decker and Van Winkle (1996) relied on an entirely male sample. We acknowledge, however, that gang youth, regardless of gender, may spend time at school initiating romantic relationships.

[4] Cities were selected for inclusion in the evaluation based on 1) the existence of an established G.R.E.A.T. program, 2) geographic and demographic diversity, and 3) presence of gang activity

[5] The Eurogang Program of Research defines a street gang as "any durable, street-oriented youth group whose involvement in illegal activity is part of its group identity." For more information on the Eurogang and this definition please see Maxson and Esbensen (2016).

[6] Longitudinal research has consistently found that the majority of adolescent gang youth are gang involved for one year or less (Esbensen & Huizinga, 1993; Thornberry et al., 2003).

[7] It is important to point out that for the purposes of this sample youth were not included in the pool of Eurogang youth if they self-nominated as a gang member at any wave of the G.R.E.A.T. evaluation.

[8] Albuquerque, NM (n = 33); Chicago, IL (n=15); Dallas/Fort Worth, TX (n = 36); Greeley, CO (n = 18); Nashville, TN (n = 30); Philadelphia, PA (n = 35); and Portland, OR (n = 13)

[9] We used independent samples t-tests to compare interviewed youth with those who were sampled, but not interviewed. A variety of demographic, behavioral, and attitudinal variables were used to examine differences in these youth at each wave of the G.R.E.A.T. study. We found few differences between these two groups of youth. Youth who were sampled, but did not complete an interview were slightly older and reported significantly higher levels of hitting neutralizations (wave 2 only).

[10] Reasons for reinterpretation vary across the youth and statistical analyses revealed that these youth reported significantly higher levels of property and violent crime as well as more anger, more neutralizations for hitting, greater adherence to the street code, more commitment to negative peers, and had fewer prosocial peers than nongang youth at the wave of self-reported gang membership. Furthermore, there were no significant differences between these 53 youth and self-nominated gang youth on these variables with the exception of negative peer commitment, which was higher for self-nominated gang youth.

[11] Three to four project members read the transcriptions and formed consensus opinions on the gang status of these youth.

[12] The use of self-report to determine both current and past gang status has been supported in prior research (Decker, Pyrooz, Sweeten, & Moule Jr., 2014; Esbensen, Winfree, He, & Taylor, 2001; Thornberry et al., 2003).

[13] The youth in the G.R.E.A.T. sample demonstrated a high degree of mobility (see Esbensen et al. 2013), therefore, many youths attended and spoke about more than one high school. In the event that youth spoke about multiple schools, we analyzed information from the most recently attended school in an effort to reduce retrospective biases. Additionally, there was overwhelming consensus on gang presence when comparing multiple responses within the same school.

[14] The majority of youth who denied a gang presence at their school also did so with confidence. These youth typically attributed the absence of gangs to the type of school (45%) (e.g., specialized magnets, strict disciplinary practices) and/or the type of student (36%) (e.g., the socioeconomic status or intelligence level of fellow students).

[15] In order to correspond with the interview year (summer 2012), these numbers represent those reported in the 2011 to 2012 school year and were drawn from the National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data.

[16] The following are the questions from this section of the interview guide: 1) What about your high school? Are there gangs there? 2) How do they affect day to day life at school? 3) How do other students deal with gangs and gang activity at school? 4) If no, why do you think that is?