

Introduction

The gang, in short, is life, often rough and untamed, yet rich in elemental social processes significant to the student of society and human nature.

Frederic Thrasher, *The Gang* (1928)

Gangs. The word has meant a number of things throughout history, but inevitably most people have used it with a negative connotation. Looking at the history of the word *gang* in the United States, one finds that the term has perennially been used of certain social groups considered to be major social problems of the time. The social science academy's research on gangs has had its own history, and the focus of this research has in turn been influenced largely by what society has considered the major social problems of the period.

In the United States, the history of applying the term *gang* to describe certain groups active in the economy starts with the western outlaws of the nineteenth century. All kinds of gangs were active in robbing stagecoaches, banks, mines, and saloons; some of the more famous were the Doolin, Dalton, and James gangs. There was no question that society, particularly western frontier society, considered these groups a social, economic, and moral problem. They posed a particular threat to social control, and people were concerned with understanding who these men were and what led them to become outlaws. Of course, to most of the residents of those areas in which outlaws were active, it undoubtedly was hoped that answers to these questions might be helpful in aiding the authorities to control them; while to those who resided in areas where outlaws were not active, the answers to the questions simply fueled the ro-

mance they had developed with the symbol of the outlaw. A romance, it might be added, that has carried forward today.

A formalized social science as we know it today did not yet exist, but various people made efforts to inquire into these questions and report their findings in books and the tabloids of the day. Interestingly, a problem researchers face today also presented itself to the researchers of the nineteenth-century outlaws—namely, accessibility to (and the cooperation of) the outlaws themselves. Outlaws, after all, had little reason to cooperate with a researcher, whose presence had the potential to raise the risk of their being captured, and most researchers surely judged the outlaws and their life-style to be too dangerous for field study. In the absence of direct observation, it is not surprising that the vast majority of their reportage was based on impressionistic, sensationalized second-hand accounts.¹ Likewise, it should not be surprising that such reportage was instrumental in building the outlaw mythology in the United States.²

As the nineteenth century moved toward its end, American society was faced with a new social problem: the social and economic assimilation of millions of immigrant workers from numerous countries into its cities. Within this group of immigrant workers, there was, of course, great variation in the quality of jobs secured and the degree of socioeconomic mobility.³ Some members of these groups saw an opportunity for socioeconomic mobility in crime and pursued those opportunities.⁴ This led to what has since become known as organized crime—that is, the establishment of organizations designed to operate in various illegal economic markets. To the general public's alarm, these organizations became increasingly successful, and by the 1920s and 1930s they were often considered the primary social problem of the time, the Great Depression notwithstanding. Although these forms of collective behavior were business organizations, they were labeled *gangs* by those who studied them.⁵ Thus it was that the word *gang*, originally used to refer to western outlaws, moved with the end of the frontier into the city, from the frontier wilderness to the urban wilderness.⁶

Although it is true that during this time the term *gang* was associated with organized crime, an analytic separation was also introduced between organized adult groups and those groups consisting primarily of young adolescents. This new conceptual framework was adopted out of an awareness that different individuals and groups experienced slower rates of integration into the economy, and a concern with identifying who among the immigrant population were most likely to be potential

recruits for the various organized crime syndicates. Both Herbert Asbury and Frederic Thrasher identified youth gangs as the socialization agents for the graduation of young delinquents to organized crime. Without doubt, the work of Frederic Thrasher was the most important study of gangs at the time. He was the first to treat the gang as an organizational phenomenon, and he focused primarily on adolescent gangs in order to understand both the conditions under which they began and the stages of their development. This approach illuminated the effects of the city on the immigrant community, gangs as an organizational phenomenon, and the process by which certain individuals were socialized into organized adult gangs (organized crime). Thus, Thrasher was both a product of his time and an innovator. His concern for the problems of the time (immigrant assimilation and the antecedents of organized crime) led him to conceptualize the gang in an innovative way. The gang phenomenon for Thrasher was not simply associated with adults; it had a youth component as well.

Because Thrasher's research on the gang was a general survey of all its aspects, his work was not only the most important of the time, it has remained the major influence on gang research ever since. After all, it was Thrasher who asserted: (1) that gangs emerge from poor and socially disorganized neighborhoods; (2) that boys join them because there is a lack of opportunity to do other things; (3) that the boys who do join gangs lack skills and the drive to compete with others for jobs; (4) that gangs are differentiated by age; and (5) that gangs facilitate delinquency. This is only a small sample of Thrasher's observations, and each of them (as well as many others) has been addressed by subsequent researchers, including all those researchers considered to have made important contributions to the theoretical and empirical study of gangs.

As time moved on from Thrasher's publication, *mob* became the term used for organized crime groups, and *gang* gradually became associated with adolescent boys. This trend was owing in part to the desire to separate analytically what Thrasher had identified as two social groupings involved in two related, but distinct, social problems—organized crime and delinquency. Given this new analytic distinction, subsequent research focused on two different aspects of gangs. In the first set of research involving delinquency,⁷ some researchers seized on Thrasher's observation that the gang facilitated delinquency and attempted to theorize the nature of the relationship. For example, Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin theorized that limited opportunity structures influence gang in-

volvement and delinquency;⁸ Albert Cohen posited that lower-class youths blocked from status within the larger society become involved with gangs to create their own subculture (primarily based on delinquency) in which they can achieve status;⁹ Herbert Bloch and Arthur Niederhoffer proposed that gang involvement and delinquency are the result of the process of psychological development among lower-class boys;¹⁰ and Walter Miller argued that gang involvement and delinquency are simply an extension of lower-class culture.¹¹ What all these theories have in common is that they attempt to explain the gang's role in lower-class youth delinquency.

In addition to theoretical studies on the relationship between gangs and delinquency, a number of researchers attempted empirically to examine (by different methods) how and why the gang facilitated delinquency. These investigations, most notably those of Yablonsky, Short and Strodtbeck, Miller, and Spergel, produced important evidence, as well as theoretical contributions, about the gang's impact on delinquent behavior.¹²

The second set of research focused on Thrasher's contention that gangs are "an interstitial element in the framework of society, and gangland [is] an interstitial region in the layout of the city." Gangs, in this approach, are simply part of the "poverty belt" of communities populated by ethnic peoples who live in the socioeconomic "zone of transition."¹³ These researchers' main concern was not with understanding how the gang related to delinquency, but rather with how the gang related to the low-income (primarily ethnic) community. Since the focus of these studies was on the community, the gang occupied only a limited part of their analysis. Although these studies do provide a good deal of rich information about the gang, it is located within the context of understanding the social construction of the communities under investigation.¹⁴

More recently, there has emerged a series of gang studies combining the interests of both the community and delinquency studies. These studies seek to explain gang behavior and crime as an outgrowth of the persistent and pervasive poverty that has afflicted certain black and Latino communities. Part of a growing number of investigations of what has come to be known as the urban underclass, these gang studies also address an issue raised by Thrasher, that of assessing the role of poverty (particularly the condition of having limited skills to compete in the job market) in stimulating criminal behavior among gang members.¹⁵ More will be said about these important studies later, but in essence, they un-

dertake to explain gang behavior in the context of the more general problems facing people who have been classified as part of an urban underclass.

In all of these studies of gangs, Thrasher's legacy is evident. All these researchers have attempted either to test his conclusions or to provide more current data for them, and most have made significant contributions to that end. However, most studies have more or less ignored one very important area that Thrasher discussed: the analysis of the gang as an organization. Despite all the research that has been done on the gang, the project of the gang itself has not been the primary focus of the vast majority of these investigations. Thus, although researchers have an intuitive understanding that the gang has organizational traits, for the most part, studies of gangs have not closely examined the nature, dynamic, and impact of the gang's organizational qualities.¹⁶ I believe that one of the reasons that society does not understand gangs or the gang phenomenon very well is that there have not been enough systematic studies undertaken as to how the gang works as an organization.¹⁷ We all associate the individual gang member with the organization, but we do not have much evidence at all as to what it is about the organization that makes his/her behavior different from what it would be if he or she were not in an organization. That is to say, what are the micro-dynamics associated with gang organizations. Of course, the primary reason for the paucity of studies with this focus is not simply one of conceptual oversight; it is, interestingly enough, the same problem as that faced by nineteenth-century researchers seeking to study outlaws—namely, the potential danger involved in systematically studying gangs and getting the gangs to cooperate. Through means that are described in some detail later in this introduction, I was able to overcome these two obstacles and systematically observe the internal dynamics and structure of gangs, and how they operate within society. In placing emphasis on the organization, however, the study does not neglect the gang as a collective of individuals. Indeed, one of the important features of this research is the investigation of the interplay between the behavior of the individual and that of the collective (organization). Thus, the present analysis begins the process of distinguishing individual acts from collective ones. This approach will help to explain why individuals come and go in gangs, why certain gangs succeed in their goals and others fail, and why one gang is able to persist and another vanishes.

The Nature of the Study: Setting, Methods, Analysis, and Presentation

The overall goal of the research project was to understand the gang phenomenon in the United States. In order to accomplish this goal, I thought it necessary to understand what was similar in the way all gangs behaved and what was idiosyncratic to certain gangs. In addition, I thought it was also necessary to understand why certain gangs grew, others declined but lingered on, and others declined and died. What follows is an explanation of the research design, the method of data gathering, the method of data analysis and presentation, and some ethical issues related to the research.

Past research on gangs had for the most part focused on gangs in one section of a city, gangs in one city, or gangs of one ethnic group. In order to understand the nature of the gang as an organization and the gang phenomenon in general, I believed it was necessary to undertake a comparative study. This was the only way to understand what gangs have in common with each other and what is idiosyncratic to particular gangs.

The Research Design and the Sample

Because it was deemed necessary for the research to be comparative on many levels, it was first essential to investigate gangs in different cities in order to control for the different socioeconomic and political environments that they operate in. Second, in order to determine if there were any differences associated with ethnicity, it was critical to compare gangs composed of different ethnic groups. Three metropolitan areas were therefore chosen for the study: the greater Los Angeles area, various boroughs of New York City, and the greater Boston area. These three areas were chosen because all three had a long history of gang activity and each had gangs operating within it when the research first began in 1978. In addition, each of the cities had a variety of ethnic groups involved in gangs.

These three cities were also ideal for comparisons because they were so different from each other. Two were eastern cities with certain weather patterns; the other was western with a completely different weather pattern. (Weather has often been thought to have an impact on gang activity, with colder weather restricting activity and warmer weather encouraging it.) Two have a vertical landscape with incredible density, the other

is horizontal with incredible sprawl. Lastly, while all are populated with a variety of ethnic groups, each had certain groups in large numbers that the others did not have.

The research sample is divided into two quite distinct groups: those people who participate in gangs (gang members), and those within the general society who have had interaction with gangs. Of the thirty-seven gangs studied, thirteen were in the Los Angeles area, twenty were in the New York City area, and four were in the Boston area. Various ethnic groups are represented in the sample, which includes gangs composed of Irish, African-American, Puerto Rican, Chicano, Dominican, Jamaican, and Central American members. The sample also involves gangs of varying size. The smallest had thirty-four members; the largest had more than one thousand. (See appendix for summary details.)

Because I decided that the sample should include gangs of different sizes and ethnic groups, the selection of gangs began with identifying geographic areas inhabited by different ethnic groups. Once a geographic area had been chosen, information was obtained from either the police or various people who worked in that area as to what gangs operated there, what the major ethnic component of each gang was, and how large an estimated membership each had. Once this information was obtained, a list of gangs within certain ethnic areas of each city was drawn up. The list separated gangs by ethnic composition and membership size. Thus there were gangs composed of one ethnic group and gangs whose membership was ethnically mixed. Within this sample, stratified by ethnicity, I randomly selected ten in each city. It was my intention to study African-American gangs, Latino gangs, Asian gangs, and white gangs, and so gangs representing each of these ethnic groups were chosen. Because I wanted to include gangs of varying membership sizes, I randomly selected gangs from my ethnically stratified list until I obtained a sample representing gangs of different sizes. Since my overall strategy was to study five gangs in Los Angeles and five in New York for two years, then add more, and finally add several Boston gangs, I selected five of the original ten chosen and began my effort to secure their participation.

Before proceeding, it is important to describe the geographic areas the gangs were drawn from. In each of the three cities, there were gangs from working-class families and areas, and from poor families living in areas that sociologists and anthropologists have described as slums. I shall now describe the physical conditions of the communities that the gangs of this study operated in. In New York, there were three types of housing units

that dominated the communities I studied. The first was high-rise public housing projects. Because there were often a number of public housing buildings located in one area, there were gangs whose members were exclusively from the housing project itself. These projects are multiple (usually fourteen) stories high, and are composed of units that have a kitchen, a small living room, a bathroom, and from one to three bedrooms. Thirty years ago, these units were inhabited by working-class people of various ethnicities (mostly white), but at the time that research was being done, they were inhabited mostly by Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, and African-Americans.

The second type of housing unit prevalent in the research communities were relatively small apartment buildings, known as walk-ups. These buildings were from three to six floors high and generally came with units having one to four bedrooms, a living room, kitchen, and bath.

Finally, there were single family units, sometimes attached to each other and sometimes separated by a small driveway on one side and possibly a small walk space on the other. These were often duplexes with wrought-iron front porches. They had been built for middle-income families, but in the communities of this study, they were entirely working-class.

Generally, the study covered neighborhoods considered working-class or extremely poverty-stricken. The poverty-stricken neighborhoods were extremely dilapidated and were often referred to as slums. In some of these neighborhoods, there were numerous abandoned buildings. In other neighborhoods, particularly the working-class neighborhoods, there was no appearance of dilapidation, but these neighborhoods often involved only two to four streets, surrounded by neighborhoods of extreme poverty.

The neighborhoods studied in Boston had some physical features similar to those of the neighborhoods studied in New York and some differences as well. There were housing projects in the Boston neighborhoods studied, but they were mostly one- or two-story projects as opposed to the high-rise projects in the New York neighborhoods studied. However, the socioeconomic conditions were not any better than in New York, and neither was the dilapidated condition of the physical structures.

Aside from the projects, two other types of dwelling dominated the neighborhoods of the Boston gangs studied. The first was called "row houses." These houses are attached to each other, are small, and have a high degree of density per unit. The other type of dwelling is what locals

call “three and four deckers.” These units are houses that have a common entryway and three or four separate units. Each unit occupies one floor and has two to four bedrooms, a living room, bath, and kitchen. These structures were built around the turn of the century for lifelong renters, but recently there has been a move in the Boston area to convert them to high-priced condominiums. In the neighborhoods studied, the residents were still renting and actively resisting developers’ attempts to convert their homes into condos. Generally, the neighborhoods studied in Boston were poor or working-class.

The neighborhoods studied in Los Angeles were quite different from those of New York and Boston, at least in appearance. When one goes through the various neighborhoods associated with gangs there, one does not get the impression that one is going through a poverty-stricken area. The Los Angeles neighborhoods were much more varied in appearance than those in New York and Boston. Some of the neighborhoods had single-family homes that had up to four bedrooms or more, and others had a combination of duplexes, triplexes, and bungalows with from one to three bedrooms. Many of the neighborhoods were clean, but others were more crowded and dirty. However, in general, the neighborhoods of Los Angeles were less crowded and dirty than those of New York and Boston. Nonetheless, what the observer would miss when riding or walking through these areas is the crowded conditions in most of the homes. Most of the families that occupied these homes were quite large, and in some cases there were multiple families living in them. Some of these families were related to each other, while others (Latino families) were part of a network system based on the locale the people had migrated from. The consequence of these situations was overcrowding in the home.

As one might expect, having decided what gangs to study, one does not simply show up on their streetcorners and say, “I am a professor and I want to study you.” This would be naive and quite dangerous. Therefore, once each of these gangs was chosen, I went to various people active in the community and asked who worked with it. Once I had discovered what individuals or agencies had worked with the particular gang I wanted to study, I contacted them and requested their help in introducing me to the gang. Some of the people who helped me were community leaders, some were social workers who worked with gangs, and some were members of the clergy. I told each of those I contacted what I wanted to do and asked them simply to introduce me to the gang. I specifically told them that I did not want them to feel that they had to endorse me. What

each did was to set up a meeting with the leaders of the gang I had chosen. When the meeting was arranged, my contact took me to it and left me there to negotiate my own terms. I believed that this was best, because it allowed me to separate myself from the person who had acted as the liaison.

At the meeting, I explained to the leaders that I was a professor and that I wanted to write a book comparing gangs in Los Angeles and New York (I started this procedure in New York). Most of the gang leaders found this an interesting idea. They were, in fact, curious about how the gangs in the other city operated. Despite indicating an initial interest, they said they would have to discuss it among themselves and the rank and file. Procedurally, I contacted each gang separately and secured a working relationship with it before moving to the next gang on the list. This process took about three months. Five of the ten gangs I initially selected allowed me to begin my association with them. Four of the white gangs in New York (two Italian and two Irish) that I wanted to study refused to allow me access. Believing that I needed to have white gangs for purposes of comparison, I continued my efforts to secure their cooperation. They were not successful, so in the second year of the research project, I began my attempt to secure some white gangs in Boston. I was able to make contact with four Irish gangs in Boston, and all consented to cooperate. Interestingly, a year after I had secured the four Irish gangs in Boston, I recontacted the gangs that had refused to cooperate in New York, and much to my surprise three of the Irish gangs consented to cooperate. However, all of the Italian gangs remained steadfast in their decision not to participate.

The same strategy was used in Los Angeles. The only difference was that instead of targeting white gangs, of which there were few, I targeted Asian and Samoan gangs, of which there were many. I had initial success in securing the cooperation of the Latino and black gangs, but did not have success with the Asian and Samoan gangs.

During the initial stage, the major difficulty with all the gangs had to do with my ethnicity. Since I am not white (the Polish segment of my name coming from my adopted father), I was more readily accepted by the nonwhite Latino and African-American gangs, but had difficulty with the white and Asian gangs. The fact that I was not Asian or Italian prohibited me from gaining access. The Irish gangs were an interesting anomaly. I would have expected that they too would have prohibited me from studying them, since I was not Irish, but because I was not Puerto

Rican (one of their rival ethnic groups) they did not perceive me as a threat and allowed me access.

By the end of the third year of study, I was observing ten gangs in New York, ten gangs in Los Angeles, and four in Boston. From the fourth year of the research through the tenth, thirteen more gangs were added to the original twenty-four, making the total number studied thirty-seven. The new gangs were added to the study for three reasons: (1) some of the gangs in the original sample of twenty had died out as functioning organizations and I wanted to replace them, (2) some of the new gangs were just beginning as organizations and I wanted to study the processes of their development, and (3) some were reported to have a unique quality (in terms of size, the type of businesses they were involved in, or organizational structure) that I wanted to investigate.

There is a good deal of ethnic variety among the thirty-seven gangs. There are African-American, Jamaican, Puerto Rican, Dominican, Chicano, Central American, and Irish gangs, as well as gangs that combined blacks with Puerto Ricans, Chicanos with Central Americans, and Irish with other whites. Whereas Latino, African-American, and white American gangs are included in the study, Asians comprise the major group that is not represented.

Having the gangs consent to my studying them was only the first step in the process of gaining entry into the social confines of their world. In order to have access to these social confines, it was necessary to have the gangs develop both a degree of trust and a degree of acceptance. This was accomplished through two tests that the gangs presented me. The first test was designed to see if I was an informant for the various law enforcement agencies. What nearly every gang did was to undertake some illegal activities over a three- or four-week period in order to see if any of their members were arrested. During this time I was observed closely, and on those occasions that I did not stay with gang members, I was generally followed to where I was staying. With all the gangs, as the time I spent with them increased, and their illegal activities were not reported, they ceased to consider me a threat. However, on one occasion I did have some difficulty. It turned out that a member of the gang, for reasons no one ever discovered, had told the police about some crime that three other members had been involved with. In order to protect himself, he told the leadership that he had heard that I was the one who had informed. The gang confronted and physically attacked me. Sometime later, however, other gang members found out from their informants who had

really supplied the police with the information. The leaders contacted me, apologized, and gave me permission to study them. I never knew what action the gang took against the individual who had fingered me; the only thing the members would tell me was that the problem had been taken care of.

The second test involved all of the gangs except the Irish gangs of Boston (for some inexplicable reason). This test had to do with determining how tough I was. While there were variations in exactly how the test was administered, it involved a number of members starting a fight with me. This was done to see how good a fighter I was and to see if I had "heart" (courage). There were some functional reasons for this test. Gang members wanted to know whether I had the courage to stay and fight if we were all jumped by a rival gang, and whether I could handle myself and not jeopardize their flanks. In this test, it was considered acceptable to fight and lose, but it was unacceptable to refuse to fight. This test sometimes doubled as part of my initiation rite. During the period in which the gang was testing me, I would take detailed notes so that I could compare how the gang behaved when they did not trust me with how they behaved when they did. This provided some checks on internal validity.

The two tests described above were not surprising to me, since I had grown up with project gangs and been associated with them while living in Detroit. The fact that I had training in karate did not eliminate the anxiety that such situations create, but it did help to reduce it. Although these tests often left bruises, I was never seriously hurt. Quite remarkably, in the more than ten years during which I conducted this research, I was only seriously injured twice.

The second group of people who were part of the study were those who were not themselves gang members but had had contact with gangs in varying capacities. They included relatives of gang members, people who ran businesses that had contact with gangs, community leaders, politicians, government bureaucrats, law enforcement officials, and members of the media.

Data-Gathering

The research extended over ten years and five months, from 1978 to 1989. There were two methods used in gathering the data. The primary method of data collection for the gangs was participant observation. The

basis of the participant-observation method is that the researcher both participates in the activities of and observes those he or she is studying. The advantage of such a method is that the researcher can observe the subjects in their natural environment. In the present study, I basically did what the gang members did for months at a time, traveling between each of the cities and each of the gangs. The primary reason the study took so long was my concern that I spend the time necessary to understand the patterns that existed within each of the gangs.

In terms of my access to gang life, after the initial period of suspicion, mistrust, and testing, gang members forgot (or did not care) that I was conducting research and interacted with me freely and openly. Of course, some of this was facilitated by the composition of gangs, there being a great range in the ages of members.¹⁸ In the gangs under study here, there were members who ranged from ten years old to forty-two. So it was not unusual to see someone who was not in his teens associating with the group. My acceptance was in part the result of spending a great deal of time with the gangs, but also stemmed from the fact that while I was with them, I had found myself in a number of the same precarious situations that they were experiencing and had handled myself according to their expectations. As I experienced what they lived, and as they observed me doing it, gang members simply thought less and less of me as a professor. In fact, the constant comments I heard were: "You don't look like a professor" and/or "You don't act like one."

There were times when members completely forgot I was doing research. New members often had no idea that I was a professor conducting research until they saw me taking notes and asked me why, or someone told them. At other times people were well aware that I was not a member of the gang (mostly because I was not of the gang's ethnicity), but they simply went about their business because I had proven to be no threat or hindrance to them.

In sum, I participated in nearly all the things they did. I ate where they ate, I slept where they slept, I stayed with their families, I traveled where they went, and in certain situations where I could not remain neutral, I fought with them. The only things that I did not participate in were those activities that were illegal. As part of our mutual understanding, it was agreed that I did not have to participate in any activity (including taking drugs) that was illegal.

Basically, I was free to observe and interact with gang members in all the various settings in which they operate. Therefore, if the data pre-

sented in this work are biased in any way, such bias should not be attributed to the gangs' lack of cooperation in allowing me access to themselves and their experiences.

I also did not have difficulty in getting those interacting with gangs to cooperate. I believed at the outset of the research that people who felt threatened by the gangs, or people in official positions who might be threatened by the study, would resist my efforts to solicit their cooperation. Much to my surprise and good fortune, they did not. Of the countless number of people that I interviewed, or whose duties (or the duties of those in their offices) I asked to observe, only three refused to cooperate, and none of the three occupied positions different from those who consented to cooperate. The only thing asked of me, to which I consented, was that I maintain their confidentiality.

While participating, I was always cognizant of the fact that I was a researcher gathering data. I went into each day's observations mindful of what previous studies had found, and this helped me establish a focus to that day's data-gathering. However, the fact that I had an agenda that helped to focus my observations did not mean that I had created observational blinders to other important facets of gang life. I was completely open to all aspects of gang activity and recorded it in as much detail as possible. Furthermore, I was careful not to create situations that did not occur as part of everyday life. One strategy I continually employed was to interview members about what they thought before some event occurred, then try to talk to them (and record) while the event was occurring, and finally reinterview them after the event.

I carried two notebooks. One was an 8½-by-11-inch pad and the other was a small note pad that could fit into my pockets. I would record events on these throughout the day or night. I was also aided by the use of two types of tape recorders. One was a medium-sized portable that I used to do interviews with individuals and record some meetings. The other (which I did not purchase until 1982) was small enough to fit into my pocket, and I used it to take notes during the day. These tape recorders were used with the complete knowledge and permission of the gangs. While the use of a tape recorder did inhibit the gang members in the beginning, as time passed they became oblivious to it.

In addition to the notes that I took during the day, at the end of each day I would record an overview of the day's events. This provided me with a context in which to place the specific data recorded during the day. Furthermore, at the end of each week, I would record an overview

of what had generally occurred with that gang for the week. This provided me with further contextual information. When analyzing the data ten years later, the daily and weekly summaries proved invaluable in understanding what was occurring with a particular gang during a specific period of time.

The data on the various institutions reported in this work were collected in two ways. First, while with the gangs, I would observe and record the behavior of various institutional agents as they interacted with the gangs. Sometimes the interaction would take place in the gang's environment and sometimes in the institution's (e.g., a courtroom). In addition, at the appropriate time (i.e., a time that would not interrupt their natural interaction with the gang), I would introduce myself to the institutional agents (telling them about myself and my project) and seek to interview them. I promised them that the information I gathered would be kept strictly confidential. Although some of them were reluctant to talk to me during our first encounter, they became more willing to cooperate as time passed. After introducing myself, I would take detailed notes on how they interacted with the gangs to see if they behaved any differently now that they knew I was not a gang member. This data check provided me another opportunity to evaluate internal validity. There were times, however, when various institutional agents did not want to talk to me while they were with the gangs. At such times, I would call and make arrangements to talk with them at a place they decided on.

I spent varying amounts of time with the gangs. In the beginning, I tried to spend a solid month with each new gang. After the initial period, I would spend five to ten days with each gang. In the last three years of the research, I would spend two to three days with a particular gang. Of course, no hard-and-fast line could be followed. If there was something interesting happening with a particular gang, I would stay with it longer. In addition, I would alternate between the East and the West Coast so that I would observe both sets of gangs within roughly the same time period. Moreover, I made every effort to observe the same gang during different seasons of the year in order to observe the effects of weather on gang activity.

Over the more than ten years of research, I attempted to follow each gang for as long as it existed as an organization. There was good deal of variation in the longevity of the organizations I studied. One lasted only eighteen months, whereas others were still in existence when I finished the fieldwork.

Analysis and Presentation of the Data

I began the analysis by establishing topics that would need to be covered in a book about gangs, such as gang recruitment, gang organization, violence, and so on. I then proceeded to read each of my notes (daily notes, daily summaries, weekly summaries) and place them in stacks having to do with each topic I wanted to cover. When notes pertained to more than one topic, I photocopied them and placed each under the additional topics.

My analysis began by taking a topic and reviewing what other researchers had found concerning gangs. Their findings would be written down in hypothesis form and then I would read my notes to determine what my evidence suggested. From the analysis of the notes, I would ascertain what the primary and secondary patterns were. From the content of these patterns, I would create the analytical categories used in the text. The data presented in this study are based on observed patterns of group behavior and what individuals said about them.

Ethics and Research

The research raised some ethical questions. Participant observation provides the researcher with a unique opportunity to observe the subjects of his/her study operating within their natural environment. Because such research is not a controlled experiment, one is not able to control situations, and this presents the researcher with some ethical dilemmas. I observed criminal behavior countless times. The first time such an act occurs, one realizes that one cannot pretend it did not happen because it is being recorded. Before going into the field, I decided that in order to do this research, I would have to remain neutral to behavior that society considered criminal. In addition, because of the sensitive nature of the data, I had to promise the gang members that I would hold all my information in strict confidence and keep everyone's true identity, and that of the gang as well, secret. I remain committed to both of these decisions. It must be obvious, that unless one is able to take this position, sociological research cannot be done on groups such as gangs. If such research is done without witnessing criminal acts, that research leaves out a critical part of the phenomenon.

Furthermore, many people representing official agencies or positions within society talked to me quite candidly because of the explicit under-