

G is for Gangsta

Introductory Assessment
of Gang Activity and Issues
in Minnesota

Research Team
John Harrington and Kate Cavett
Hand in Hand Productions



Copyright 2000

May not be duplicated without written permission of:

Hand in Hand
313 Selby Avenue
Saint Paul, MN 55102
Phone: 651-227-5987 Fax: 651-227-3926
handinhand@oralhistorian.org
www.oralhistorian.org

Chapter 4

RITUALS

After a murder, this gang conducted a ritual:

“We stopped and Brad said, “We need to lock it on the six.” So, we did that. We make pitchforks, stack them and you turn and lock, you lock them. Which is our equivalent of, I swear on the bible, that we’re not gonna say anything.”¹³⁸

Baby Doll, 23 year old European American
Grand Rapids Gangster Disciple

As Nakken¹³⁹ told us, rituals play a crucial role in maintaining the addictive personality. Nowhere is this more clear than with the gangs. These rituals are repetitive, symbolic and frequently cloaked in an air of mystery. The elements we recognized are similar to some of the key elements of ritual behavior in religious organizations, secret societies, fraternal groups, and the military. In looking at ritual behavior in the gangs, we have seen that there is a surprising similarity to the way the military train young soldiers to adopt and maintain fighting spirit.

While this may surprise some, it actually fits very well with the part of the gang’s public image when they reference themselves as soldiers. The state of California recognized this when they passed the street terrorism act. “Monster Kody” also speaks to this in his video and book, Monster, as he describes para-military style raids conducted against rival gangs and includes ambushes, traps and full-scale frontal assault. This theme is a common one found in rap music and in the discussion of many of the gangsters. As Mr. Boo’s tattoo told, he believed, *“I am a gangster at war.”* Among the rituals that gang members use to create fighting spirit are:

- Initiations
- Orientation by disorientation, noise, constant noise
- Physical skill and struggle
- Uniform dress
- Hair cuts / styles and tattoos
- Music and/or ceremony
- Physical rituals / hand gestures

¹³⁸Baby Doll Interview, November 1998

¹³⁹ Nakken, Craig, The Addictive Personality, Hazelden Press, 1998

INITIATIONS

Initiations are primary rituals for the new recruit. Chapter 5 deals exclusively with initiations in gangs; therefore they won't be discussed here.

ORIENTATION BY DISORIENTATION

Gang initiations demonstrate a model of how to inculcate fighting spirit. It may be accidental, but gang initiations follow a model pioneered by U.S. Marines. The Marine Corps protocols for bringing in new recruits include all the following elements.¹⁴⁰

- Disorientation
- Noise
- Constant motion
- Physical struggle
- Grooming
- Uniform / clothing
- Music
- Physical skills
- Ritual activities

In looking at the Marine Corps initial experience, it happens in the middle of the night. This, according to the Marine drill instructors (DIs), throws the recruit into a more receptive and less resistant state of mind. This causes a period of disorientation that is difficult to overcome. During the first few hours of initiation marine recruits are in a state of constant motion. Constant motion adds to the fatigue and general disorientation that the Marine Corps recruits experience. When we discuss the initiations of gangsters they frequently report that it takes place during a party late at night or after the young gangster has been up for many hours or days.

¹⁴⁰ Taylor, Ian Fighting Spirit, BBC Broadcasting, RKO Production

Marine DIs create a chaotic environment for the new recruits as they shout, yell and scream at them constantly during those first few days. This noise is unintentionally duplicated in the hard driving sounds of gangster rap or rock. As Doe tells us the music plays a significant element in creating the proper mind set.

“TV influences it to a larger extent, ya know. TV influenced me. I could sit an’ watch a movie now, an’, an’ if I feel like I wanna be like that person, I’m fucking 19 and I still get these feelings, ya know. It’s like, yeah, I wanna be able to do that. Or, music, definitely music, man. Music has got a hell of a lot to do with it. Rap, listening to rap influenced me hugely. We use to listen to real hard core music. We didn’t listen to like, well we listen to it too, like Snoop Dog. To us, that was weak. We’d listen to like Gangster Nip, Ghetto Boys. We listen, a course we listen to all the Bloods music. Different rappers. We listen to real death hard core rap. They were like psychotic, satanic shit is what we listened to and, as a result of that, a lot a us were real psychotic. ‘Cuz we sat and listened to this and we be like –“ hey,” ya know, “if we’re like that guy, ain’t nobody gonna fuck with us.” So we would, we’d strive to be as crazy an’ as bad an’ hard core as possible. And, boy, believe me we got pretty damn psychotic and mean. Hard core.¹⁴¹

PHYSICAL SKILLS AND STRUGGLE

The Marines build men and women using an extremely extensive regimen of physical fitness. In addition to running, calisthenics and marching, Marines are taught martial skills including hand-to-hand combat, bayonet practice and marksmanship. The gang also creates a physical struggle for their new recruits, in the form of the beat-in or gauntlet (see Chapter 5). Later we find the gang teaching their new recruits skills to help them survive.

UNIFORMS AND CLOTHING

One of the first experiences that new Marines undergo is a personal transformation from being a civilian to becoming a Marine. This involves hairstyle changes to create a uniform appearance. Thus begins the process of creating a new team.

This process of uniformly grooming recruits is very similar to the initiation process that gangsters undergo. The Southeast Asian gangs use hair coloring and cutting as a part of the process of

¹⁴¹ Doe Interview, November 1997

initiation. Many of the officers who worked with the ORB¹⁴² remember when Freeway arrived in town, sporting hair shaved short on the side. The new recruits taken from the 612s and other Crip sets, who had, up to that time, worn long hair with blue strands, suddenly appeared with short hair shaved close on the sides. In the case of the TMC,¹⁴³ they used red dye to identify their members. Other gangs using hairstyles to identify themselves are the local Skin Heads and other White Supremacist groups.

The second part of the induction process involved changing recruits clothing for new uniforms. The Marines take all personal effects and exchange them for uniform items. While the gangs do not go to quite this extent, they do begin the process of uniforming the new gangsters right away. As Star recalls, after her sex-in she was given a rag to wear. Gavonti speaks about having his rags blessed after his beat-in. Gangsters do wear a form of uniform especially during the early days of the Minnesota gang world. Back then we saw very strict uniforms, including the red berets of the El Rukins, and the blue and khaki dixies of the GDs and Vice Lords. Later as gangs from Los Angeles arrived, gangster clothing became more sports-related, when items such as Bulls, Michigan, and Georgetown jackets and caps became the uniform of the day.

For a long time, hat position (cocked to right or left) and colors were used to identify different gangs, such as blue (GD and Crip), red (Bloods and Vice Lords), and black (GD or Vice Lords). Until the last year or two, young gangsters told stories of getting violations if a gangster didn't wear their hats cocked correctly or wear the right colors. In the metropolitan area, this has mostly been stopped, because it was too recognizable to law enforcement. In outstate¹⁴⁴ Minnesota, this type of representing continues in some areas. As of 1999, the Crips in the metropolitan area are wearing long, plaid flannel shirts with khaki Dockers pants.

MUSIC

Music is another component used to inspire fighting spirit. Marines use cadence for running and traditional marching. Music provides a rhythmic accompaniment to many of the initial

¹⁴² Oriental Ruthless Boyz Hmong gang

¹⁴³ Tiny Man Crew gang

¹⁴⁴ "Outstate" refers to outside of Minnesota's Minneapolis, Saint Paul and suburban Metropolitan area that includes smaller cities and rural areas.

experiences of the marines. Music is also part of the initiation ritual for gangsters. As rap music blares its rhythmic beat, the gangster learns the rules of his new life. In both cases music describes the history and values of the soldiers in these groups. For the Marines, these “Jody Calls” and marches tell what it means to be a good Marine. In the case of the gangster rap, we have the fictionalized exploits of the gangsters.

One point that brings this home is how universal rap music is for gangsters. We found that it is the music of choice for the Black gangsters, Asian gangsters, Native American gangsters, Hispanic gangsters and White/European gangsters, both in the metro area and in greater Minnesota.

RITUAL PHYSICAL / HAND GESTURES

The Marines use an elaborate series of ritual activities to train recruits. They are given a litany of rules to memorize and recite upon demand, such as general orders. In addition, informal ritual sayings are taught to the recruits, such as the prayer for the rifle. Marine recruits are taught posture (chest out, stomach in, feet together, hands at the crease of their pants), hand gestures (salutes), and how to walk in formation.

Gangsters are also taught new rules and rituals for their new life. For example, as the gangsters are introduced to the 22 laws of the GD or the Vice Lord creed, they learn they must not only memorize them, but also repeat them when called upon by ranking officers. Gangsters even learn short poems and sayings, such as “5 Popping and 6 Dropping” (Vice Lord shooting and GD dying). Gangsters, too, are taught how to stand, or more accurately *how to lean*, and how to gesture with their hands, which includes the intricate hand shakes and hand signs of the gang.

What is interesting in looking at these similarities is that it does not appear that the gangsters consciously constructed this list of activities, but rather it was spontaneously created. We must point out that not all gangs follow this format. However, the key points of disorientation, new uniforms and appearance, physical struggle, music and ritual seem to be a part and parcel of every gang. When we look at military practice, it is also true of military organizations including Seals, Green Berets, Rangers, French Foreign Legion and the Israeli Defense Forces.

FAMILY RITUALS

The rituals the gangs adapt are not only adapted from the military, but from traditional family life. They told us about gangster's funerals and baby blessings or baptisms. In funerals they describe pouring alcohol on the ground for the dead gangster, placing drugs, money and rags or gang flags in the casket in memory.

"When we go to funerals you take red rags and you put 'em on the casket. Inside the casket you pour beer. It's like a rest in peace ceremony. You pour beer and you get drunk, and you smoke weed. You bury them with blunts and stuff like that. I mean it's not your ordinary funeral. Some, some gangs start shooting in the air, some just get wild. We didn't, we don't do it like that."¹⁴⁵

Here KK, who comes from a multi-generational gang family, tells about her cousin's funeral:

"...but, my cousin's funeral was the worst funeral I'd ever saw in my life. It was my family on one side, and then it was Crips. It was weird that Bogus Boyz showed up and even before that. And then there was the Bloods, too. That was my family, too, so that was all considered family. Everybody in my family mostly had guns 'cuz they knew something was gonna happen, and they had guns. They had basically everything, waiting for people to walk up in there and disrespect our family. They had thrown bags of marijuana and money and all kinds of stuff in his casket, and that was disrespectful. And, I was like "Y'all need to get up outta here if y'all can't handle it."

"Well, my brother, he kinda did his little, his little respect thing. That was throwing his red flag in there and like a whole ounce of marijuana and all this kinda stuff, and everything that he thought that he woulda liked, that's what he put in there. And then Big Drama, my other cousin, did the same thing 'cuz he was a 6-0, so he did the same thing to try to outdo each other, but they was too down to be trying to outdo each other. And then a lot of people was dying in our family and a lot of people has since then, too."¹⁴⁶

Just as the initiation ritual is an integral part of the gang culture, other rituals are found woven throughout the culture. Here Baby Doll describes her daughter's "blessing" into the Gangster Disciples:

¹⁴⁵ Tone Capone, Interview, March 1998

¹⁴⁶ KK Interview March 1998

"My daughter was born and she has her rag. It was a nice ceremony I guess you would want to say. I brought her home from the hospital. Sam [the superior] took the baby and he presented her with her rag. He went and blessed it and did his little thing. He just said a war prayer over it. Have you eve hear our war prayer? It says: "*We are Folk, we have no pity, lay our bones in disciple city, place two forks across my chest an tell my Folks I did my best.*" We say that before every rumble or whatever you wanna call it.

He blessed the rag and it was so cute, 'cuz I was holding Melissa, and he laid it over Missy and it was jut kind of like a blanket 'cuz she was so tiny. And, my brother took it and placed it on the table and took the baby, laid her on top of it and folded her up in it, like a swaddle, and he kissed her and he handed her back to me. And Sam kissed her and they knew that she was the baby, she was the next generation."¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁷ Baby Doll Interview, November 1998

Chapter 5

INITIATIONS

"I think the reason of initiation like that is because, you want to see what you can take. If you can take a beating, you're willing to take a beating from 20 people, then next time when there's an enemy around and there's like 20 of them and only you, you won't back off and you'll be true to the gang. It's just to show your respect and how much you're down [for the gang]."¹⁴⁸

Sad, 21 year old Hmong American
Saint Paul MOD Girl

One subject with a surprising level of variance is gang initiation rules. According to the national literature, all gangs use some sort of initiation before they allow new members in. Martin Jankowski notes an exception; all gangs in his study, with the exception of the Irish gangs, use some sort of initiation test.

If information is needed to decide whether the prospective gang member can fight, the gang leadership sets up a number of situations to test the individual. One favorite is to have one of the gang members pick a fight with the prospective member and observe the response. It is always assumed that the prospective member will fight; the question is how well will he fight? The person selected to start the fight is usually one of the better fighters. This provides the group with comparative information by which to decide just how good the individual is at fighting. This test usually doubles as an initiation rite, although there are gangs who follow up this test phase with a separate initiation ritual where the individual is given a beating by all those gang members present. This beating is more often than not symbolic.

Jankowski also notes a second form of initiation that allows the gang to determine if the prospect is trustworthy, which "is done by setting up a number of small tests. To help establish this they set up a number of criminal activities (usually of medium level illegality) involving the individuals; then they observe where the law enforcement proceeds to make arrest of the specific members involved."¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Sad Interview, September 1998

¹⁴⁹ Jankowski, Martin Sanchez, Island in the Street, University of California Press Berkeley 1991

In general, Minnesota gang initiations fall into four categories:

1. Beat-in
2. Criminal culpability
3. Blessed-in
4. Sexed-in

Females formally join the gangs through an initiation process. Like with the males they can be blessed-in, beat-in or sexed-in. Presently in Minnesota most females are either beat-in or blessed-in. Nationally, we heard about female gangsters who were required to have sex with an HIV-positive gang member. It is important to recognize that each set or small gang organization may have different rituals in their initiation process. Throughout this document there are references to different initiation rituals. There is clearly no single way males or females are initiated around the state, even within the same gang.

In Minnesota, all but the sex-in initiations are used by both male and female led gangs. Sex-in, as an initiation tactic, is one that we see solely in male-dominated gangs. However, at least one female gangster interviewee reported setting up or pimping other young women for sex as a part of proving loyalty to the gang. It should be noted that status and rank are connected with each of these initiations for females. A female gang member who is beat-in or who commits criminal acts for the gang is considered to have higher status than one who is sexed-in. Females who have relational opportunities to be blessed-in may choose to be beat-in, because it gives them ore status or respect.

The status afforded by being blessed-in is less clear, since it is frequently connected with all members who have relatives who sponsor them into the gang. Thus, the son of the gang's leader may be blessed-in and may, because of his family connection, have more power than an individual who is beat-in. Status in this case is relational and exists only so long as the parent or sponsor remains in power.

It should be noted that in Minnesota, not all gangs use all forms of initiation for members. Only a few reported that they did a sex-in initiation. Lynn describes for us the range of options for initiation that she was familiar with:

“They said I could have done it, like three different ways. One was the “six penny pick up,” where they dorp six pennies and you have to pick ‘em up an’ if you drop ‘em,

they start all over again and you have to pick up all of em'. They hold six pennies in their hand and they drop them on the ground and you gotta pick 'em all up. And if you fall down or drop the pennies, they start all over again. [And they're beating you the whole time].

[Another is] just when they say go and you just start swinging and they do the same. [Time] it varies, it depends, [it's usually six minutes]. They're supposed to be six girls, there can be more. Boys aren't supposed to beat-in girls, but that's how it has happened. My best friend got beat-in by three girls and three guys.

There's other ways. You can have sex, you can sleep with 'em all, like a lot of guys in the set or whatever. I never asked about it, 'cuz I was not interested in that way at all. Just that you go around and sleep with a whole bunch of guys, I guess, or have sex with them. Some [wanted to be sexed-in] 'cuz they still live with their parents and if they come home with bruises or whatever, they didn't want their parents to know, or just sometimes that's just the way that things go.

The way that I got in is I called, "no face shots", so I couldn't fight back, just as long as they wouldn't hit me in the face, and they did. So, I don't know, I don't think it was intentional. There were six girls and there was like three or four guys that were standing around....I don't know if they got any hits in. I fell down a couple times. And I had a really swollen eye from one of the girls that kicked me in the face.

For, I just stood in the middle of six other girls and there was other people watching, but I stood in the middle of six other girls and the superior called when I started, when I stopped. I don't know how long it lasted. Usually it'll last about six minutes. But, usually the way it goes is that if you fall down they start your time all over again, an' I fell down a whole bunch of times, but they just kept going. I felt someone kick me in the face, I started swinging and that's when it everything pretty much stopped. 'Cuz I was like, well, she just [kicked me], so I started swinging back. They're like, you're not supposed to be swinging back, but my eye was all swollen, I was crying and stuff an' that was about it.

I don't know, I mean, like part of me was kind of like how you have a birthday party or wedding for somebody. They become your family, but then a part for me was like I don't wanna do this. This isn't right. And in my heart I knew it wasn't right because the rules now you're not supposed to have anyone beat-in. And so I knew – because they were going about it the wrong way and I don't know, I just – half of me was happy and half of me was kind a pissed off 'cuz the way that things were being done."¹⁵⁰

INITIATION: BEAT-IN

A gang member is said to have been beat-in when he or she has undergone a ritualized trial by combat. During the medieval era, knights were forced to fight to display their skills and bravery.

¹⁵⁰ Lynn Interview, October 1998

Young gangsters are placed similarly in a figurative arena and forced to show that they are strong enough and tough enough to be part of the gang. This test is conducted in many fashions including:

- Serial beat-in: 3:1, 5:1, or 6:1
- Gauntlet / Melee
- One on one

Serial Beat-in

In a serial beat-in, the gang initiate is not allowed to fight back or flinch. This initiation, which we have seen used by suburban and outstate¹⁵¹ gangs, consists of the gang initiate being placed against a wall with their flag or rag in hand, or simply with hands behind their back while OG (Original Gangster) punch him/her multiple times. The number of participants and blows are prescribed and typical following the numerology of the gang (Gangster Disciples: six is their number, Vice Lords say they run under the five). Targets for the blows are also governed by rules. For example, in one GD beat-in we discovered that blows to the chest were the rule except when the initiate raised his knee to protect himself, and then the OG was allowed one face shot (punch to the face). Duke, a GD from Duluth, describes his initiation:

“My initiation, well they set up a meeting on Mary 29th. It was 4:30. They had a council. They had GD council there. They just asked me like, if you were to be a GD what would I do for my nation? How far am I willing to go for my nation?”

I told them I’d die for my nation. Anything that stood in the way, that knocked down the nation, I take it out. Then they had me hold up my rags, my blue rags one in each hand with forks up. They had a line of people and they each started to drill me. They’d punch you in the chest, they’d each get six shots. Then the one who would be my higher, he gets the last shots and he gets 12. After that he gives me a hug and says, “GD Nation to the heart.” He’ll give me my forks up and that’s when I became a foot soldier. Just in the chest. When I had forks up and if I were to fall when somebody hit me, I couldn’t be a GD And I’d like be a disgrace to the Nation. Or if I were to drop a hand or something, I’d be a disgrace to the Nation.”¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ “Outstate” refers to outside of Minnesota’s Minneapolis, Saint Paul and suburban Metropolitan area that includes smaller cities and rural areas.

¹⁵² Duke Interview, August 1996

Gauntlet/Melee

Baby Doll describes the initiation gauntlet of one of her male monies in their GD set:

“Brandon’s a good guy. He’s a big guy and he’s a tough guy and he walked the line rather than go for the timing, and he got halfway through the line and stopped to make sure everybody got to beat him properly and then finished walking through.

You have six members on one side and six members on the other side and you walk through the line and everybody gets to beat the crap outta you on the way through, as many times as they can hit ya they’re gonna hit ya. And, nobody has ever stopped in the middle of a line, I don’t know what he was thinking, but he came to my house afterwards and I took care of him.”¹⁵³

In a melee, the gangster is surrounded by established gang leaders and forced to fight or take a beating for a period of time, usually two to six minutes. The amount of time and number of the participants is governed by the gang rules and literature. Thus for outstate Latin Kings three seemed to be the number. While in a Cottage Grove Vice Lord/Latin King melee, the number of participants was five and five minutes was the time limit. In some GD sets, this is called “360 degrees” or “gladiator school.” Here, Adversity describes his initiation his set’s format:

“I was initiated at the age of 11. Back then it was a fight situation where you were put in a 360 degree circle amongst six individuals with fighting skills that more than likely didn’t compare to anyone there. Basically, you were put in the ring with the best and you were made to fight until, basically until they felt that you’ve shown enough combat skills to hold your own, pull your weight at any time. And, that how I was put into it. I held my own for; I’d say anywhere between a minute and two minutes. After that it was, I was shown love from everyone. I was given more respect than I had when I entered. And most of all, I had more respect from my brother, which was the original sponsor, my original sponsor. Someone has to sponsor you; someone has to bring you within the circle. You can’t just up an’ say, “Oh, I wanna – I wanna be a gangster,” ya know, you have to be known by somebody with the organization.

A definition of Gladiator School, is 360 degree circle where you are made to fight, if you don’t wanna fight you’re out. You don’t have a choice really, you’re still beaten even if you don’t wanna fight. Gladiator School is sometimes used for punishment too. I know in the prison system it’s used for punishment. Or when two organizational representatives have a disagreement and they feel that neither one can be violated for it, and they feel that they need to settle their differences they are brought to a

¹⁵³ Baby Doll Interview, November 1998

secluded spot. They're put in a 360 degree circle and they fight it out until one gives. Doesn't matter – one or the other."¹⁵⁴

One-on-One

In one-on-one initiations, the gang initiate is forced to fight one other member of the gang, usually a WarLord or other enforcer for the gang. The initiate is not required to beat the enforcer, only to fight well enough to show their fighting spirit and prowess. In a one-on-one, the gang member may fight more than one enforcer, but the fights are all conducted as individual combat. Forty Ounce, from Mankato, told us the following about how they initiated new gangsters into the Bloods:

“Well, like two or three of us, that were already in, would beat you in. You'd just fight for five, six minutes. You just fight with each other. And then when you get back up and you all hug and tell each other that you love, you're in, we love you this an' that. But, it first stated with Tony the Cambodian. He, it was just him one-on-one with them, and he was in this gang that he just kinda started. An' then, so as they got more members it was a little bit more organized. But usually it was just two-on-one, three-on-one to jump you in.”¹⁵⁵

INITIATION: CRIMINAL ACTS

Another form of initiation requires the initiate to commit a criminal act or acts. These acts range from the trivial to the deadly. Recently, a news flash came across the Internet warning motorists not to flash their headlights asking oncoming cars to dim high beams, because this was a way gang members used to pick out their random victims. While the news flash was merely one of those urban legends, it does represent this form of gang initiation. As Shepherd told us, “The initiation was easier. All you gotta do is go beat up somebody else. So it's just your choice. Anybody you don't like. Just beat them up. As long as they see that – somebody from the set sees you fighting, then you're in. They just wanna know if you're hard core enough to fight.”¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ Adversity Interview, November 1998

¹⁵⁵ Forty Ounce Interview, January 1997

In high schools in the metro area, beating of other students is carried out to benefit the gang.¹⁵⁷ Assaults are a very common form of criminal acts, combining physical fighting prowess and ruthlessness. Other common activities include putting up your own gang graffiti or writing over other gang graffiti. Locally, we also have seen that being involved in criminal activity may serve as not only an initiation, but also as a recruitment plan. In this case, the reports seem to show that the younger person gets involved in the selling of drugs, acting as a look-out or stealing property for sale by the gang. If these activities are done successfully, they are given more and more responsibility and privy to more and more of the gang's secrets. As Poet told us when we asked what it took to get into his gang:

“Just show loyalty. Whichever way. By any means. Whichever loyalty means to the gang members, that's what you did. You could....shooting, stabbing, robbing, spray painting on the wall. Anything. I must have been loyal 'cuz I got rank. I got respect.”¹⁵⁸

INITIATION: BLESSED-IN

The process of being blessed-in is the simplest form of the initiation from a physical safety point of view. It may be slightly more intellectually challenging than a sex-in or beat-in, but even this can not be said with great confidence, since some of the same practices are required after the beat-in/sex-in has taken place. During a blessing-in, the gang initiate may be required to “spit the lit.” Lit, as we have discussed, is the history, sayings, rules and organization of the gang. Especially in those gangs with Midwest connections, learning of the “lit” is a major component of the gang's life. To even be given some portion of the lit to learn is a major event and marks the initiate as having started the process of joining the gang. Swearing to oaths and answering questions about the lit are the heart of the ritual of being blessed-in. As Westside, a Vice Lord explained the process to us:

“Okay. Then, yeah, I was initiated in. I was blessed-in. You'd be blessed with a prayer and you don't get eat up or nothing like that. It ain't like that. Well, let me see how it went. I got blessed because I wanted to be blessed-in and I talked to some people and people knew I was about that. About being a Vice Lord and, before I originally really 'came one, I was always represented. So they blessed me in. A lot of little older people.

¹⁵⁶ Shepherd Interview, June 1996

¹⁵⁷ Johnson High School

¹⁵⁸ Poet Interview, 1996

Higher ranking. Elites and supreme elites, chief, stuff like that. So they blessed me in. It's like four basic prayers that they give. It'd be a oath, and this statement of love, and the Afatihah and the Holy Luvern. Those were the four basics that, that if you, in the street, that a Vice Lord should know. Should know the signs and stuff like that. Champagne glass and the gloves. There's meanings to all that. And our colors. The original colors of the Vice Lords is black and gold. You may see some wear black and red, we can use that, too. But, that's originally, black's the only color. But, it's, when I got into it, it wasn't, it wasn't for protection like other people doing now. It was just something I just wanted to get into, be a part of. That's all it was. And it's like I grew. I grew with it. And as I got older, I guess the feelings got stronger for the, for the Vice Lords, so I just took it from there. Yeah, it could be like that. And, just a little something. It wasn't nothing hard or nothing like that. I knew stuff that they didn't expect me to know. Like as in literature. Like the statement of the holy divine, all this stuff. The lords of lords. The introduction of it. Everything. Valley of death. The Vice Lord concept. It's it's a big book. It's a lot to know. And, most literature is based on the Koran. Like the Afatihah. The holy divine and stuff like that.¹⁵⁹

One unusual piece came from Cia, who told of the blessing-in ritual of a friend in her set:

"If they wanna be blessed-in, like my one home girl, she got blessed in. You learn the lit and then you get punched six times hard. Hard as they could in the chest an' then they bless your rag an' then they give you your rag and you're just in. They broke her, her breast, her breastbone. When they blessed her in she got punched six times, hard as we girls can do, and then the superior has to punch her hard as he could. And then when we were punching her, her breastbone just broke. [Was she taken to the hospital?] No, it was her loss. She knew it was broke, but then the next day after you get beat-in, you have like a all night party for them. All night, just party all night with them, with the new person that gets in. She stayed there because she had no choice to stay there. They wouldn't a let her leave because it's her party. She has to stay there. [What if she would have died?] Well, she's the one who wanted to be in, so, we always thought it was her fault. She's the one who wanted to be in."¹⁶⁰

Prospecting

Violent initiations seem to be much more prevalent in outstate Minnesota and in the suburbs than they are in the Metro area. Forty percent of our sample reported that they were not violently initiated, and the majority of this group came from the Twin Cities. In discussions with transplanted gangsters, we were told that both Chicago-based Vice Lords and Gangster Disciples are discontinuing with the beat-ins. The GD, in fact have a rule in their lit prohibiting rape. Many GD rules are quoted authoritatively in the Metro area. But, in outstate Minnesota, they have

¹⁵⁹ Westside Interview, February 1997

¹⁶⁰ Cia Interview, September 1998

never heard of the rule. One interview subject, who provided the project with an extensive Gangster Disciple lit, explained that in Chicago beat-ins are considered stupid:

“How do you get in, ya mean? A lot of people get it twisted and a lota people get hurt, beat up to be in, ya know, which is crazy. And, to be honest, it’s a test. Because there is no initiation. The only initiation is your brain. That’s the only thing we test. And if you’re stupid enough to let us beat on you to be in this gang, then we don’t need you. We don’t need no stupidity. It ain’t, no man gonna let another beat on them for no reason, just to be beating on them, ya know. Whether it’s to get in the gang or whatever, ya know. You’d be better off being nothing if this person talking about he love you all. Folks, I love you, you my guy, and this is the same person just split your head?”¹⁶¹

A hybrid of the criminal acts and blessing form of initiation is conducted by the Hells Angels and Outcasts, as well as other Outlaw Motorcycle gangs, and is called prospecting. Prospecting is an extended period where the candidate is required to comply with any request or order from any established gang member. During this time, the candidate may be required to commit assaults, rape, theft or any other activity and is under constant scrutiny and observation. As Face noted, “I didn’t really have to do nothing. I was what we call observation. I was on observation for six months. They just basically watched me to see if I had what it took to be a gangster.”¹⁶²

In Outlaw Motorcycle gangs, the candidate is given access to gang runs (activities) and meetings, although he is not allowed to vote. At a certain point, the candidate is allowed to wear some of the gang insignia. The biker gang prospective member, after what may be as long a two years of prospecting, is then voted in or out by the members. In this case, if the candidate is not voted in unanimously, he is then blackballed from the gang. This protocol for voting the candidate in is similar to the way that some of the Southeast Asian gangs decide on who will be allowed in. Leng told us:

“It’s like say if this one guy wanted to get into it, I had to go talk to my friends, what would they say. If one of them objects I go to him and say no, he can’t get in. Everybody gots to agree on that. Ain’t gotta be no majority vote and stuff, everybody gotta agree on it.”¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ Face Interview, April 1997

¹⁶² Face Interview, April 1997

¹⁶³ Leng Interview, July 1996

INITIATION: SEX-IN

Sexing-in a female member is not a new approach. It has long been associated with gang life. Historically it was called "running or giving train." In the train, the girl tosses a dice to determine how many of the gang male will be cars on the train. A male's rank in the gang determines his position in the train, as the engine, regular cars or the caboose. Here in Minnesota, male gang members describe the same process of sexing-in a female initiate. Both male and female gang members are in agreement that, while it does provide access to the gang, it does not provide any real status and, in fact, is a dead-end in the gang hierarchy. Gang members describe the process as taking one of two forms:

- One-on one sex with all members over an extended period of time.
- Gang rape with all members at one time.

Sex-ins vary with different organizations, and even within different sets of the organization. We were told by one Gangster Disciple (GD) set, you have to have sex with six different males within a month. Another set's ritual is to have sex six times within a month, but it can be with the same male, a boyfriend.

The least common form of a sex-in seems to be requiring a female gang candidate to have sex with all members of the gang over a period that may last days or weeks. The other form of this recruits a girl in as one gang member's girlfriend initially, but later, she is given or sold to other members.

Once again, a sex-in does not really confer real membership for the girl. Rather, it allows her to hang around and socialize with the gang. During a sex-in/gang rape, the girl may be blindfolded and then, as many gang members as are present, are allowed to have sexual intercourse with the girl. In some cases, the sex is done in private, in others it is done in full view of all the other members, male and female. In many cases, the female is required to submit to any type of sexual request made by a gang member. Baby Doll shares her GD sex-in initiation in outstate Minnesota:

“He [my boyfriend] introduced me into the life an’ I just kind of went – well, this sounds alright, this is a good way to end things without actually being at fault or it. I got sexed-in, ‘cuz I told them that I wanted to be a member and I really wanted that secure family feeling and that’s how he kind a made it seem to me. I had to sleep with six members of the gang. Six members at different times, it was within three nights, but it wasn’t all in one night. Most of them had come down from the cities, so it was not people that I knew or saw on a regular basis. And he didn’t count, so that wasn’t fair. It’s a very degrading experience actually if you think back on it. At the time it wasn’t for me, ‘cuz I was higher than a kite.”¹⁶⁴

Star, from another GD set in another part of outstate Minnesota, describes a different style of sex-in:

“I was excited because I got to be one of them, and I was just about willing to do anything to be one of them. Either I could get beat-in, or blessed-in or sexed-in, and, I was going to get blessed-in, but they said, “No, no, no.....” They, well they gave me the three choices. And I don’t like to get beat-up, I don’t like to be hit, I don’t, and so I – that was automatically marked off my list and, so I said – well, why don’t you just bless me in?” – because all you’d have to do is, ya know, they’d ask you questions, you answer them, they give you the lit book and that’s all. And, they said, “No, that’s too easy, “ ya know, “you’ve hung out with us a couple years.....” all that stuff. It’s too easy, so I got sexed-in by five member during one night, on one bed.

Well there was a room. It was at one of the guy’s house and there was a big bed and there was candles on one side of the bed and there was a big six point star and – I don’t really remember much about this, I try to block it away. But, a big six point star and then candles. I remember there were beads hanging from the door. It was just like a normal bedroom, but you could tell it was a gang members’ bedroom because of the graffiti and stuff all over the walls, and all the candles and there was Christmas lights on the top of the ceiling, and people were watching. It didn’t matter; it was a normal thing. And then one person would come and they would do their thing and then they would leave, or stand by the door, and they would cheer each other on and – they had a rag around my eyes, so I couldn’t see nothing and – so, I was really scared, I was very scared, but I was waiting for them to be done so I could be on of them. Then when they were done, I had to wear that rag on my forehead the whole night, so everybody knew that something happened and I was one of them now. I walked out of the room and there was a bunch of people out there and they were drinking or whatever, and as soon as I walked out they turned the music on, they were hollering and clapping and, I was happy then because they were all saying “yeah” I felt accepted. I felt that everyone was happy that I was one of them, just as happy as I was. So I stayed there the rest of the night.

And then I went home that night and I took showers and showers and showers, and I scrubbed and I scrubbed and I scrubbed, because I felt so dirty. But, I was still proud for some reason. I was still proud. Then the next day I forgot about it, because I medicated myself, and I was happy because I was one of them now.”¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ Baby Doll Interview, November 1998

¹⁶⁵ Star Interview, October 1997

The more common form of a sex-in is the gang rape. Little Joker describes the initiation ritual for his organization, a Native American Latin King set. We have had other Latin King Mexican sets that absolutely declare that Kings never sex-in females. This contrast is another example of the lack of consistency between sets in this part of the United States.

“Well, when you get a girlfriend, she gotta be gang raped. She’s gotta go around and get boned by all of us guys. All of us Kings. All 43 at one time. Kind of a long process, I guess. We meet girls and stuff at pow wows and stuff and they hang around with us and then they get the idea that we wanna go out with them, but we really don’t. And then they just say, they just bring it up – “Is it alright if we roll with you? Make us a Queen or something?” Then we’re like, “Yeah, we’ll make you a Queen.” Then we’ll take them back –

Everybody on the “res” has got their cellular phones or their pagers. Then we’ll each get a page and we’ll go call somebody and say, “Hey, there’s gonna be an initiation.” Then we’ll all get together or something. Like, I somebody’s outta town on business, in East St. Paul or something, we’ll hold that off until that person gets back.

Usually there’s about five of them that wanna...the most, there’s either five or how many ever wanna become Queens. Then somebody will take one somewhere and the other somewhere. You just go wait for your turn. We’ll bust out some Spade at the table, shake some craps or sit back and drink and watch satellite or something. She stays in the bedroom and then whoever got done with her will come back out and then say, “Hey, whoever’s next, go ahead.”

I haven’t, but I’ve heard people tell stories. Don’t do it. Just say...like she’d tell them, “Don’t do it. Just say you did.” They’d be like, “No, I can’t, it’s required that you do this. You can’t do this. If you don’t do this, you ain’t gonna be a Queen.” Sometimes people, after she’s had like half of them, then she’ll get to this one and say, “Don’t do this no more.” Then, sometimes they’ll just throw her out. Throw her out without her clothes on and she gots to take off, because she wasn’t really truthful about wanting to become a Queen. It’s her body she’s doing this to, not ours. That’s how we thought, ya know. If she wants to do this, let her. We don’t think about her concern. We only think about ourselves.”¹⁶⁶

We were told that some male gangsters are also sexed-in. They than refer to their initiation as being blessed-in. We were not able to confirm this in any of our interviews.

¹⁶⁶ Little Joker Interview, May 1996

Chapter 6

FEMALE GANGSTA

"A sense of belonging. I really didn't fit into places. I was kinda smart, kinda dumb. I wasn't really popular in schools, I mean I don't have the prettiest looks, so, I was pretty popular with my gang members. I did like special jobs needed to be done. I was always the one in charge of it or I was always the one who was doing it. I handle a lot of our money factors, so, whenever anything kinda, kinda important, I was down, I was the one always noticed about it. All my friends were in it. It was most a the people in my neighborhood were in it. It was all around me, so it was kinda hard to stay out of it."¹⁶⁷

Lady, 18 year old Black American
St. Paul Rolling 60 Crips

The sociological literature has long discussed the roles women play in the gangster's world. From Bonnie of Bonnie and Clyde to Ma Barker to Dillinger's "the Lady in Red," criminologists' have long been fascinated by the attraction and roles women play in the criminal world. As in the larger community, the presumption was that girls were presumed to be simply "wives" or "old lady" to the male gang organizations and, as such, to be servants to the men. Literature portrays Bonnie Parker and Ma Barker as atypical figures, as they were leaders or equal partners in the life of crime.

G. David Curry makes the case that female gang involvement is worthy of research, if the traditional perspectives of gang research are useful in exploring female gang activity, and if there is an increasing involvement of females in gangs.

Over time, research on female gang involvement has moved closer to a feminist approach that involved understanding female gang participation from the point of view of the females themselves rather than from an externally imposed male perspective. A feminist perspective is one "in which women's experience and ways of knowing are brought to the fore, not suppressed" (Daly and Chesney-Lind 1988:498). Those who pursue a feminist perspective in developing theories of criminal behavior do so under the assumption that heretofore criminological theory has been "unable to explain adequately the phenomenon of women and crime." There is also the assumption that "unwittingly" focusing on "the activities, interests, and values of men while ignoring a comparable analysis of women" results in a perspective that is inevitable sexist (Leonard 1998:182). One of the strongest arguments for a feminist perspective is the comparatively narrow range of behaviors attributed to females under the male-centered perspective. From the male-centered perspective, participation in gangs is by nature a male behavior, and

¹⁶⁷ Lady Interview, April 1998

females can be either tools to serve the interests of male gang members or the instruments of other social institutions antithetical to participation in the gang.¹⁶⁸

It has also been argued that law enforcement agencies and researchers who have relied on law enforcement data have greatly underestimated the number of females in gangs. Not all delinquency is detected and not all gang members are identified by law enforcement. Given the lower levels of offending females in comparison to males, even among the gang members, ...it may be that female gang members are less likely than are males to be identified as such by law enforcement agencies. Still, (Curry 1994:8) noted that "in a number of cities females as a matter of policy, were never classified as gang members."¹⁶⁹

... picturing gangs as quintessentially male through an act of cognitive purification is likewise part of the process of social cleavage. As all-male violent social entities, gangs cannot be perceived as fundamentally different from the dual-gendered society in which they exist. Attention to gender as a viable requires "the understanding that in any community or location, men and women assume different social roles (Weiss 1993:2). The gender-based analysis demanded by feminist perspective, with its focus on the social role of men and women a different, complementary, and interesting, offers an especially useful tool for understanding the gang-related activities of females by studying the behavior of *both* men and women in gang-related roles.¹⁷⁰

We first became curious of the role of women within gang life while we were hearing the male gangsters express their attitudes towards women. Then some females shared their observations as Lulu explained, "They dogged them a lot, one time I heard one of the home boys tell her, "I just sold you for a truck" or "I just traded you for a truck" or something."¹⁷¹ Understanding the male gangster attitude towards females is critical as we begin this discussion about female gangsters. This is a snapshot of the stories we have heard.

"Our attitude toward women in basic wasn't very good. I mean we thought they were nothing. But the one, the women in our gang we'd have respect for them in a way, but not a lot after awhile. After she started sleeping with us all, we'd just call her a slut and stuff, behind her back. But whatever she needed we'd give it to her. Like if she was, like if she needed a bag or something, we'd give it to her."¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸ Curry, G. David, "Female Gang Involvement," *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, Vol. 35, No. 1 February 1998 100-118, page 101 Sage Publications Inc.

¹⁶⁹ Curry, G. David, "Female Gang Involvement," *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, Vol. 35, No. 1 February 1998 100-118, page 106 Sage Publications Inc.

¹⁷⁰ Curry, G. David, "Female Gang Involvement," *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, Vol. 35, No. 1 February 1998 100-118, pages 115-116 Sage Publications Inc.

¹⁷¹ Lulu Interview, November 1998

¹⁷² Forty Ounce Interview, January 1997

"We'd just go and meet girls and use them. But a lot a the guys, including myself, had relationships outside a that and treated them differently. But the girls that we treated like shit, we just, ya know, use them basically. Raise money, sex, whatever we had to, a place to say, ya know, a house to sell the drugs at. We used the girls for money, ya know, for extra money. Clothes, food, cigarettes, whatever it came do to. Just so we didn't have to spend the extra money outta our pocket.

Yeah, I had a girlfriend. Well, I mean, it just seemed like I treated, ya know the real good looking ones, the real shy ones, I just treated her different, ya know. I mean I didn't want nobody touch her but me. I can't be specific, but I know that I didn't want nobody touching her and she was mine, ya know, and I wanted her to just be with me, just me and her.¹⁷³

"For me I don't care about girls, I just like use girls and go, spare no pity on girls. Gonna give you sex, money almost anything ya want, like if you want weed, go get money, go get some weed and sex. Just to stay with you, 'cuz whatever you want just go over there. If she like you or love you, she do anything for you. But for me I just take girl as a joke, I don't really care about girl, 'cuz why do you care about girl, ya know. A girl ain't really nothing, they ain't helping you with nothing, you just use them, leave them alone and move on.¹⁷⁴

That was another rule, that girls couldn't be a part a this, 'cuz . . . where their hearts are at, we felt they're . . . too week emotionally and physically to be a part of it. Just didn't think that they'd be strong enough or smart enough and, I don't know, we didn't have much respect for them, so how we suppose to let them in the family if we don't respect them. They can hang around us for someone to fuck and someone to do dirty work for us, but we still showed them a lot less respect. We didn't give them any actually."¹⁷⁵

"'Cuz they're your girlfriend. So, I don't really know, when you ask for money they give you money, 'cuz they get money from their parents and they work, that's about it. The All American way. You're a guy and your girlfriend works and ya know, you just kick back and collect."¹⁷⁶

"They're kinda housewives of the gang. They're like, they never gang banged. They're GDs and they're just there for, ya know, if like I met a girl and I started going out with her, she'd become a GD and she'd become my GD ho (whore), I could do what I wanted with her. I could pimp her off to somebody else in the GD, sell her for 20 bucks and he could have her. That's the way it was.

Women were very disrespected in GD. They like weren't really worth nothing but a good time. I sold a girl to my friend one time for 100 bucks. She didn't have no say in it. She didn't necessarily have to be sexual. If he wanted her to, she had to, but it was up to him. She was out of my hands, so it wasn't up to me anymore.

¹⁷³ Rock Interview, March 1998

¹⁷⁴ CK Interview, March 1998

¹⁷⁵ Jack Interview, March 1998

¹⁷⁶ Leng Interview, July 1996

I don't know. I found a new girlfriend. I can't break up with her 'cause she'll always be my girlfriend in the GD Nation, but I can sell her to somebody else for them to use her. If they're rich, you use them for their money. I've known GDs to go and rob their houses, found out where they lived, come around and be good friends with them and then rob them and sell their shit."¹⁷⁷

"Attitudes toward girls is just, they're a bunch a bitches or fuck them and leave them. That's what a lot a guys in my gang thought about girls, ya know, "Let's go pip on that bitch over there" . . .and talk about girls. And basically what people try to do in the clique was try and get girls and fuck them and leave them."¹⁷⁸

The arguments not to study female gang involvement include that *there are minimal numbers of girls in gangs and they are not committing the serious violent crimes*. But, as we acknowledge in our dual-gender society, with so much domestic abuse and male dependency/dominance, it is hard to heed these arguments.

When we review the Minnesota statistics on gangsters, females are not usually recognized as gang members. Reports available on Minnesota female gangsters were based on data from professionals, but we were unable to identify direct research interviews of female gangsters in Minnesota. Thus, our sample of 30 interviews with female gangsters may be the largest available to date. Our sample of females is small because it was extremely difficult to find professionals who would identify and introduce females involved in gangs to us. The other challenge that we faced was that the rules of the gang are *don't talk to anyone about the gang activity*. We clearly saw that *since the males make the rules they decide when to break them*. This is demonstrated by the fact that males would actively self select to participate in the research with no regard to rules against talking, but the females felt bound to follow the male rules: *do no talking about their gang experiences*.

¹⁷⁷ Duke Interview, August 1996

¹⁷⁸ Silent Interview, March 1998

FEMALE RECRUITMENT

A review of the female interviews suggest females are recruited into gangs through three primary external incentives:

- Inter-generational family gang affiliation
- Peer involvement and gang activity which is dynamic in their neighborhoods
- Charismatic males recruit/seduce females to the life style¹⁷⁹

We consider the first two incentives passive recruitment because the female choose to explore the gang life. But the third, is active recruitment of females because they probably would not have explored gang life without this charismatic male luring.

In the first case, when family members are in the gang, it appears close to impossible to avoid some gang exposure. This family involvement may include siblings, cousins, and in the inter-generational gangs that have moved here from Los Angeles and Chicago in which one or both parents may be minimally or inactive members of a gang. The females may have joined the same gang as the family members' affiliation. They may also associate with a different gang in cases where their family members don't want them to be involved in a gang. Gangsters quickly demonstrate, "Do as I say, not as I do." None of the gangsters interviewed wanted their children to be gang affiliated.

"My kids wouldn't be a part of my affiliation whatsoever. That's a part a me, uplifting myself now, so that my kids wouldn't follow off, doing the things that I did. Now, if they chose to be what I am and do what I did, then I would support them. Just as long as it ain't nothing that would hurt them."¹⁸⁰

"Everybody is kind of her [the children of gangsters] parent. I think, the thing that I really wanted to say, for kids that are born into a situation like that, I think it lays quite heavily, the responsibility, lays quite heavily on the parents to change, if not for themselves at least for their children. Because if you do not, your children are gonna end up doing exactly the same thing you do and if you are truly involved, you will never want that. If you truly love your child, you will never want your child to go through something like that."¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ Hahn, Sandra, Boys and Girls Club Gang Conference presentation, Bloomington, Minnesota, Washington Co., Minnesota, Probation Officer, March 1998

¹⁸⁰ Tee Interview, November 1998

¹⁸¹ Baby Doll Interview, November 1998

The women often revealed that older sisters or brothers, cousins, or parents would block her wanting to join their gang. So she might go to a cousin's organization that was different than her immediate family's, or she would go around the immediate family. NeeNee details how being around a family gang made her want to join and how she accomplished this:

"I wasn't supposed to be involved, but my uncle and some of his friends jumped me into it, so that's how I got into it. My uncle is 28. My uncle asked me did I wanna be in and I said, "Yeah." They set it up where I could get jumped in and that's what happened. From there on, I was being with them a lot and doing what they were doing, like fighting people.

My dad didn't want me to be involved in none of that. He was in it, but he didn't want me to be in it. Just like he was telling me don't do it, but he was doing it. So, I did it myself 'cuz it's like they had so much going. Like they had money. They had everything that you even think of wanting and it's like they were doing it by beating people up and selling. So I can do it, too, if it's that easy for them to make money. It's like a lot of people looked up to him because they were in a gang that had . . . a lot of people were afraid of him and that's what I wanted. I figured if I was in it, I got my whole family to back me up when something's going on and they'll be there for me no matter what. That's the way I liked it, so that's why I joined in.

Mom don't want to be involved with it, but my step dad is doing it [as a Vice Lord] and it's the same thing. It's just me that's the difference. And with my older brother, been locked up on and off. He's still involved in a gang. Now, he's different. He brings his friends over and it's like my step dad, he don't like my brother's friends 'cuz they GDs, so he'll threaten them and chase them around and stuff. He's [my step dad] involved a lot and he don't like when other sets come around him 'cuz it throws him off. Like they're trying to do something to him. [My younger brother], he's 11. He thinks he's a Vice Lord, he walks around with a rag on his head and he throws up some signs. He knows how to do it all, but he's not a Vice Lord."¹⁸²

The second way females become attracted to gangs is by living in a gang-infested neighborhood. What we live around becomes normal to us. When a neighborhood has many youth promoting the benefits of gang life and having their needs met by the gang, it becomes a natural attraction. Amy describes her transformation from being in a gang neighborhood to making a gang commitment:

"[I was] like eleven. All my friends were in it, most a the people in my neighborhood were in it. It just . . . it was all around me, so it was kinda hard to stay out of it. The Latin Queen, Latin Kings. I went out with two of them. The first one, we were together for like two years. He basically taught me stuff about it. He was the one who

¹⁸² NeeNee Interview, March 1998

really got me into it. He use to show me handshakes and drawings, and literature and stuff like that. We were really close and then we just broke up and, I didn't fall away from hanging out. I still hung out with them. Eventually I got another boyfriend that was a King. Most a my boyfriends were Kings.

I wanted, ya know, the fast life. . . drugs, beer, partying, gang banging, all that mess. I wanted to be a part of it. My mom, ya know, I kept my gangs and partying and stuff away from my mom. I didn't want her to get involved in it. I didn't want her to know about it. She didn't know I was in it 'til I came to prison and I finally told her all the things that I use to do."¹⁸³

Amy refers to the availability of drugs that we see as another attraction in the neighborhood gang culture. Young women who are chemically dependent quickly discover that gangs are a sure, easy, monetary-free way to have the drugs and alcohol to feed their addiction. Often because of the acuteness of the addiction they are willing to pay the high price of gang life for easy access to these drugs.

"I was at a mall where I lived in St. Louis Park and I was talking to this guy, and I asked him if he smoked marijuana and he said yeah. And I went to his house and he was talking, and a lot of his friends came over, and he was talking about his gang and everything, and that is how I found out, by drugs. I said like, asked questions around like how do you get into it, and things like that, of that nature. He said, "there's three different ways to get into it [the gang] and for most girls to get into it is to be sexed-in." And he asked me if I ever had sex with anybody and I told him yeah, because I had. He said, he asked me if I was looking to be a part of something and I said yeah, and he told me how I could get into it and told me what it takes and I did it. About two weeks, two and a half weeks (later I got sexed-in). I used marijuana, LSD, crack and cocaine, and alcohol. I used every day and was high most of the time. I want to change like my self-esteem and everything, but I don't wanta have to give up my drugs to do it."¹⁸⁴

The final, and clearly the most active manner of recruitment is the charismatic male's seduction for sex and gang support. The best description of this is an anecdotal story:

A college graduate student called looking for support because she felt very guilty for getting her younger high school age cousin involved in a gang seduction. She had taken her cousin to the Mall of America and allowed her cousin to go off by herself against her mother's directive. During this independent time, the cousin had met some gang males. These attractive, charming males had been especially attentive and interested. Over the next 8 to 9 months there were many phone calls, parties, dates, drinking and marijuana experimentation and use, missed school, fights with parents

¹⁸³ Amy Interview, November 1998

¹⁸⁴ Sara Interview, March 1998

because this boyfriend was black and a gang member, and several incidents of running away from home to be with this charismatic gangster. While she was “on the run” from her parents home she began to call her older cousin to share how charming and how special she had been made to feel those first months. She described how no one had ever made her feel so attractive and extraordinary as he had. She explained how important this was to her because ever since her mom had been remarried, she had only fought with the new stepfather. She thought her mom didn’t spend time with her anymore. Then she began to share how confused she was now that her boyfriend was impatient with her more often. She began to share all the abuse she saw, he was beginning to flirt and she suspected he was sexual with other girls. He had begun to hit her when he was high. She shared that sometimes she was frightened. After several months, our contact was called to the hospital because her young cousin had to be taken to the hospital after this male gangster boyfriend beat her severely.

The parents took their daughter home and got an order for protection. While living at home, the young woman began to sneak calls from the gangster. His homies began to come to the family home and the family felt threatened. The homies began to help her sneak out to meet the gangster. After her wounds fully healed, she ran away again. She left the state for a period of time to avoid being found.

The young woman who contacted us expressed frustration that the only support the family could expect was for the domestic abuse charges. Professionals could only suggest obtaining the order for protection, which the gang didn’t acknowledge or respect anyway. The family experienced extreme frustration that the police were unable or unwilling to look at the gang involvement and threats. There were no resources available to the family.

Another Minneapolis female gangster told us the following story about her male homies going to the malls to pick up females:

“ . . . not people that were trying to be in a gang, but I seen it happen to girls. There’s this one house in Minneapolis where everybody be and they’ll bring people over there. The girls will come with them, but when they get there they don’t wanna have sex, but they’ll still have to. They’re not getting involved in a gang, but they’re still . . . having sex with them ‘cuz they’ll say, “Well, she came here. She must have wanted something.” They’ll say that. When they first come, they’ll sit and watch TV and stuff and just act all . . . I don’t know. Then when it happens . . . like one girl, she came back with the police to that house. But the person that had sex with her wasn’t there. She was trying to file something on him or something. She came back to the house and she was telling the stuff that he did to her, but couldn’t nothing happen to nobody else in the house ‘cuz the person wasn’t even there no more, so didn’t nothing happen. But she wanted to press charges against him.

Another one [girl] came there. She’s a white girl. She came there. All of them had sex with her, did whatever they wanted to do with her and pushed her outside the

door with no clothes on. Then she like . . . she kept banging on the door. She wanted her stuff. She wanted her stuff. One of them went out there and grabbed her by her hair and they were just beating her real, real bad and left her out there and shut the door on her. I don't know what happened to her, but she never came back. Some of them, they'll come back after it happened to them like it didn't even matter to them. I don't know, like they'll just continue to come back and come back and come back. 'Cuz they still come back and it's like . . . I know if it happened to me, I wouldn't come back to nothing like that 'cuz . . . that ain't right. I know that ain't right 'cuz they're having sex with people that don't even wanna really have sex with them and they're making have sex by hitting and stuff, and I don't know. That's wrong again."¹⁸⁵

THE SEDUCTIVE PEDESTAL

Sexual attraction is one of the enjoyable exchanges of male/female relationships. Throughout history, there has always been, and always will be the game of seduction in some courtships. But, our research would indicate that in Minneapolis and Saint Paul this seduction has a new twist that is very dangerous. Inner-city male gangsters have developed a gang recruitment / seduction model to attract young, naïve girls. They often appear to be looking for suburban European American girls. Out of their own insecurities the females are easily seduced as they enjoy the attention and build up of being placed on a pedestal that is quickly raised. Just as soon as they begin to feel secure on the pedestal the gangster will have it crash to the ground and the female will have to tolerate extensive physical, sexual and emotional abuse; often from the whole set.

An anecdotal story was told by a young Korean and European American girl, Janie, who was not able, or willing, to do a formal interview on tape because of her fear of the superior:

Janie described meeting some GD gang members at a mall in a Western Metropolitan suburb. She and a friend were invited to a party where they were shown significant attention. After a couple opportunities to hang out and party with the other gangsters, the OG began to show special attention to Janie. She was told she was special, different, unique and especially intelligent and beautiful. (She is especially intelligent and beautiful, has unstable self-esteem, and is chemically dependent.) She was invited to join the gang "if she was worthy." To prove her toughness and commitment to the gang, she had to participate in criminal activities including selling drugs, attacking and fighting other females and males, burglaries and robberies. He kept telling her he wanted her to be a full member in the GD set, but was having problems convincing other OGs to let her in, so she had to continually do crimes to prove herself. At one point she was required to set up her parent's home for a home invasion robbery.

¹⁸⁵ NeeNee Interview, March 1998

Throughout all this Janie was enjoying being sexual with the OG. She watched other girls be commanded to have sex with any male who asked. During the initial period, the OG praised her specialness and kept her sexually for himself, telling her he would protect her. This was very seductive to her self-esteem. After about a month, he began to allow other gangsters to demand sex from her when he wasn't around. Soon he encouraged his homies to take her sexually while he watched. Although she was devastated, she described continually thinking he would return to protect her if she was able to please him again.

After he family arranged an out of home placement to get her away from the drug use and the gang, the OG came to the family home. Janie ran from her placement home explaining her fear of the OG. In lengthy dialog she explained that she considers returning to him for the sense of protection, excitement, glamour, and the hope that his attentiveness will return. Janie admitted hoping she could return to be his special one.

As Janie described the "seductive pedestal," she helps us explore the external draw to the gang life. Her story also points out the critical need to study the internal vulnerability that makes females susceptible to the gang lifestyle.

ROLES OF FEMALES IN GANGS

Glasser¹⁸⁶'s model of "Five Basic Needs" is as applicable for females as it is for males. The *father hunger* issue appears to also be as strong for females, but is acted out in different ways.

Overall, girls who attach to male gangs tend to hold traditional sex-role images about female identity. There tends to be a prevailing view that the "good" or "competent" female is defined by her ability to please and/or be desirable to men. Such stereotype is likely fed by girls' view of their mothers and strong mass media images. A particular challenge for prevention is to help young, susceptible females expand their vision of competence, a process which is made difficult in a family context where alternative role models and/or encouragement for education and professional success may be lacking.¹⁸⁷

These girls with traditional sex role images embrace the support role they are assigned in the gang world. Even those that desire to "achieve" or be self-sufficient are plainly comfortable with the low ceiling that is definitively in place for females in gangs. In the corporate world, we talk about the *glass ceiling* (glass because one can see to the top positions with the illusion a female may have the option to go there) that women have faced in climbing the corporate ladder. In the

¹⁸⁶ Glasser, MD, William, *The Control Theory Manager*, New York: Harper Business, 1994

¹⁸⁷ Search Institute, *Girls and Gang Summary Report*, Minneapolis: April 1995 – page 8

gang world, the gang's bureaucratic structure is very clear. The ladder for females to climb is only a defined rung or two with a very low ceiling.

The gang categories that females choose to associate with provide them power that is achieved. Usually any power recognized by others is from their relationship with their boyfriend/children's father or a brother who has rank. This ceiling is clearly defined as very low and very firm. In the flat structured gangs, without a ladder to climb for rank, females sometimes explore the illusion of equal posturing. Very few succeed. The female gangsters continue to define and justify the female role as either subordinate or as support to the males:

"Well, the men run the world so they say, it's a man's world. We're looked at as more sensitive . . . our feelings could trigger us to do just what we shouldn't do, ya know. Women tend to think with their feelings most a the time, that's what they think . . . half a these men."¹⁸⁸

"Cuz boys do more in it. It's like they're different 'cuz they're move involved in it. They're not . . . like girls, yeah, they can fight. They [girls] can shoot somebody, but afterwards they're gonna be all . . . I don't know, like paranoid and stuff. But if a boy does it, they're not funny acting like that. They're more like, "Who cares?" That type of attitude. Girls, it's different."¹⁸⁹

"Mostly, they are used. But, a few show that you're more, you're not gonna get put down or be used, then there . . .there's some place for you, but not very high. You won't ever become like a coordinator or anything like that. You just, either get used or have little respect."¹⁹⁰

"I had the highest rank there was for a female. Just all we did was support. That was it. We pretty much, we stayed to ourselves and whenever they needed something, we had it."¹⁹¹

"Women are supposed to be at home taking care of the children and the house and all your business problems and all your paperwork, dealing with your lawyer."¹⁹²

If a ranking male is sent prison, "his woman" may be allowed to take on responsibilities of running the business while he is locked up. If she is successful, when he returns to the street, they may be allowed to continue this role. But it needs to be clearly emphasized that women are usually

¹⁸⁸ LA Interview, November 1998

¹⁸⁹ NeeNee Interview, March 1998

¹⁹⁰ Angie Interview, December 1997

¹⁹¹ Lady Interview, April 1998

¹⁹² Sue Interview, April 1996

seen as *acting as the male's agent*. The women are seldom seen acquiring solo power or leadership positions, except in all-female gangs.

These traditional sex-role attitudes of both male and female gangsters are a model we have observed often in history. As recently as the civil rights movement in the 1960s, the acknowledged leaders were males: Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Jesse Jackson, James Farmer, James Forman, Julian Bond, Stokely Carmichael, and Bob Moses. But, most Americans do not know the powerful females who influenced and designed many strategies during this period. They include: Unita Blackwell, Ella Baker, Casey Hayden, Mary King, Fannie Lou Hammer, Virginia Durr, Rita Schwerner, Bernice Johnson Reagon, Dorie and Joyce Ladner, to name a few. When we study this period and talk to those involved it is clearly evident that many women are strategists, directors, motivators, and conclusive leaders, even though the larger society only heard of the males; the males were the only recognized leaders. We are beginning to see similarities in the gang, where the females often have a critical behind-the-scene role in the accomplishments of the gang.

“I was not somebody you messed with, and if they had a problem with somebody, they came to me. I earned my rank very difficult, because it was harder for me being a female. There weren't a lot a females involved when I got involved. And they were really just kind of used for sex objects. They aren't anymore, but they were at that time and we kind of had to earn our respect by doing the same things the guys were doing. If they carried a gun, then we carried a gun. If they carried a knife, we carried a knife. I've carried a knife almost all of my life. Since I was probably . . . 10 or between 11 and 13. I've carried a knife with me at all times. And I wasn't afraid to take it out and use it when I needed to. So, yeah, I earned my rank very difficulty.

We ran the meeting, Brad [the acknowledged leader] and I, we ran meetings, we presided over councils, we decided where money was spent, we collected dues, we ran the drugs. We kept the drugs. I kept a gun in my house. I actually kept the gun that was used in the murder, at my house for awhile. I protected my crew from getting in trouble. I protected my crew from getting in fights. I protected my girls from harassment and sexual harassment that they experienced at school. We pretty much just hung out and became kinda like a family.

When I first started with this crew again, they were handing out stupid violations for people. If you said “donut,”¹⁹³ people got violations, whatever. And, I just think that's bullshit. I think ya need to be more mature than that. I mean if you drop your rag and step on it, on the floor, yeah, I'm gonna beat the shit outta you, but if you say, “Do you want a donut?” I'm not gonna hit you in the head for that, ya know what I'm saying? I just felt that, that was ignorance, no, you're not running this like this. And Sam [the OG]

¹⁹³ Glazed donut is a derogatory term for Gangster Disciples

really listened to me. He never really questioned anything that I did and he never really argued with me. He never questioned anything that I did.”¹⁹⁴

TYPES OF FEMALE MEMBERSHIP

Ann Campbell states that today there are three types of gangs that females affiliate with:

- Independent female gangs
- Female auxiliaries of male gang
- Membership in male gangs as co-ed membership¹⁹⁵

INDEPENDENT FEMALE GANGS

Very few females have equal rights and responsibilities as their male counterparts in the male organizations. In traditional male gangs, we have not seen any room at the top for female gangsters. It appears that a very defined ceiling keeps females from achieving rank. Because of this ceiling both nationally and here in Minnesota, it appears the only method to becoming a full-fledged gangster without submission to the male's power, is to become a member of a female gang. These girl gangs are female-run, with female membership, and a female style and agenda. Here in Minnesota, the only true all-female gangs seem to be in the Hmong community with the Tiny Titty Twisters, Oriental Cock Suckers, and Crip Devoted Oriental Gangsters C-Dogs. There are also the Sisters of the Struggle (SOS) and the MOD girls, which are allegedly all-female gangs, Black and Hmong respectively. Both MOD and SOS, however, seem to be auxiliary gangs to their male respective organizations i.e., BOS (Brothers of the Struggle, which in reality is the Gangster Disciple Nation) and the MOD (Men of Destruction). In Minnesota, these young female gangsters have run narcotics and assisted in setting up girls for prostitution by facilitating

¹⁹⁴ Baby Doll Interview, November 1996

¹⁹⁵ Campbell, Ann, 1993 *Men, Women and Aggression*. New York, Basic Books

their running away. So far, while these girl gangsters are certainly violent, they have not been as enamored with gunplay as their male counterparts. We are seeing the girls use padlocks to club their rivals, and razorblade / box cutter knives as their weapons of choice to cut females' faces.

The independent female gangsters are the smallest group of female gang members found in Minnesota.

FEMALE AUXILIARIES OF MALE GANGS

Some male gangs in Minnesota have auxiliary female organizations that run in partnership with them. They use the same name or an auxiliary version of the male name. In these situations, the females have their own structured organization. They have separate functions or meetings. A few females have clout, but despite the fact that they often run independently of male organizations, the females are still subordinate to the males.

“All the boys hung out and all the girls hung out. We never like clicked. I wasn't like really with guys that much, mostly with a lot of females. Our clique was maybe about 12 people. Wasn't really that big. And we really didn't go around like talking shit to anybody. We were, like, quiet, we didn't want to get our ass in trouble, 'cuz I had a couple warrants out and they were all runners from places. We didn't take that much of a risk. We stole. We stole spray paint to get high, and we use to steal from Dayton's a lot to get money. We'd steal from Dayton's and then we'd go down to this park and sell it for weed.

We slept under bridges and in abandoned buildings. And they would get these apartments, these guys would, and they would all stay there. The guys would really cause a lot a trouble. They'd get in fights a lot. [The other girls] they protected me. I was the youngest so they thought of me as a little sister. They told the guys to stay away from me, most of the time probably because they wanted them. I wasn't' around the guys a lot.”¹⁹⁶

MEMBERSHIP IN MALE GANGS AS CO-ED MEMBERS

Our research reflects that most females in Minnesota gangs are co-ed members in male gangs. In the these organizations, both males and females actively participate together, but the males

¹⁹⁶ Marie Interview, June 1996

definitely have the power and control. Jessica defines her gang's co-ed status, and how she has more status or respect in the gang by not being sexed-in, but beat-in for six minutes. In this situation the six minutes is significant. She describes how many of the females in her gang get far less respect because of their sexual behavior.

"It's a guy and a girl gang. There's 27 of us. The oldest is 23. There's only four of us that have respect in our gang. A [male] superior has respect, the superior's closest homie has respect and then two [girls]. It's me and one of my homies that have respect. When I got initiated, it was on the 6th and . . . 6th of each month you get initiated, that's what I learned at least. And then when I got beat-in, it was six girls, and I knew ahead of time because I had to be there at a certain time. I got beat-in six times, stopped one minute each time, got beat-in again. I got beat-in to have respect from the other gang members. I took six minutes, because if I wanna have respect – most people just take three minutes and they don't have respect, it's their loss. They're the one who's gonna be violated. If I don't have respect they can treat me like shit. If I didn't have respect they can dis me, they can treat me bad, if I didn't have respect I would be nothing in that gang. But, if I had respect I would be able to violate people if they were like throwing up signs that they weren't suppose to throw up or else wearing the wrong color. I'd feel more better and then I would have control over most a the people who did not have respect. And, that would just make it easier on me.

Once in awhile the girls just go chill by themselves. Like, homie [Dee] just go chill, me . . . by ourselves. But, if her boyfriend [wants to] come with her, he'll come. She has no say in it. See her boyfriend is our superior and even though we're not suppose to be like dating other people in the gang, [he's her superior], he can just pass her on, pass her on to another gang member. When they pass her on, she just goes lower and lower. When she's with the superior she's like a higher power. She was like almost higher than I was, then when they passed her down to my one home boy, he just slapped her around. Hit her a couple times and just passed her on, just used her like a ho. Just like some a the girls that act like hos,¹⁹⁷ are hos in that gang. And they will be hos to them guys. Most a the people I know got sexed-in and me and Dee call them hos, 'cuz hos are just like that. They always sleep around with everybody.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁷ "Hos" refers to whores

¹⁹⁸ Jessica Interview, September 1998

LEVELS OF FEMALE INVOLVEMENT

In Minnesota, we find four different levels of female gangster involvement in the male gangs. The four levels are categorized by females' activities, knowledge of the gang, influence on the gang, and primary behaviors around the gang. These levels are:

- Groupie
- Affiliate Gangsters
- Associate Gangsters
- Independent Female Gangsters

GROUPIES

The first level of female gang involvement is really just as a gang groupie. Just as in the worlds of sports, music and now politics, there are women who enjoy simply being allowed to hang around with the men in these professions for the power they vicariously receive. They earn this "privilege" by providing sex, services and money. In the gang world, we see this same role played out with the young women who are recruited and / or welcomed to hang with the gang. Unfortunately, many of these young women have not accounted for the physical, verbal and sexual abuse they will encounter when they choose to hang out with gangsters.

"[In my crew] there are between 20 and 30, just a small little crew, all males except for me. A lot [are sluts]. They weren't really part a the crew. I mean, they weren't really part a the crew, they just be like females that they'd just go find ta fuck. Just anytime if they [the males] wanted to get it on or whatever, they'd just go find the females. And they'd [the girls] think that they were being respect or whatever, being cool because they were messing with somebody that's good looking and high ranked and got a lot a respect. But, they just get dropped off, and they don't get no money, no nothing from the dudes."¹⁹⁹

The two most highly publicized examples of groupie are the G-line (gang phone line) rapes in Saint Paul and the gang rapes of three suburban girls in Minneapolis. The G-line cases involved

¹⁹⁹ Shantel Interview, August 1998

Southeast Asian girls who were calling and leaving their names and numbers on a pager answering service called the “G-line” for “Gangsters line.” It may seem strange to those outside of the gang world as to what would impel a young girl to put her name on such a service. It appears that a combination of naivete and a need for attention area factors in the mix. We must recognize that the concept of the male gangster is attractive to a certain proportion of the population, both male and female. We have only to look back at James Dean, Sean Penn, and rap artists like Ice Cube and Tupac, to see that the image of the male rebel, sulking and dangerous, is a popular archetype provided by the media.

In the G-line case, Hmong gangsters took the girl’s information and made contact with them. Ultimately, the males kidnapped and raped the girls. These girls were not being initiated into the gang. They simply were being taken advantage of, with nothing being offered for their pain. The second example is also all too common. Three young women from the East Metro suburb of Oakdale decided to go for a ride to a Minneapolis party with three men. Instead of the movie they had told their parents they were going to, the girls managed to con their way into a building in Minneapolis where they were attacked and sexually assaulted. Once again, these girls were not looking to join a gang, but were going to hang out with them. There is an element of dangerous excitement that seems to be in play here.²⁰⁰ There is also an element that we see especially with suburban and rural young women; they are not gang-specific and will party with gangsters of any set. Some of these young women will evolve to the next level for females, the affiliate female gangster.

AFFIIATE FEMALE GANGSTERS

This is probably the largest group of female gangsters, according to both male and female accounts. Affiliates are the sex objects of the gang and are used for sex or to perform other tasks as ordered. They are used and abused as unimportant objects. The males objectify their sexual acts with these female in the same manner as the gangster rap music objectifies sex. Affiliate female gangsters will usually be associated with only one gang at a time. Star, among others, was very typical of this progression. A sex-in is typical for these young women after which they are allowed to participate in the gang’s life to a limited degree. Once they are sexed-in, they are referred to by both male and other female gangsters as “hos.” Their “job responsibility” is being a

²⁰⁰ Shantel Interview, August 1998

sex object. This job duty usually continues throughout their gang career. These girls may be required to do other work for the gangs and may occasionally believe they are fulfilling the role of girlfriend to the gang members. The affiliate gang member is allowed to show their gang membership and allowed to claim their gang.

Star is very articulate in describing her experiences as an affiliate gangster:

“If somebody said something to me, or if somebody was talking about me, I would tell them. Or, if they would hear it, they would tell them not to do that. Or they would beat them up over it. Or, they would go ask me to come with them when they were gonna go steal something, I felt important. I felt big and bad because they were gonna go steal something and I got to go with. But, the only thing that I would ever do was to distract somebody or hold their bags for them or whatever. They would, they used the girls a lot, and especially for sex, they did, a lot . . .

And, the first time that somebody tried to do it [sex] with me, they pulled me into the bathroom. We were in the basement of somebody’s house, and they pulled me into the bathroom and they told me to do that [oral sex] and they were really drunk and I said “no.” I told them that I was not gonna do it and he said, “Well, if you’re going to be a true GD with us you hafta do it.” And I was like, “Oh, whatever, and I had’t gotten any kind of initiation then, but I wanted to be friends with them. I wanted to be accepted with them. I didn’t want to lose them ‘cuz they were my power. So I did.”²⁰¹

For the affiliate gang members, sexual exploitation is a daily experience. Star describes, above, her initial exposure to exploitation at age 13. She goes on to detail what this life is like as an affiliate member of the gang.

“Mostly, it was oral, mostly and I don’t know, it’s kinda weird to talk about, but. . . mostly it was oral sex. Sometimes it was, like intercourse, but mostly it was oral sex, just a quickie before they were gonna go do something, ya know, big. How, whenever they wanted it, I’ve done them at parties, and it’s really embarrassing, it’s really humiliating, and I’ve done them in private and, they pull you in a room. It’s really humiliating, really humiliating.

It was basically any guy. I never had a regular boyfriend or whatever and I thought that I was special because of that stuff. At the time I would do it because I thought I was special, it made me feel good, falsely, and I thought that they liked me if I did that. It was what everybody was supposed to do, say yes to them, ‘cuz all my friends that I had did it. All my friends that were girls did it, so why wouldn’t I?

²⁰¹ Star Interview, October 1997

There was this boy in [rural Minnesota] he had an apartment and it was an upstairs apartment and the upstairs and the downstairs were owned by a GD member. And there would always be parties over there. I remember the first time that I saw a girl do oral sex on a guy, I was like, "What is she doing? Can't they do this in private?" And then . . . after that it just became normal. Like, it just happened. If you go to a party you're gonna see it. If you're gonna go to a party, you might just have to do it."²⁰²

Star defines for us that the females not only experience oral sex, but also physical abuse:

"Well basically if they wanted you to do something . . . you had to do it. I've been hit and slapped and kicked and all those things by a lot a guys that I hung out with in the GD, and I don't, if they want you to do something and you say "no" it's like disrespect, that's what they said, it was that. You were disrespecting them, that you had to do it, because they were, they were like your boss, you had to do it. And I did it because I didn't want to be unaccepted and I was always scared that if I said "no" that I would get beat up, and I didn't want to get beat up."²⁰³

These females, like all the female gangsters, act as the mules for the gang, carrying drugs in the vaginal cavities, and hiding guns in the bras for the male gang members. Star's story identifies how females are used sexually, as well as other ways.

"Well, some of the guys would send drugs with me to school, when I went to school, and I would sell the drugs there and I'd have to give them the money. I didn't get to keep anything, so basically, they just used the girls a lot of the time, most of the time, actually. I mean they use you for sex, they use you for – to sell their drugs, to make their money, to steal things for them, to distract somebody so they can steal something from their house or their car, or whatever it is. And, I use to think it was cool, that I was appreciated."²⁰⁴

Star also talks about the motivation for being an affiliate when she told us:

"I was really vulnerable towards things, because I had never really had anybody that liked me for who I was and stuff. So I thought that they liked me for who I was, and actually they just took advantage of me. And, I thought that it was cool to be involved with people who had a lot of power, and I thought that it was cool that if somebody said something about me, or to me, that I had someone who would tell them not to do that. I thought that is was cool that people were getting hurt over me, and it wasn't. I see that now."²⁰⁵

²⁰² Star Interview, October 1997

²⁰³ *ibid.*

²⁰⁴ *ibid.*

²⁰⁵ *ibid.*

Conclusively, these young women are convinced that this sexual objectification is the only available choice they have to be gang-affiliated. Unfortunately, other female gangsters do not guide or support them to make different choices. This could be a result of the traditional sex-role images these women demonstrate, where they listen to males and not to females. It is also amplified by the attitudes that other female gangsters express in their extensive contempt towards the groupies and affiliates. They appear to do nothing to help. They do not even acknowledge “the hos” (girls who act as sex objects). In this example, we see the significant victim stance in which female gangsters live.

“They treat her like she’s a . . . I don’t know how to say it, like a slut. They treat her like that. If they wanna have sex with her, she gotta have sex with them. Whatever they want, she gotta do it. No matter what it is. ‘Cuz she wasn’t beat-into it, so she’s not . . . she’s considered in it, but she’s not . . . I don’t know how to say it. She’s not fully into it ‘cuz she was sexed-in. Like she gotta be beat-in to be really into it, but she’s not. So they treat her like . . . like a slut, but she’s still gotta do, like if we were to beat somebody, she’s still gotta be up in it. She can’t say, “Well, I don’t wanna do it,” she’s still gotta do it. She still do the same activities as everybody else, but she get treated like a slut. She didn’t wanna get beat-in, so she wanted to take it the easy way in. I think she knew, but she didn’t wanna see it that way. Like she don’t like that she gotta do that whatever they ask her to do, she still don’t like that, but she still do it.”²⁰⁶

“A nation ho, a nation ho, that’s what they will be. And I’m not being judgmental, but I mean, that’s what they do. They like to have, we have some straight hooches. And they ain’t no sisters. If they want to think themselves, that since they fucked half the brothers, that they want to be a sister now, that’s on them. But they’re not. I know real ones, ya know, real ones know me. You gotta know lit,²⁰⁷ you gotta know not just your handshake is the surface, but you gotta know lit. You gotta know all type of certain things and if you don’t, you claim to be what you are, you getting a mouth shot, you probably gonna get rolled out on because you phony. So just ‘cuz you go around sexing half these brothers and fake like you something that you ain’t, that’s really on you.”²⁰⁸

“If they were stupid enough. If they felt like they had to just to be accepted, that’s what a lot of them did. But, I was one that didn’t. ‘Cuz, I knew better, I knew better. They felt that that’s what made them be a Vice Lord by sleeping with all a those brothers and that’s not what made them be a . . . be a sister, ya know. They put they self out there like hos, and that’s how they were treated.

[They were] just trying to be recognized and get recognition and then they realized after they had, ya know, trashed they self that they weren’t getting nothing out of it, ya know, and that’s too bad.

²⁰⁶ NeeNee Interview, March 1997

²⁰⁷ “Lit” refers to literature, which are the rules of the gang

²⁰⁸ LA Interview, November 1997

It was basically up to us how we wanted to . . . ta be initiated, ya understand what I'm saying. And, if they chose to sleep with all a the brothers, it wasn't something that was mandatory, that's what they chose to do. But, I wasn't going out like that. As a matter of fact, I . . . I wouldn't mess with none a the brothers. My kid's father is a brother, ya know, but I couldn't see myself going through all those brothers like that. Just out a respect that I have for myself, ya know, and as far as being a woman, I couldn't do that.²⁰⁹

Tee goes on to explain that of the 50 females in her Minneapolis Vice Lord organization, all but five were "Nation Hos."²¹⁰

ASSOCIATE FEMALE GANGSTER

The third option for women is to become associate gangsters. If a young woman comes into the gang not as a groupie or as an affiliate gangster, but as an associate, we see her having more options for power and status. Sometimes females are able to move from an affiliate gangster to a full associate gangster. Lady was blessed-in to a girl's auxiliary set when she was 11. By 13, she was tired of the sexual exploitation and wanted opportunities to use her mind. She describes moving from an affiliate gangster to an associate gangster by being re-initiated through a beat-in.

"I was 11 when I got into the girls, I got blessed-in by the girls. I had a person who kinda watched out for you and everything and she suggested that I did it [get beat-in] by the boys because I was pretty much head-strong, as far as knowledge, and being able to keep all the money, and also as far as power. [After being beat-in] how they looked at me was totally different. I was just like another guy instead of one a them little girls and everything. I was only, I was only 13, and so I was still pretty much little. Everyone called you little Lady, it really changed their view on me, because I was like I said; I was looked at as another guy who was in our little clique. It was only like three of us [females] total, it was only three of us total. [The sexual exploitation] that automatically stops, 'cuz you're just at a different level then."²¹¹

Lady does go on to say that she was still required to occasionally pimp other females if she was not going to perform the sex herself.

²⁰⁹ Tee Interview, November 1998

²¹⁰ "Nation Ho" refers to whores in the Vice Lord or Gangster Disciple Nations or Gangs

²¹¹ Lady Interview, April 1998

Associates typically come from families where there is already significant gang history. They are the little sisters, literally or figuratively, of the OGs and therefore in a sense, protected from some of the sexual predation and random physical abuse. They are still however, witnesses to all of the other horrors of the gang life. These families have a much clearer picture of what they are getting into. Since it is in their family, it is a normal life for them and often the only life they know how to consider.

The fact that these girls are told that they are too weak, ugly, or stupid to be part of the gang may be a function of their male siblings and parents trying to dissuade their interest. In some cases, we see this early stage of their involvement as the point where some significant physical abuse starts. As they see what little respect girls get and as they demand respect they come into direct conflict with the OG's wishes.

When associates formally join the gang, they will find themselves forced to take the beat-in route. Once again, this seems to be a function of their need to gain respect and of their families' desire to keep them out, if possible. Associates may also be blessed-in, but currently in Minnesota this is less common. These girls are typically beat-in.

Once in the gangs, women tend to develop as leaders and gain power through taking up a management position, where they initiate or manage a criminal enterprise. The associate female gangsters often will form a very small group within the gang, in which they are true associate members and where reprieve from the male discrimination can be found.

Sad describes the power she had as an associate member of the MOD auxiliary organization:

"I got initiated into MOD girls. And when I was a MOD girl, I was not treated like . . . a girl, ya know. A lot of gang girls that I see get treated like they're a sex object, or if not that, it's just . . . a shield. I was MOD girl's leader. I held guns, did a lot a shootings. I was responsible for some guys, which were Jr. MOD, at a point of my life . . . where . . . I had power. That time I didn't feel scare of nothing, ya know, I felt like a guy, acted like a guy, dressed like a guy. I didn't even date, ya know. I thought that was gross. Everybody is different, but I could only speak for myself that was more like a guy. And the girls that I knew that were gangsters were more like guys, where we wouldn't take no bullshit from nobody. It can be from the cops, to our parents, to our friends, to enemies. We didn't even talk like decent girls anymore. We just . . . all we talked like was cussing. Every word came that came out of our mouth was just cussing and how we're gonna go get this person, how we're gonna take revenge on that person. Planning things, ya know,

we even pimped girls. We pimped girls before, we've . . . plotted ways pretending we're gonna date this guy from a different set that was our enemy just so we could bring them to our gang so they can beat the shit out of them or something.

I was ranked as MOD girl's leader, at one pint I was a coordinator, which was sort of like, in a larger community, a mayor. I had total control of one city, where if someone's gonna make a hit out on somebody or do a drive-by, they would hafta get OK'd from me. With MOD, they respected me, they gave me a lot a power where whatever I said goes. I didn't hafta get a okay from this person, or . . . there wasn't nobody telling me what to do except for their original leader. And, he was much older, but he loved me like a sister and he said that with his own words. Instead of him letting me be like all the other MOD girls and run around and do whatever, he would always tell me to stay home, don't do drugs, don't drink. But, he said it in a manner where it wasn't accusing me already, it was just telling me that those stuff wasn't good. He always told me that I can do better than just do drugs. 'Cuz that wasn't gonna get me anywhere. I knew he loved me for some odd reason, not as in a boyfriend-girlfriend way, but in like a brotherly way, a sister way. He was just, whenever I had any conflicts of any boy issues, he was always there, even though I was a runaway, he would never let me starve. He took me in like a sister."²¹²

In summary, the majority of females who make up the largest percentage of the female gang world in Minnesota are being seen as either "affiliates / hos" or "associates/ bitches." The difference between the two primarily has to do with how the female comes into the gang and results in determining what roles they can play in the gang. A typology describing this distinction would include all of the following factors:

AFFILIATES / HOS

1. Actively recruited by others and welcomed
2. No family history of gang activity
3. Courted and praised for their beauty / brains / sexuality
4. Start out as a girlfriend or sex object
5. Sexed-in
6. Used for crimes
7. Abuse starts and never ends
8. Status / achievement via compliance
9. Act as a follower

ASSOCIATES / BITCHES

1. Self-select involvement, rejected initially
2. Family history of gang activity
3. Disrespect / physical / emotional abuse starts
4. Start out as a little sister, associate
5. Beat-in / blessed-in
6. Initiate crimes
7. Violations take and given out
8. Status / achievement through action
9. Develop into leaders

²¹² Sad Interview, September 1998

ABUSE WITHIN GANG LIFE

As we have seen, initiation ritual is an example of violence towards these girls. We cannot explore the female's world within the gang without discussion of the abuse they experience. At all levels of female gang affiliation within the male gangs, there is significant abuse from the male members. An associate female gangster has more acknowledgement or *respect* than the groupie or affiliate gangster. They are often not used as sex objects, but they still experience their share of being used by the males. From prison, Lulu, an associate, describes that the manipulation and the threats of violence were continuous ways of existence for the females.

"They would want you to be able to do whatever, hold guns, shoot guns, watch their back if we were going into part of area or town you're not well liked or whatever. If they got into it with some dude on the street or altercation with another gang on the street, they expected you to be down with them. They wanted you to do everything.

I think everybody's being manipulated . . . even amongst themselves, just everyone. If you want something, you knew you had to hustle on them or whatever, with whoever. So I'm not excluded from . . . from it. They would use me. Once we moved away from the complexes, I got my own apartment. They would use that as theirs, like, now I need a place to stay tonight or can we come drink over there tonight, or they would use that if you had a car, they would want you to take them here, there and everywhere. Money, I need this to get up on this, just front me this until, whenever. . . they would come at you for anything. My homies got me evicted from my own apartment, from my apartment building because I told him no, you can't do this or can't do something and he decided he wanted to go berserk in my apartment. They'll shut you off for a minute, it won't be a group thing but, like maybe an individual or a couple of them, shut you out or just constantly messing with you trying to break you down or whatever.

For three or four years I can now see we put up with incredible amounts of manipulation. Now that I'm away from it and you can see how they, how it was done . . . used on you and stuff. But when you're in the middle of it you don't . . . ya know you don't see it."²¹³

Often the only place associate co-ed or auxiliary gang members have power is in abusing other females. Even though female associate gangsters have some level of respect, they are often reminded how powerless they are. If the males abuse the female associate's friends they believe they can do nothing but watch. It has been sad to hear over and over how they stand back and watch friends be physically and sexually abused and do nothing. It appears that the only place these females often can exert any power is to show violence to other females. And that abuse

²¹³ LuLu Interview, November 1998

towards females is acknowledged as a normative behavior. NeeNee and Amy describe watching a friend being abused:

“Cuz that’s sad what happened to her. Like, the first person she didn’t mind, but I don’t think she knew that everybody had to have sex with her so it was even . . . ‘cuz she was getting hit while she was having sex. By that, she coulda just got beat-in for it if that was the way it was gonna happen. The first person didn’t, but after that, she didn’t wanna do it no more, so they’ll hit her and have sex with her. I didn’t want it to happen to her, but I couldn’t stop it ‘cuz she wanted to be in it. I don’t know, once you say you wanna be in it, you can’t change your mind and try to go back.”²¹⁴

“Yeah, most a the time if like girls would be with the Kings. They would bring them to parties and stuff . . . If you weren’t careful and they [the Queens] didn’t like them, they would beat you up and the King couldn’t really say nothing ‘cuz, ya know [the King] he can’t say nothing because that’s disrespectful.

I remember one time I had this GD boyfriend and my friends came over and they beat him up because he was a GD. And, I mean, I couldn’t do nothing and like, if I would be with a friend that wasn’t a Latin Queen, she would get slapped and they would, ya know, punk her and stuff and I’d be like, “Man, ya all stop.” And, they’d be like, “You’re our friend, you’re my little sister,” and all this and that. And I’d be like . . . I’d just hafta sit there and like . . . man I would feel bad, but there wasn’t nothing I could do.”²¹⁵

In Amy’s description we also see how the gang controls and excludes outsiders to their organization. This would also be an example of the domestic abuse model that permeates gang life.

To view these young women as victims is justifiable. Most have been victims of violence and sexual abuse from parents and relatives since early childhood. They have been victims of poor economic conditions and the cycle of poverty and of overburdened and understaffed school systems that have failed to recognize them as at risk. In addition, the young women have become victims of physical and sexual violence within their own gangs. However, to view these young women only as victims is not accurate. Although the literature portrays female gang members as little more than sex objects, the role of teenage girls in gangs is evolving. They now are the perpetrators of serious crimes as well.²¹⁶

“I was charged with first-degree assault. I had gotten into it with, she was claiming to have been a home girl at the time, and I stabbed a girl 70-something times because she had accused me of stealing and that’s something that Latin Queens don’t do, is steal. And, she was gonna get some gang – some home boys to shoot at me, so I told her let’s just settle this woman to woman and not get gangs involved, and everything

²¹⁴ NeeNee Interview, March 1998

²¹⁵ Amy Interview, November 1998

²¹⁶ Curry, G. David, “Female Gang Involvement,” *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, Vol. 35, No. 1, February 1998 100-118, page 101 Sage Publications Inc.

just got out a hand. So, we fought and I stabbed her. It was a pair a scissors, I had took them out a her hand 'cuz she had some in her . . . in her hand, so I took them out of her hand and used them on her, before she used them on me. I had no way of proving it [self-defense]. And, because of my background it was hard for me to even be able to prove that."²¹⁷

Some of the hardest stories to hear from females are those of the crimes against other females. Some oral histories are woven with stories of being abused and abusing. Brandy, who has been a victim of abuse herself, describes how she has also been the perpetrator of abuse in some incidents.

"I was involved in drive-bys. I was involved in beat downs. I was involved in – I've seen things happen. I've seen people destroyed. I've seen torture. I've seen a lot a things, ya know. Being as – my age that I am now, I've lived through enough of maybe a 60 year old person that has probably not even seen as much as I have seen.

Somebody was forced to drink some Draino. And I seen them – the acid burn through from the Draino, and it was tough. I could just feel it burning when it was going down their throat. It's just torture, ya know, Draino. The torture part is the hardest thing I've ever seen, as far as when they disrespected you or they disrespected your G or they disrespected some other folks. . . they gotta be taken care of.

It was a female, probably 16, 17 . . . that disrespected her man . . . she was fucking another G, he was pimping her. She disrespected him by fucking another guy and giving her loot to the other one. So she was a young girl. And so he decided it was time for her t go because she knew some things that could implicate him and put him in prison for the reset of his life. So he thought that if he just beat her down, that she would run to the police, so he had her taken care of the way that he wanted. Him along with some of the women [were holding her down], she was scared, she was hollering, she was screaming, ya know, but the more he hollered and screamed, the more she got beat on . . .but , she ended up drinking it. She passed out after a little bit, ya know. But, she . . . that's how we ended up forcing the Draino down the throat, 'cuz she was passed out, 'cuz she was hysterical, ya know. Everybody was involved, it was everybody in the room, taking care of what they had to take care of."²¹⁸

Shantel glamorized how she exploited other girls sexually, blaming the abuse on the stupidity of the girls themselves. By being a madam, or as she calls herself a "pimpstress," she gained influence with the males and power over the females, as well as collecting the money she "earned." When she was asked, "What was it like you pimping all the girls?" Her response was:

²¹⁷ BooBoo Interview, November 1998

²¹⁸ Brandy Interview, November 1998

“Fun. I mean it was. It’s mean, but I had fun doing it. Like these girls, I mean, they’d spread their legs to anything. So, if they’re gonna do it, why not make money off of it. So, I started like going to some a my boys, like, “you can’t sleep with her unless you give me . . .” even if it was from a pack of cigarettes to a 1/8th a weed, or just anything.

Like if we re going to a party and I got all my boys with me, they’ll probably tell me, “Go get some a them hos.” And, so I’ll get about ten girls. Not females that I respect, ‘cuz I don’t really like females. I get along with one female. And, it’s like, I’ll go get like 10 females, bring them to the party. I don’t really care about them. If they wanna spread their legs and be stupid, let them do it.

It was just, it depends on if the dude had money. ‘Cuz, I know, like I know a lot a drug dealers that I use to do it to, and there was this other girl, and I use to sell her for like \$150 an hour. Me and my friend a mine, use to make a lot a money off a her. She was pretty. She was pretty and she had a nice, I dunno, she had a nice figure and was really pretty, but she was just stupid. She was really stupid. She’d just spread her legs to anything, I mean like any, any, anything, no matter how ugly the dude was. She just thought that . . . maybe it made her feel important or something. So, and many people like tried to tell her that, that don’t get you no respect, spreading your legs. And, she just couldn’t get it through her head. So, she was just worth a lot.

But, like the other girls, I’ll just be like, gimme \$15 or whatever. Or else some people, or some guys I’d ask for \$60. It just depends on who the guy is. Sometimes I could just throw it in their face and be like, “You ain’t never gonna find a girl like this again. But, like ya know, you either pay me or else I’ll tell her not to do it. I’ll make something up about you.” And just throw it in their face and then they just pay a lot a money. Some of them would just come to their senses, which I’m glad that they do. Like a lot a the girls would just come to their senses and they’d be like, I got a boyfriend, I can’t be doing this stuff. And, I’d try to talk them into it, but a lot a females it was just like – naw, naw, naw . . . I can’t cheat on them. And I’d be like, forget you then, and I’d just call up the next one.”²¹⁹

In excerpts from her interview, Sweetie defines the bizarre reasoning that these gang girls take on to justify why females should be physically abused and beaten, and why other females should do the beatings:

- KC: Why did they beat down girls?
S: Because they’re asked to. If a guy, some guys will beat a girl down themselves, but some of them are respectful enough that they’ll ask another girl to do it.
KC: What does it feel like to beat down another girl when you don’t have any beef with her?
S: Well, it’s like . . . if they mess with one of your boys, when they do, you have a reason to beat them. Because they should know that’s not okay to mess with them.

²¹⁹ Shantel Interview, August 1998

- KC: Now, help me understand this one. The guys don't think it's right for a man to beat a female?
- S: Some guys don't, I should say. There's some guys that respect women more than that.
- KC: So, they don't think it's right for a man to beat a female, but they'll ask another female to beat a female?
- S: Yeah.
- KC: How does that make that right?
- S: Because . . . I dunno. Guys think men are stronger and some men are, but some women are stronger than men. And, it's like . . . it's . . . I dunno. 'Cuz it's more equal if a woman beats a woman than a man beating a woman.
- KC: So, is it okay for women to be beaten on a regular basis?
- S: If they deserve it.
- KC: So, what does a woman do to deserve to be beaten?
- S: Like cheat . . . um . . . like disrespect them and . . . um . . . just, I dunno. Just be disrespectful and if they a Folk²²⁰ and they violate it, then they should get beat and stuff. It's like if you wanna be in a gang and if you wanna hang around gangs, you're gonna hafta. If you don't like getting hit, you shouldn't hang around them. I mean, no one likes getting hit, but if you have like some phobia of getting hit and if you can't take it, then you shouldn't hang around them.²²¹

Surviving the Marginalized Communities

Drs. Meda Chesney-Lind and Karen Joe deduce that:

One of the major conclusions one draws from listening to these young women and men is that the gang is a haven for coping with the many problems they encounter in their everyday life marginalized communities. Paradoxically, the sense of solidarity achieved from sharing everyday life with similarly situated others has the unintended effect of drawing many gang youth, both boys and girls, into behaviors that ultimately create new problems for them.²²²

When these young women come from a difficult life without much hope for the future, the gang becomes idealized and romanticized. They develop an exaggerated sense of belonging to the gang. LA declares how the gang parented her, gave her the coping skills she needed to survive, and filled her need to belong:

“Basically it really got bad when we moved to Minneapolis. My mom and dad have always been drug addicts, alcoholics, so they weren't never around. So my . . . my

²²⁰ “Folk” is another name for Gangster Disciple

²²¹ Sweetie Interview, September 1998

²²² Chesney-Lind, Meda and Joe, Karen, “Just Every Mother’s Angel, an Analysis of Gender and Ethnic Variations in Youth Gang Membership,” *Gender and Society*, Vol. 9, No. 4 August 1995 page 426

family, my friends were my fellow gang members or whatever you want to call them. Vice Lords, them were the people that I could relate to. I grew up with the Bloods, the Disciples, I've grown up with them all, but people that I click with was the Vice Lords, ya know. Filer Cotton is my cousin and people know him. I just was more into with the Vice Lords period. And them were the people that I hung out with, stole with, lived in abandoned houses with, robbed people with, I mean, we did everything together.

Well, I didn't have to explain myself to nobody, for one. Really, back then it wasn't a choice of us kids just being . . . running away from home, it was mostly 'cuz no parents were there and if they were there you were better off not there for the . . . being afraid of getting abused or whatever. So there was this security we had for each other. We became each other's family. We, ya know, we loved on another. We took care of one another down to the food, to the clothing. We taught each other a lot, streetwise. How to make guns outta rubber bands and paper clips and all that. We taught each other all that stuff. So it was just the, the sharing and the bonding. That's what we had."²²³

Marie shows how her gang was a refuge from an abusive, alcoholic stepfather, a mother who was so dependent on him she could not protect her daughter, and the total hopelessness she experienced in her life:

"My mom wasn't looking for me, and all my friend were just doing things behind my back with my boyfriend. [I was on the run] six times. One time when I was 12, three times in the summer time after I turned 13, and then twice again. Well, there was three big girls there, umm, one was 21, one was 17, and one was 15. And I didn't know they were going to do it, but they beat on me for 45 seconds.

They had a lot of tattoos, like on their necks. They have tattoos all over. We stole spray paint to get high. And we use to steal from Dayton's a lot to get money. Like 'cuz . . . we'd steal from Dayton's and then we'd go down to this park and sell it for weed and money.

I was dirty. My friends were mad at me for being with them and then I remember just like being sick almost every day from like drinking. But, one day I got to take a shower. This lady, Angie, the one with the two kids, she brought me to her house and she gave me clothes and she told me to take a shower, a nice long shower. It felt good, real good, 'cuz I didn't think anybody cared about me, until she did that. I was happy.

I wanted to fit in somewhere, and I wanted to feel like a family or something, someone, somewhere out there. Yeah, we were family, but I don't think we ever had too much fun."²²⁴

²²³ LA Interview, November 1998

²²⁴ Marie Interview, June 1996

Toughness of Female Gangsters

As we explore the female gang involvement, we continually look to why these girls act out in this manner. As Anne Campbell notes in reflecting on the meaning of her research: "If we are willing to allow young women to be exploited by poverty and crime – if we can offer them no way out of victimization – then we can hardly be surprised if they respond by nurturing a self-protective reputation for craziness."²²⁵

"The violations of traditional notions of femininity then, particularly the 'unacceptable' displays of toughness and independence, are hardly a reflection of their liberation from patriarchal controls. The cost of having been born female are not only clear in their lives, but are, in fact, attenuated by the economic dislocation of their communities."²²⁶

When Lady was asked, "What did you mostly get out of the gang?" her response was immediate and absolute:

"I got a sense of toughness, a sense a belonging like I said. I wanted to fit in. Everywhere I went I wanted to fit in, and I fit in there real well. I was, I was pretty tough and, ya know, I got to show it off. It was where toughness really meant something. A lot a places ya go, toughness doesn't mean nothing and so, when I was there toughness meant a lot."²²⁷

Cia describes how at a very young age she becomes a part of something, and to be fully accepted, she must be crazy.

"Well, I started liked getting into it when I was 12, but it wasn't with the Folks. It was with Latin Kings and Queens. And, I just like, I was young and I seen how my family was and everything and I wanted to be a part of it. And, I was real young and I had somewhat good experiences, but I had more bad experiences so I just left it. But, I still like the gang life. I like the adrenaline it gave me, like a high, I just liked it. I liked how they were, everything they were about and everything. So, I just stared like getting more into it, my family was about . . . I started talking to my cousins more, then I started growing up more, I seen more and then meeting more home boys and homies and all that . . .

²²⁵ Campbell, Ann, *Female Gang Members' Social Representation or Aggression*. Paper presented at the Annual meeting. American Society of Criminology, New Orleans. 1992 page 13

²²⁶ Chesney-Lind, Meda and Karen Joe, "Just Every Mother's Angel, an analysis of Gender and Ethnic Variations in Youth Gang Membership," *Gender and Society*, Vol. 9, No. 4, August 1995, pages 426-7

²²⁷ Lady Interview, April 1998

home girls. They kept coming and going and I just . . . pretty soon, before I knew it, I was all caught up with it. And then when I was like around 12, my home boy Lazy Boy, he took me in . . . he looked at me like a little sister, whatever, and whenever they would do "hales" (criminal activity) or jobs, like go fuck up somebody's car or go do some shit, ya know, they'd always . . . he'd take me with him and I would get high with him. He let me drink and he'd give me this and that, so kinda like brought me into everything. He introduced me to . . . he would just tell me . . . he would throw a set to me. He would tell me, "What's the best color ever?" and, I'd be like, "true blue." Just stuff like that. So then one night we were all . . . one night we were just all messing around and we were at his house and . . . he was all like, "you been with us long enough, do you think you're ready to be one of us?" And, I'm like . . . I was 12, so I was like, "yeah, yeah," so he was all like, "alright," he was like, "alright, I'll bless you in." I was like, "okay, cool." So, he blessed me in that night. We went and we did lot a things to a lot a people and a lot a cars.

We did a lot a crazy stuff. We partied hardcore that night and then we just did a lot a crazy shit, a lot. And I guess they always wanted me, I was like the crazy one 'cuz I was so young. I was the youngest one, I was 12 and I was kicking it with like people that were OGs, with all the OGs. Lazy Boy was like 24 at the time and, ya know, they looked at me like the little hardcore thug, ya know . . . however, so. And, I like my attitude towards everything an how I was. And, I just loved it and I fed off of it and I just got worse.²²⁸

Among this small number of associate gangsters in each co-ed and often auxiliary organization they describe a strong sisterhood among themselves:

" . . . we stuck together. We were on our own level. The brothers was on their own thing. The sisters was on their own thing. We held our own things down. We . . . supported each other financially. Like I said, that was a part a paying the dues. We looked out for each others kids for each other's sakes, or healthwise, everything. A lot a us had jobs and stuff, so we weren't just out there selling drugs and stuff like that. A lot of us had job and looked out after each other like that. One would be like watching all the kids and stuff like when we were off dong our little things or whatever and rotations and all that stuff."²²⁹

In their toughness and craziness, sometimes girls are getting a reputation for being more vicious. Police have shared stories of young women doing bloodthirsty attacks on other young women. We have shared with you here stories of female-on-female abuse, we acknowledge it exists.

²²⁸ Cia Interview, September 1998

²²⁹ Tee Interview, November 1998

Some police have diagnosed that “girls are just more vicious than the boys.” After hundreds of hours of dialoging with these girl gangsters, it is our belief that the females are not more vicious. The issue is a perception and expectations of the two different genders. For example, males tend to engage in considerable posturing behavior before events, whether the event is the Superbowl, a wrestling match, or a golf tournament. Males boast, brag and announce their challenge before the actual event. Even in something so innocuous as changing his baby’s diaper, a male may boast about the fact that he’s doing it, positioning himself to approach the task. To the observer, this posturing behavior has come to serve as a warning that the activity is about to begin or intensify. The same behavior tends to be exhibited in acts of violence or fighting. Posturing warns us that something is going to happen.

In contrast, females are not taught or socialized to engage in posturing behavior. Women tend to just proceed with the task at hand, whether it’s changing a diaper, playing sports, or committing an act of violence. When a girl gangster decides to do an attack, she just does it. She has not learned to posture or announce her attack. She may have done her talking and planning ahead of time with other females. When she commits an act of violence it does not mean she is more vicious than males. It simply comes across as such because it appears more sudden; we don’t have the warning behavior of posturing beforehand.

A second factor that occurs in this perception is that we are socialized to expect females to be more docile, gentle, and nurturing. We have also been conditioned to expect males to act out more, so that when males commit violence it doesn’t come as a great surprise. However, when females act out violently, the contrast between the behavior and our expectations is so great that it jars our view of how females are “supposed” to act. Therefore, even though the act itself may not, in fact, be any more violent than what males do, our perception is that it’s more vicious because we don’t expect females to commit such violence.