The Disengagement from Gangs in Prison and its Effects for Reentry

by

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ABSTRACT

Recent times have seen a steady growth in studies about gangs and their members in prison. Despite the increased interest on gangs in prison, there is much to learn about their members. Specifically, emerging research indicates that gang members disengage from their gangs while in prison, however, explanations for why members leave have been limited to individual level factors. Little is known about how the gang context influences the process of disengagement in prisons. Further, despite disengaging from their gangs, former members continue to be at a higher risk for recidivism upon release, when compared to non-gang members. The current body of literature fails to explicate the mechanisms that increase a former member's risk for recidivism. Accordingly, this dissertation seeks to advance the literature by asking three primary questions: 1) Does gang organization matter for disengagement from gangs in prison?; 2) Do reentry experiences differ by gang membership status—current, former and non-gang member?; 3) Do reentry experiences impact reintegration outcomes?

Data from the LoneStar Project—a multi-wave study that explores the trajectories, associations and reentry among 802 gang and non-gang involved inmates released from Texas prisons—are used. Regression models are estimated to assess the effects of the gang organization on disengagement and to compare the reentry and reintegration experiences of current, former and non-gang members. The results indicate that gang organization is important for disengagement in prison. Further, upon release, former gang members show no differences in their reentry and reintegration experiences when compared to non-gang members. Former members, however, show higher levels of

motivation for change and better mental health 1 month after release, when compared to current members. Additionally, current gang members are found to have the lowest levels of psychological reintegration 9 months after release. These differences are found to be mediated by levels of motivation for change and mental health at 1 month after release. The findings are discussed in light of their implications for continued theoretical development, future empirical research and the creation of public policy concerning gang members

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INTRODUCTION

Gangs are a significant reality behind prison walls (Jacobs, 1974; Pyrooz & Decker, 2019). They pose a considerable challenge for prison management as they are responsible for most cases of serious misconduct including inmate assault (Cunningham & Sorensen, 2007; Ralph & Marquart, 1991; Reisig, 2002), staff intimidation (Gaes et al., 2002), sexual misbehavior (Ralph & Marquart, 1991; Wyatt, 2005), and drug trafficking (Shelden, 1991). The influence of gangs in prison, however, stretch far beyond prison walls (Camp & Camp, 1985; Fleisher & Decker, 2001; Jacobs, 1974; 1977; Skarbek, 2014). Because these groups are more organized and possess structured features, there is greater likelihood of institutional conflict and gang directives to spill over to the street (Jacobs, 2001; Pyrooz et al., 2011; Skarbek, 2014). The far-reaching hold of gangs in prison and beyond, led Fleisher and Decker (2001, p. 2) to highlight the importance of studying gangs in prison, labeling it "the final frontier" for gang researchers.

More than 20 years have passed since Fleisher and Decker's recognition of the importance of doing gang research in prisons, yet today research continues to focus predominantly on gangs on the street (Pyrooz & Decker, 2019; Pyrooz & Mitchell, 2018). The dearth of scholarship in prison, Pyrooz and Decker (2019) argue, brings with it unknown costs for correctional policy and practice. Given the level of complexity involved in the functioning of gangs in prisons and the influence they have on their members, our lack of knowledge is particularly consequential for helping members disengage and reenter communities. In the absence of good research, commonly held

misconceptions about gang members as hardened criminals are likely to prevent the development and implementation of programs needed to support gang members both in prisons and in communities. With an estimated 12 to 17% of state prison populations (Griffin & Hepburn, 2006; Kreinert & Fleisher, 2001), 9% of the federal prison population (Gaes et al., 2002) and 14% of returning inmates being gang affiliated (Pyrooz & Mitchell, 2018), our lack of understanding of disengagement and reentry among gang members is worrying. Gaining knowledge in both areas will help inform policy and programs aimed at rehabilitation and reintegration of gang members. To that end, my dissertation aims to fill these gaps by exploring why members disengage from gangs in prison and the immediate consequences gang membership status has for reentry.

"Blood in and Blood out" is the idea that one has to kill another to enter the gang and kill oneself or a loved one, to leave. This is a misconception widely held by gang members and popularized by films like "American Me." The perpetuation of such beliefs, Klein (1995) argues, serves to create expectations for behavior and reinforces group cohesion, thereby strengthening the bonds of membership and generating respect for the gang as being tough (Pyrooz & Decker, 2019). In reality, however, gang membership is much more fluid and temporary. Decker and Van Winkle (1996), for example, found that members in their sample shared a belief that one could only leave the gang by killing their mother. Despite this shared belief, their entire sample knew of someone who left the gang without having to kill. Indicating that exiting a gang is common and far less violent.

Recognizing the fluidity of gang membership, a growing number of researchers have begun to explore if members disengage from their gangs on the street and the

consequence leaving has on the lives of members. In general, it is found that not only do a large majority of street gang members leave, but they do so within two years of joining (Pyrooz, 2014). Indicating that gang membership is short lived. Further, most members are found to leave using non-violent methods, with about 8 to 25% of former gang members reporting that they were jumped or were required to injure another (Carson & Vecchio, 2015). The often-cited reasons for disengagement range from factors related to the gang life, such as exposure to violence, to factors related to family and work, such as having a child, getting married or finding a new job (Decker & Pyrooz, 2011; Pyrooz et al., 2013). Regardless of the reasons or methods of leaving, research shows that the consequences of time spent in the gang are enduring. Being in a gang is found to be linked to poor educational attainment, relationship difficulties, poor employment outcomes, and poor health, years after one leaves the gang (Augustyn et al., 2014; Krohn et al., 2011; Levitt & Venkatesh, 2001a, 2001b; Pyrooz, 2014; Thornberry et al., 2003). Suggesting that the time spent in a gang serves as a formidable force in the lives of members long after they break away from the gang (Pyrooz, 2014).

The reality of disengagement and its consequences for the life course is less clear for individuals in gangs while in prison. We know little about whether gang members disengage in prison and if so, why? Further, even if disengagement takes place within prisons, we do not know how the time spent in a gang affects individuals upon their release into communities. When considering disengagement, on the one hand, we could expect similar factors to play a role in the process of disengagement in prison as is seen on the street. This is because much like gangs on the street, gangs in prison possess a

durable nature and their members share a collective identity (Decker & Pyrooz, 2011). Conversely, given the different contexts, and the close quarters inmates live in, leaving might be difficult due to fear of retaliation by the gang. Further, gangs in prison are also said to operate with higher levels of organization— "the degree to which a group effectively and efficiently coordinates and carries out activities" (Pyrooz et al., 2012, p. 85). Specifically, gangs on the street are found to be less organized than gangs in prison. For gangs on the street, leadership is found to be situational, violence less coordinated and more symbolic, and drug dealing tends to be individualistic rather than collective (Curry & Decker, 2002; Decker & Pyrooz, 2011; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Klein & Maxson, 2006). Gangs in prison, however, are said to be more hierarchical in structure and operate through an established code of conduct (Decker & Pyrooz, 2011).

The level of gang organization is found to impact the behaviors of members such as delinquency, victimization, drug selling and the amount of violence one engages in (Bouchard & Spindler, 2010; Decker et al., 2008; Venkatesh & Levitt, 2000). Given this, it could be that the greater level of organization in gangs could make leaving in prison more difficult. A possibility that has not been tested in the literature. It is important to note here that "street gangs" can and do operate in prisons and "prison gangs" operate on the streets. In fact, Pyrooz and Decker (2019), found that describing gangs as either street based, or prison based is inconsistent with the views of the gang members themselves. Accordingly, creating a street gang-prison gang dichotomy would be unhelpful for studying disengagement. Rather, of consequence for programs and policy, is an

understanding of the disengagement process in prison and the characteristics of gangs that influence leaving behaviors.

Understanding if and why members leave gangs in prison will be beneficial for programs aimed at preventing individuals from joining gangs in prisons and more importantly, help those already in gangs, to leave. From a rehabilitation standpoint, however, it is not merely enough to get individuals out of gangs. This is because leaving a gang does not free an individual from the unique effects of a gang (Pyrooz, 2014). Research on former members on the street, finds that the time spent in the gang leads to poor life outcomes within various domains such as employment, relationships, education and health (e.g., Melde et al., 2009; DeLisi et al., 2009). This means that those who spent time in gangs while in prison or on the street, are more likely to experience problems that will hinder their reentry outcomes. While current research has not studied the problems faced by gang members—either former or current—upon their release, a growing body of literature finds that gang membership serves as a risk for recidivism (e.g., Dooley et al., 2014; Huebner et al., 2007; Saunders et al., 2009), alluding to the possibility that reentry is different for those who are affiliated with gangs. In fact, Huebner and colleagues (2007) found that even in a high-risk sample, gang membership was a significant predictor of recidivism, while more traditional risks factors for offending like gun use, demographics, prior convictions, and community disadvantage, were not.

The findings from Huebner's study suggest that the social processes that promote or prevent recidivism are likely to be different for gang and non-gang members. These findings have led researchers to advocate for resources to be focused not only inside

prisons but also on community reintegration, so as to effectively manage gang populations (Huebner et al., 2007). With the current state of literature, however, we do not know what these different processes, if any, are. For this reason, the call for the allocation of resources to reentry programs needs to be bolstered by additional research focusing on how gang membership interacts with traditional markers of post-release failure (Dooley et al., 2014). One way to do so, is to draw a richer picture of the experiences immediately after release that might make gang members more vulnerable for recidivism.

In the end, both gang involvement and reentry are major social problems. In order to address these issues and facilitate positive social change we need to understand not only the factors that encourage disengagement from gangs in prison but also how the time spent in these groups place an individual at increased risk of reoffending. The implications of such an understanding are multifold. From a public safety perspective, for example, an understanding of what makes members leave their gangs can aid policy aimed at shortening the amount of time individuals spend in gangs. This in turn could result in less violence in society, as gang members are disproportionally involved in violence both in prison, and communities (Decker, 1996; Griffin & Hepburn, 2013).

From a correctional policy standpoint, understanding the disengagement process and reentry difficulties of gang members can help develop policy that are more effective at responding to gangs. This is necessary because gang related violence and management issues, both in prison and on the streets, rank high on the agenda of policymakers, garnering a lot of attention. In the past, the urgency surrounding issues of gangs have led

to the development and implementation of a long list of unsuccessful criminal justice policies aimed at gangs (Decker & Curry, 2002; Klein & Maxson, 2006; McGloin & Decker, 2010; Thornberry et al., 2003). The larger issue that these unsuccessful policies highlight is the haste with which policies are designed and the lack of consideration of problem analysis (McGloin, 2005). Thus, in studying disengagement and reentry of gang members, insights can assist in developing more well thought out policy.

Finally, from a theoretical and empirical standpoint, understanding disengagement in prison will help expand the discussion of gang disengagement—an understudied area. Moreover, in using group organization to study disengagement, there is an opportunity to expand our knowledge of the relationship between group processes and individual behavior. This is important because it is said that group processes are the mechanisms that make gangs "qualitatively different" from other criminal and delinquent groups (Klein, 2006; Klein & Maxson, 2006; see also Decker & Pyrooz, 2011). Ironically, researchers have devoted little attention to examine how group characteristics of gangs shape individual behavior (Maxson & Klein 1995; McGloin & Decker, 2010), choosing instead to focus on individuals level characteristics (Pyrooz et al., 2012). This lack of focus on understanding the relationship between group processes of gangs and individual behavior is said to be a notable oversight in the study of gangs (Decker et al., 2008).

Research Purpose

Against this backdrop, my dissertation builds upon past research on the topics of disengagement from gangs and reentry, to determine why members leave gangs in prison

and the consequences of leaving gangs on reentry experiences. Specifically, I ask three primary questions:

RQ1: Does gang organization matter for disengagement from gangs in prison?

RQ2: Do reentry experiences differ by gang membership status—current, former and non-gang member?

RQ3: Do the reentry experiences impact reintegration outcomes?

In asking and answering these questions, the broader purpose of this dissertation is to shine a brighter light on the conditions under which members leave and if membership status matters to reentry experiences. To do so, I adopt an interdisciplinary approach that draws from various literatures, such as gang disengagement, reentry, organizational behavior, and the life course perspective.

Organization of the Dissertation

The remainder of this dissertation will be divided into several chapters. Chapter 2 explores why gang organization might matter for disengagement outcomes. Specifically, drawing on research within the street gang literature, and research in the area of organization behavior, this chapter argues that gang organization is a multidimensional concept, with each factor having differential effects on disengagement outcomes. Further, using the congruence model of organization analysis (Nadler &Tushman, 1980), and Bubolz and Simi's cognitive-emotional theory of gang exit (2015), this chapter examines how gang organization could be linked to gang disengagement, through its effects on one's sense of disillusionment with the gang.

Chapter 3 explores what happens to gang members, both current and former

members, after they are released from prison. Specifically, using a life course perspective and the concept of cumulative disadvantage, I examine how gang membership can affect factors that are found to hamper reintegration for formerly incarcerated individuals. Although a large body of work has examined the factors that impact reintegration, we know little about the experiences specific to gang affiliated individuals. Accordingly, this chapter examines the relationships between gang membership status and a wide range of reentry experiences (e.g., family relationships, mental health, and housing).

Chapter 4 presents the data that will be used in this dissertation. Using mixed-method approaches, the analyses draw on the Lonestar project, a multi wave study of returning prisoners in Texas (see Mitchell et al., 2018). The main aim of the LoneStar Project was to evaluate the interrelationships between prison gangs and street gangs and how gang membership affects recidivism, reentry, and programming upon release. Data, which were collected at three different waves, include information concerning demographic information, physical and mental health, criminological theoretical constructs, criminogenic attitudes and behaviors, gang membership and embeddedness, release planning and services received, social support, family contact, peers, employment, housing, substance use, and case management. Thus, making these data ideal for the purposes of this dissertation.

Chapters 5 and 6 begin by identifying specific measures in the LoneStar project that are used in the analyses for disengagement and reentry, respectively. This is followed by a discussion of the analytical strategy used. The findings of the analyses are then discussed. Specifically, Chapter 5 describes the results of gang organization and

disengagement, while Chapter 6 focuses on the relationship of gang membership status, reentry and reintegration after release.

Finally, in Chapter 7 the implications of the results are discussed. This chapter revisits the key empirical findings from the previous chapters and discusses the core implications of these findings for research and policy. In addition, directions for future research, and some final thoughts about disengagement from gangs and its consequences for the lives of members are laid out.

CHAPTER 2

DISENGAGEMENT OF GANG MEMBERS IN PRISONS

Gangs and gang members have been the subject of inquiry by researchers for more than a century. Since Thrasher's seminal work on Chicago gangs in 1927, research on gangs have increased exponentially (see generally Pyrooz & Mitchell, 2015). Researchers spanning fields from biology and math (e.g., Austin et al., 2011; Beaver et al., 2010; Sooknanan et al., 2013) to public health and criminology have become interested in various aspects of these groups and their members. Using diverse methods such as, observations, ethnographies, surveys, and interviews, these studies have informed our understanding of the history, demographics, sub-culture, criminal involvement, membership patterns, and group processes of gangs and their members (Cloward & Ohlin, 1960; Klein, 1995; Klein & Maxson, 2006; Short & Strodtbeck, 1965; Thrasher, 1927). The empirical endeavors to understand gang members have demonstrated that membership in these groups largely follow three stages—joining, persistence, and disengagement (Esbensen et al., 1993; Hill, et al., 2001; Peterson et al., 2004). Of these, the disengagement stage is the least understood, with researchers only recently becoming interested in understanding the causes and consequences of leaving a gang. While this growing body of literature has undoubtedly informed our understanding of leaving gangs, there is still a lot that we do not know about the disengagement from gangs. To that end, this chapter will provide an overview of what we know about gang disengagement and will identify current gaps in the literature that this dissertation will attempt to fill. Specifically, the chapter will begin by defining gang disengagement,

followed by a brief overview of what we already know about gang disengagement, finally an argument for the need to incorporate gang organization into the study of disengagement will be put forth. Ultimately, with a majority of members leaving their gangs (Carson et al., 2013; Johnson & Densley, 2018; Pyrooz & Decker, 2019; Pyrooz at al., 2013), a better understanding of why they leave will help challenge long-held myths about the permanence of gang membership. This is important because if such beliefs are left unchallenged, it could demonize gangs and their members, resulting in the isolation and marginalization of individuals who want to change and leave the gang. Further, deeper insight into why individuals leave their gangs will help inform and design more effective policy and programs aimed at gangs and gang members.

Defining Gang Disengagement

When does a gang member become a former gang member? Researchers have struggled to answer this question and, in the process, have conceptualized and operationalized the term "disengagement" in various ways (Carson & Vecchio, 2015). For example, some researchers have used de-identification to conceptualize disengagement. In doing so, they have defined a former gang member as someone who no longer identifies as a gang member, after having done so in the past. From this view, disengagement is seen as a single event that indicates the transition from current to former gang member status (Carson et al., 2013; Decker & Lauritsen 2002; Decker et al., 2014; Melde & Esbensen, 2011, 2014; Pyrooz et al., 2010; Pyrooz, et al., 2013, Krohn & Thornberry, 2008). Other researchers have argued that disengagement is a process, rather than a single event. To capture this process, they have included disembedding as part of their conceptualization of

disengagement from gangs (Krohn & Thornberry, 2008; Sweeten et al., 2013). Disembedding views gang disengagement as the process of disconnecting oneself from the gang (Pyrooz & Decker, 2019). In using this conceptualization, disengagement is measured as the declining level of embeddedness to the gang over time. Where embeddedness refers to "individual immersion within an enduring deviant network, restricting involvement in prosocial networks" (Pyrooz et al., 2013, p. 241). Using this conceptualization, studies have repeatedly demonstrated that embeddedness in the gang matters as much, if not more than gang membership itself (Decker & Laurintsen, 2002; Pyrooz et al., 2013; Sweeten et al., 2013).

Given the importance of embeddedness, it would seem that measuring disengagement as an event could bias research findings. Recent research, however, has found that modeling leaving the gang as an event (de-identification) to be a valid and reliable proxy of modeling the process of disengagement (disembedding). Decker and colleagues (2014), for example, found a strong relationship between self-reports of de-identification and levels of embeddedness in the gang, after controlling for demographics and gang characteristics. This finding led them to conclude that self-reports of gang status is robust measure to differentiate between current and former gang members. Accordingly, this dissertation will use a measure of de-identification to measure disengagement. Keeping this in mind, the next section will discuss what we know about disengagement from gangs.

Research on Disengagement from Gangs

One of the major problems with the study of disengagement from gangs is the absence of a clear theoretical framework. Given this, a growing body of research has been drawing on existing theories of desistance from crime to understand why individuals leave their gangs (e.g., Decker et al., 2014; Roman et al., 2017; Sweeten et al., 2013). And much like in the work on desistence from crime, there is a tendency by researchers to emphasize the importance of either internal or external factors as being the main cause of disengagement (see LeBel et al., 2008). When focusing on external factors, researchers have adopted a life course perspective and sought to identify turning points (Sampson & Laub, 2003). This is because positive turning points are thought to increase social capital and informal social control, thereby reducing an individual's involvement in crime. Others argue for the necessity for changes in internal processes such as identity and cognitive transformations if individuals are to desist from crime (Giordano et al., 2007; Maruna, 2001; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009). From this perspective, internal changes such as cognitive transformations (Giordano et al., 2002; Giordano et al., 2007) are assumed to result in individuals desiring an alternative future that does not involve engaging in criminal behavior. Such cognitive shifts, create a motivation for change, leading to changes in the external environment or contexts that support or weaken bonds.

Using these perspectives as a backdrop, researchers have often sought to identify reasons for why individuals leave their gang. To do so, they often ask former gang members to reflect on factors that caused them to walk away from their gang. These reasons are then organized within a push and pull framework, which was originally

conceptualized by Decker and Van Winkle (1996) for studying gang entry. The idea behind such a framework is that most pushes and pulls represent 'factors' that create a motive to leave (Roman et al., 2017). Push factors reflect causes related to an individual's experiences while involved in the gang (e.g., disillusionment with personnel, burnout) and pull factors reflect reasons outside of the gang that encourage an individual to leave (e.g., having a child, endangerment to family members). In general, the most commonly identified pull factors are employment (Hagedorn, 1998), marriage (Decker & Lauritsen, 2006; Spergel, 1990), and parenthood (Decker & Lauritsen, 2006; Pyrooz et al., 2017; Fleisher & Krienert, 2004; Moloney et al., 2009; Moloney et al., 2011; O'Neal et al., 2016). While the most commonly cited push factors are disillusionment with the gang, maturing out of the gang or experiencing violence fatigue (Bubloz & Simi, 2015; Carson et al., 2013; Decker & Lauritsen 2002; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Spergel, 1995). Overall, research finds that push factors are more commonly associated with leaving the gang than pull factors (e.g., Decker & Pyrooz, 2011; Pyrooz & Decker, 2019; Roman et al., 2017).

In using the push and pull framework, researchers have also found that often times individuals identify both push and pull factors as motivations behind leaving. Suggesting that individuals likely experience a multitude of factors both internal and external when disengaging (Pyrooz & Decker, 2011; Roman et al., 2018; Tonks & Stephenson, 2019). Consequently, by focusing on only one or the other—push or pull—researchers might fail to capture if and how multiple, interacting factors influence the process of disengagement. Recognizing this, more recently researchers have proposed to

view changes in members as a balanced interaction between both factors (Bottoms et al., 2004; Farrall, 2002; Weaver, 2012). Specifically, they argue that disengagement should be viewed as a combination of individual and external factors rather than the result of only one or the other.

The most notable work within this area was done by Decker and colleagues (2014). Using Ebaugh's (1988) theory of role exit, they proposed a four-stage model demonstrating how members disengage. The first stage, which they termed as "first doubts", involves gang members contemplating the value of their current role (Roman et al., 2017). First doubts can be anything from questioning the legitimacy of the gang to being concerned about the future one has with one's family. In the second stage—anticipatory socialization—gang members begin to weigh alternative roles by trying out new roles they can potentially adopt in the future. The third stage of disengagement involves turning points where a member experiences an event, that would act as a hook for change, encouraging them to act on their initial doubts. Finally, in the fourth stage of post-exit certification, a member's new role is validated by way of external forces (the ex-gang not having the individuals back) or internal forces (cutting all contact with members of the gang). Decker et al. (2014), argue that while members have to go through the four stages when disengaging, they do not have to move through these stages in a cyclical fashion. Rather, the authors acknowledge the possibility of a relapse into old expectations and roles. They do, however, recognize that in the absence of 'first doubts' gang members are unlikely to engage in anticipatory socialization or view turning points as significant events in their lives. Thereby indicating that while internal factors may not

be the singular motivation underlying the disengagement from gangs, they are undoubtedly a necessary factor that needs to occur early in the disengagement process.

Given this brief overview of what we know about the disengagement process, it becomes clear that the main approach to studying disengagement from gangs is to focus on factors that are unique to the individual (e.g., identity shifts or parenthood). Missing from this body of literature is an understanding of how "the gang" influences the leaving process. More specifically, we do not know how characteristics of the gang influences disengagement. This is a notable oversight, because gang characteristics, such as organization structure is found to be the second most frequently specific aspect of gangs, after criminal activity (Howell, 2012). Further, it is found to not only influence the function and processes of the group but also the criminal behaviors of individual members (Bouchard & Spindler, 2010). Providing reason to believe that the effect of the group context will also be seen on disengagement. Ultimately, to understand disengagement from gangs, without a consideration of the gang context, would seem like a lost opportunity to gain a more complete picture of disengagement. To that end, the next section will provide a detailed discussion about what we know about gang organization and structure and will then discuss the potential impact level of gang organization can have on disengagement.

Gangs and Level of Organization

Gang organization is one of the key features that distinguishes gangs from other groups. An understanding of how this differentiating feature impacts different aspects of member behavior, is of considerable importance to criminologists (Pyrooz et al., 2012). In

the most general sense, gang organization refers to the degree to which a group effectively and efficiently coordinates and carries out activities (Pyrooz et al., 2012). Traditionally, to understand gangs and the level of organization, researchers have adopted one of two perspectives—instrumental-rational and informal-diffuse. According to the instrumental-rational perspective, gangs are regarded as rational organizations who act in logical ways that serve their own self-interest (Decker et al., 2008). It conceives of gangs as having a vertical structure and strong internal controls to create discipline around well-established goals. From this view, it is assumed that a gang works towards common goals, motivates others to join in a common enterprise, and structures monetary activities. Thus, in adopting this perspective, researchers emphasize the formal, rational, and instrumental aspects of the organization (Decker et al., 2008). Support for this view comes largely from ethnographies conducted in cities such as Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles and New York (Mieczkowski,1986; Sanchez-Jankowski, 1991; Skolnick et al., 1988; Taylor, 1990).

The informal-diffuse perspective, on the other hand, adopts a very different view about the organization of gangs. It conceives of gangs as not well organized and less focused than the instrumental–rational view. This perspective argues that although a gang is united by several common features, such as symbols, signs, and having common enemies, they are best viewed as having horizontal structural characteristics and diffuse organizational features. Research that supports this view points to the young age of most gang members, suggesting that developmental factors inhibit the development of high levels of organization among gangs (Decker et al., 2008). Support for this view exceeds that of the instrumental-rational perspective and come from studies done in Milwaukee,

San Diego, Chicago, St. Louis and Los Angeles (Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Fagan, 1989; Hagedorn, 1988; Maxson et al., 1992).

Regardless of the perspective one adopts the problem in choosing one perspective over the other is that it compels us to view gangs as either completely organized or completely disorganized. The reality, however, is that gangs vary widely (Thrasher, 1927). They vary in size, composition, and goals, among many other factors, suggesting that no single representation (as either organized or disorganized) could encompass all gangs. Recognizing this variability, Decker and colleagues (2008) argued that gang organization should be viewed as lying along a continuum with informal-diffuse at the lower end and instrumental-rational at the upper end. The utility in doing so, even if gang organization is relatively rudimentary (e.g., Decker & Van Winkle 1996; Klein, 1971; Miller, 2001; Thrasher, 1927), is that we can identify the various components that make up these informal organizations and thereby, will be in a better position to understand how the gang organization impacts member behaviors. This is salient because whatever order, planning, or coordination, no matter how little, gangs can bring into their activities will results in an increase in the productivity of their individual members (Decker et al., 2008).

Components of Gang Organization

Broadly speaking, organization refers to structures that promote formal rationality by increasing the efficiency of attaining organizational goals and reducing the uncertainty of organizational activities (e.g., Weber, 1922). Such rationality in an organization is increased with the presence of certain components. For Thrasher (1927), the components

of organization within gangs' mirror those of other institutions in society and have been largely used when studying gang organization (for example see Bouchard & Spindler, 2010; Miller, 2001; Decker & Curry, 2000; Decker & Van Winkle, 1994). They include the presence of leadership; differentiated roles; rules and regulations; regular face-to-face meetings; and management of finances. These components can be viewed as the building blocks of gang organization; and the degree to which these components are present have the potential to make gang functioning more efficient, rational, and predictable. Each of these components and how they relate to gangs are discussed below.

Gang Leaders

Leaders are an important part of any organization. Effective leaders can bring members together and encourage them to work towards common goals of the organization. Within gangs, the leaders are the ones who determine the character of the gang (Rostami et al., 2012) and the level of criminal activity a gang will engage in (Carlie, 2002). In fact, Short and Strodtbeck (1965) argued that leadership is a key factor for gang violence, as threats to the status of a gang leader cause him/her to instigate conflicts with other groups. Unlike corporate organization, however, there can be multiple leaders within a gang, each responsible for different aspects of the gang's activity (Curry et al., 2014). While some have argued that gang leadership is ephemeral, situational and relatively weak (Klein, 1995), researchers have found evidence of gangs with both weak and strong leaderships (Jankowski, 1991; Spergel, 1995).

Gang Roles

Role distinction is another important indicator of the level of organization. The

absence of roles would indicate a complete lack of organizational development, which could result in preventing the development of common goals – a defining attribute of organizations (Decker, 2001). The existence of roles creates meaning and expectations for behaviors from persons assigned to a given status. Most gangs are able to identify different roles members play in the gang. Even among the least organized gangs, Curry et al. (2014) noted some degree of distinction between core and fringe members. In general, while gangs may differ in the titles they use for various positions within their gang, at least three levels of roles can be identified in most gangs—leaders, experienced gang members and regular members (Curry et al., 2014). Leaders, as discussed above, are those who lead the group. Experienced members are those who are assigned specialized roles within the gang such as stealing cars or obtaining weapons. Regular members are those that make up the majority of the gang. They, however, offer little to the gang beyond their membership (Curry et al., 2014).

Gang Rules

Rules reflect the ability of a gang to discipline their members and structure behavior more formally. The presence of rules is a key component of formal organizations. They create an expectation among members and helps pattern their behaviors. For the majority of gangs, the rules are informal and unwritten, and sometimes can be unspoken, but are understood by their members (Densely, 2012). These rules can cover a number of topics from expectations about snitching and cheating fellow gang members, to displaying insignia of other gangs, deference to elders, availability on demand and, not getting high on one's own supply (Densely, 2012). Violation of these

rules may lead to consequences. But because a majority of gangs do not have a formal system of punishment in place, the consequences of breaking these rules often result in informal sanctions (Curry et al., 2014). For example, punishments handed are often dependent on who the member breaking the rules is and who the person deciding the punishment is. As gangs evolve, however, they are found to be less reliant on personal attachments and more on established rules and regulations (Curry et al., 2014; Densely, 2012).

Gang Meetings

Meetings can be defined as planned gatherings of three or more people who come together for a purpose that is related to some aspect of organizational or group function (Boden 1994, 1995; Schwartzman 1989). Meetings are distinct from casual encounters, in that they have an organizational purpose, occurring during a particular space and time. Research from political studies find that meetings are important for setting agendas (Adams 2004; Tepper 2004), building commitment and providing information (Adams, 2004). Within gangs, meeting, even informal ones, are also said to facilitate the establishment and maintenance of group cohesion and provide a platform for communicating information to members (Decker & Van Winkle, 1996). Meetings can help members feel included, trusted, and important. Research on gangs find that a majority of gangs hold meetings in some form or the other (Curry et al., 2014). The type of meetings gangs organize are dependent on various factors, such as the size of gangs.

Gang Money

Another important indicator of the degree of organization is the handling and

spending of money within a gang (Decker, 2001; Decker et al., 1998). Curry and colleagues (2014) demonstrated that more organized gangs handled money differently from less organized gangs. In studying gang use of money, two models are highlighted—individual entrepreneurship and the corporate model (Curry et al., 2014). In the individual entrepreneurship model, which is what most gangs adopt, individual members keep the money that is generated through the activities of the organization. For example, Decker (2001) found that members of less organized gangs, used the money they made on sales for personal reasons, especially related to individual consumption. A corporate model, on the other hand, would require that members reinvest a large portion of the profits they make back into the gang, to further the interests of a gang. While this is rarely found among street gangs, a few, more organized gangs, such as the Gangster Disciples in Chicago, are found to adopt this model (Curry et al., 2014).

Collectively, these five measures represent how organized a gang is. And while research has shown that gangs are not highly organized (Decker et al., 1998; Fagan, 1989; Klein & Maxson, 2006), these elements have been found to exist among gangs, and can be thought of as forming a gang's anatomy. They provide a structural foundation within which the group goals and activities are designed and have the potential to impact member behaviors (Bouchard & Spindler, 2010; Decker et al., 2008). The next section will make the argument that the level of gang organization matters in the study for disengagement.

Gang Organization and Disengagement

According to Klein and Maxson (2006) group processes within gangs trump the impact of ethnicity, gender, and neighborhood characteristics on criminological

outcomes. Despite this contention, gang scholars have devoted very few resources to examining gang characteristics, choosing instead to study individual level characteristics (Pyrooz et al., 2012). To be sure, only a handful of studies have examined the impact of gang organization on the behaviors of members. Done largely in the context of delinquency and victimization, the direction of the findings of these studies have been slightly mixed and far from conclusive, but the general result is that higher levels of organization are linked to increased violence, delinquency and victimization (Bjerregaard, 2002; Bouchard & Spindler, 2010; Decker et al., 2008 Pyrooz et al., 2012; Sheley et al., 1995; Scott & Maxson, 2010). More recently, in an attempt to understand what keeps individuals in the gang, Melde and colleagues (2012) found that in gangs that have higher levels of organization the probability of an individual becoming a stable gang member (2 years or longer) increases. Suggesting that organized gangs could be more capable of "coercing longer membership, maintaining member interest, developing stronger social ties between members, or fulfilling the social needs of the youth" (Melde et al., 2012, p. 494).

Despite the likelihood that gang organization might play a role in disengagement, an examination of this feature within the study of leaving the gang has been largely overlooked in the literature. To date, only three studies have included a measure of gang organization when studying disengagement from gangs**.** The first study, done by Pyrooz and Decker (2011), using bivariate analyses on a sample of 84 juvenile arrestees in Arizona, found that level of organization has no effect on gang leaving. Similarly, Pyrooz et al. (2013), using longitudinal data, found no effect of gang organization on

disengagement from the gang. Finally, and in contrast to the other two studies, Leverso (2016), using eight waves of panel data on high-risk youth from the Denver Youth Survey, found that individuals who perceive their gang as more organized were less likely to leave their gangs. Given these mixed results, a closer look at the operationalization of gang organization in these studies could shed light on the conflicting findings.

First, all studies made use of binary variables to create their gang organization index. In doing so, it assumes that a gang either has or lacks each of the components of organization. But as discussed earlier, gangs vary greatly, thereby requiring a more nuanced approach to capture where on the continuum between informal-diffuse to instrumental-rational a gang lies. In using binary variables, these studies have failed to capture the variability of gang organization and could be the reason for the mixed results. The second problem has to do with the assumption that the first two studies make about gang organization being a unidimensional construct. In these studies, gang organization was measured by summing up responses to items reflecting the various components of gang organization. Suggesting that all the components of gang organization tap into a single latent construct. However, Pyrooz et al. (2012) argue that certain factors may be more strongly related to the gang, indicating that items may differentially impact an outcome. Further, from the work done on organizations within the field of organizational psychology, research has repeatedly shown that the construct of organization is multidimensional with different items tapping into different dimensions of the construct of organizational structure (Dalton et al., 1980; James & Jones, 1976; Katz & Kahn;

Mintzberg, 1979). For example, the traditional view of organization structure is seen as having three dimensions—centralization, formalization and size (Brass, 1984; Schminke et al., 2000; Wally & Baum, 1994). In recognizing this limitation, Leverso (2016), attempted to test the possibility of multidimensionality, but found no evidence of it. The problem, however, goes back to their use of binary variables, making it difficult to identify a latent construct of gang organization. Thus, moving forward, studies need to pay closer attention to the construct of organization, if we are to understand its effects on member behaviors.

Given the limitations with the current studies, more work is needed to understand if gang organization matters for disengagement. Failing to do so, limits our understanding of the extent to which gang organization impacts all stages of gang membership. But to simply determine if there is a significant relationship between organization and disengagement, as was done in the prior studies, fails to shed light on why organization might matter. More simply, the results only provide a general indication of organizational functioning, without any indication about the mechanisms linking the two. And ultimately if we are to impact policy and practice that is focused on preventing individuals from joining gangs and helping those in gangs to leave, we need to clearly understand how gang characteristics impact leaving behaviors. In this dissertation, I argue that disillusionment is the missing link between gang organization and disengagement. More specifically, the level of gang organization will influence a member's sense of belonging, safety and financial independence—reasons often cited for joining—thereby impacting their sense of disillusionment, which will ultimately lead to

disengagement.

Sense of Disillusionment and Disengagement

The study of disengagement has revealed that internal and external factors rarely work independently in the disengagement process. Rather these factors need to work in concert to effect change among members (Decker et al., 2014). That said, it is necessary for internal changes to occur in order for external factors to be effective in helping one exit the gang. More often than not, this internal factor is disillusionment. While it is possible for members to leave in the absence of disillusionment, such as in instances where the gang breaks up (Decker & Pyrooz, 2011; Horowitz, 1983; Quicker, 1999, Vigil, 1988) or one moves to a new neighborhood or school (Carson et al., 2013; Decker & Lauritsen, 2002; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Hagedorn, 1994; Padilla, 1992; Spergel, 1995; Vigil, 1988), research has shown that to leave a gang, one largely needs to experience a sense of disillusionment (Bubloz & Simi, 2015; Roman et al., 2018)

Bubloz and Simi (2015, p. 336) define disillusionment as a "psycho-social emotional state of discontent that is a result of unmet expectations." They further state that disillusionment occurs because individuals enter gangs with grand expectations of what their life will be like after joining the gang. The lived reality of gang membership, however, slowly leads to a realization that these expectations are unlikely to be met, resulting in disillusionment. While this is true, following from research on disillusionment in relationships (Huston & Houts, 1998), I would argue that expectations can develop at any time, even while one is in the gang. In general, these expectations can range from being protected, making money, excitement and having loyal friends (Decker & Van

Winkle, 1996; Descormiers & Corrado, 2016; Esbensen et al., 1999; Peterson et al., 2004; Moore 1991; Sánchez-Jankowski, 1991; Thornberry et al., 2003; Toy, 1992).

In reality, the likelihood that the gang will provide protection, unfailing loyalty and friendship, or economic security is very low. To be sure, prior studies have repeatedly demonstrated gang membership places individuals at a greater risk for victimization (Curry et al., 2002; DeLisi et al., 2009; Fox et al., 2010; Goveret al., 2009; Miller, 2001; Miller & Decker, 2001; Peterson et al., 2004; Taylor et al., 2008; Wu & Pyrooz, 2016). This is especially true for the most serious forms of victimization such as aggravated assault and homicide (Howell, 1999; Maxson, 1999; Taylor et al., 2007). Further, it is found that members frequently turn their backs on fellow gang members when they are needed most (Anderson, 1999; Goffman, 1959). The code of protecting each other—a law gang members allegedly live by—is frequently violated (Anderson, 1999). While profits from gang activities such as drug dealing, are often found to be close to minimum wage (Levitt & Venkatesh, 2000; Papachristos et al., 2008). Together, this suggests that the gang is often unable to provide an environment that meets expectations, thereby resulting in members developing a sense of disillusionment.

According to the cognitive-emotional theory of gang exit (Bubloz & Simi, 2015), once the roots of disillusionment have been sown, individuals will begin to experience an incongruence in self-appraisals in identity. Which in turn will leads to negative emotionality, social distress, and anger, encouraging members to suppress gang roles and promote non-gang roles. For the authors, the shift in the relative importance of gang identity compared to non-gang identities is crucial to the process of gang exit. While no

work has directly tested this theory, a large number of studies have found disillusionment to be an important motivation for leaving (e.g., Bulboz, 2014; Carson et al., 2013; Decker & Pyrooz, 2011; Levitt & Venkatesh, 2000; Padilla,1992; Roman et al., 2016; Vigil, 1988). In these studies, disillusionment is often characterized by statements such as "it wasn't my type of life" (Decker & Lauritsen, 2002) or "It wasn't what I thought it was going to be" (Carson et al., 2013). Using such operationalizations, Carson and associates (2013) found 42 to 55% of their sample of former gang members to be disillusioned with their gang. Similarly, Decker and Pyrooz (2011) found an overwhelming 73% of their sample of former gang members to be disillusioned with the gang.

From above, it becomes clear that disillusionment is an important component in the disengagement process. To date, however, little research has explored why so many members become disillusioned with the gang. With some only alluding to the gang context as being a source of disillusionment (Decker et al., 2014; Hagedorn, 1994; Padilla, 1992; Thrasher, 1927,1963; Vigil, 1988). But assumptions in the absence of empirical support is of little use for our understanding of disengagement. To that end, the next section makes the argument that level of organization in the gang, influences if one develops a sense of disillusionment, which in turn leads to an increased likelihood of disengagement.

Linking Gang Organization, Sense of Disillusionment and Disengagement

Studies focusing on the relationship between the level of gang organization and disengagement have been few, and when done, have failed to explain why organization level might matter. This is a notable oversight because knowing that organization matters

without providing a reason for why it matters, oversimplifies its effects and limits our understanding of the group context. While not studied much within the gang literature, the idea that organizational features impact individual attitudes and behaviors has been the focus of much research within the field of organizational behavior (James and Jones, 1974; O'Neil et al., 2016). For example, this body of work has repeatedly theorized and found organizational structure to influence individual outcomes such as stress, job satisfaction, feelings of burnout, and turnover (Maslach, 2011; Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998). While it is clear that gangs are not formal organizations, we find that gangs do exhibit some of the characteristics of social organizations (see discussion on gang organization components). Indicating that using decades of informational gain within the organization behavior literature can be beneficial to our study of gangs.

To guide our understanding of why organization may impact behaviors, the congruence model of organization analysis proposed by Nadler and Tushman (1980) provides a useful general organizing framework. Lying within the larger realm of open systems theory of organization behavior, the model views organizations as consisting of three interacting parts—inputs, outputs and transformational processes. Inputs are the factors that create the context within which an organization has to work. These include the larger environment, the history of the organization, and the resources available. Outputs are what the organization produces and can be at the individual, group or organizational level. Finally, transformational processes, are the key components of the organization and are fundamental for transforming energy and information from inputs into outputs. Transformational processes include components such as tasks, individuals,

and organization structure. According to the model, the interaction between the components of transformation processes is most important for the larger organizational context, with outcomes at all levels of output being most positive when these components fit with each other. Here fit refers to "the degree to which the needs, demands, goals, objectives, and/or structures of one component are consistent with the needs, demands, goals, objectives, and/or structures of another component." (Nadler & Tushman, 1980, p. 45). Thus, incongruence between any two components will cause problems.

To further understand the concept of congruency, consider the components of task and individual. A task demands a type of person who possess a certain set of skills and knowledge to perform the task. At the same time, the set of individuals available in an organization have certain characteristics, like their levels of skill and knowledge. If the individual's knowledge and skill match the knowledge and skill demanded by the task, we will likely see more positive outputs at various levels. Similarly, to consider the fit between individual and organizational structure, we need to ask questions such as “How are individual needs met by the organizational arrangements?” “Is there a convergence of individual and organizational goals?” (Nadler & Tushman, 1980, p.46). In such a case, if an organization fails to meet individual goals or needs, or if the individual does not agree with the goals of the organization, the organizational structure and individual are not in congruence, leading to problems in output, such as lower productivity, turnover and absenteeism.

From above, it becomes clear that in order for organizations to function effectively the fit or congruence between different components of an organization are

more important than the components itself. This idea seems to be useful when studying gangs. As has been stated above, members come into the gang with certain expectations, but the gang is unable to fulfil these expectations, thus resulting is feelings of disillusionment with the gang, eventually leading to disengagement. So, what is it about the organization of gangs that leads to discordance between individual expectations and reality? From research looking at organizational structure and employee behaviors (Cummings and Berger, 1976; James & Jones, 1976; O'Niel et al., 2016), it would seem that the components of gang organization discussed above are not enough to make people feel like they are safe, protected, and economically independent.

Specifically, I argue that as the leadership, gang roles, gang rules, gang meetings, and gang money components of gang organization become less formalized, gangs will be less capable of fulfilling expectations, thereby increasing the probability of disillusionment. Take leaders for example, they provide a model for acceptable behavior, and through their actions can garner the trust and respect of their gang members. Leaders who can communicate high expectations and a vision for the future, are likely to inspire members, and instill pride in their gangs. The problem is that, for most gangs, leadership is ephemeral, and situational (Klein, 1995). Indicating levels of leadership in the gang are low. In such cases, it would seem likely that a number of individuals compete to be leaders, and as there are more people competing to be in power and in control of the gang control, conflicts within the gang will likely increase (Kahn, 1964). Such competition of power can sometimes lead to the exploitation of the fears of lower members, likely causing detrimental outcomes (Singh, 2009), such as disillusionment of one's role.

Similarly, gang roles and gang rules, serve to create expectations for behaviors of their members. In the absence of clear rules and procedures to govern the behaviors of members of the gangs and clear description of work roles and skills necessary to complete those roles, members will experience high role ambiguity and conflict (O'Neill et al., 2016), which in turn could result in them feeling dissatisfied with their gang. Furthermore, having clearly laid out rules will impact perceptions about the extent to which the gang has consistent and equitable rules for everyone in the gang. This perception of fairness is important as it has been found to impact feelings of burnout (Lasalvia et al., 2009), a syndrome that has been sometimes discussed as a process of disillusionment (Edelwich & Brodsky, 1980; Meier, 1983; Pines & Aronson, 1981). From prior research, however, we know that gangs often lack clear rules and parse out inconsistent punishment for breaking the rules. Thus, as the clarity of rules decrease, we would likely see that members are more likely to be disillusioned.

In addition to reducing ambiguity, having clear roles, can result in many younger members aspiring to grow within the gang, and thus, see scope for growth in the gangs. For example, in gangs that have clear roles such as leaders, experienced gang members and regular members, a young member starting out as a regular member, may aspire to become an experienced member. To do so, he or she might recognize certain activities/ behaviors that they need to engage in or exhibit to grow within the gang in order to become an experienced member. In the absence of clear roles, however, they may see little or no chance of bettering themselves in the organization; and may feel like their careers will eventually come to a standstill, thereby increasing their disillusionment

especially regarding economic success within a gang. Relatedly, if individuals are using money for their own personal use instead of reinvesting it in the gang, this may signal to members that only higher up member are likely to be in the position to make money off the gang, and in the absence of promotional opportunities, they may become disillusioned about their future in the gang.

Finally, gang meetings have the ability to increase group cohesiveness, a factor that has been found to be linked to job satisfaction and burnout (Lasalvia et al., 2009). When gang members are able to come together and participate in gang activities, talk about problems that they might be experiencing or share their views on an issue, they are likely to feel valued by the organization and have authority over gang matters. A lack of participation, on the other hand, can contribute to members feeling they are part of impersonal organizations (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993), where one does not feel a strong sense of camaraderie or belonging—a reason often cited for gang joining. Thus, leading to disillusionment.

In sum, it would be expected that gang organization will impact an individual's sense of disillusionment by way of creating an environment where an individual does not feel supported, protected and respected and where the prospects for growth seem slim. Once a sense of disillusionment occurs, it will likely trigger the disengagement process which will ultimately lead to one leaving the gang. This conceptual model is presented in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1. Conceptual Model Linking Gang Organization, Sense of Disilluionment and Gang Disengagment

Disengagement from Gangs in Prison

The presence of gangs behind prison walls acts as a destabilizing force. They impact correctional programming, undermine state authority, and threaten inmate safety. (Crewe, 2009; Cunningham & Sorensen, 2007; Fleisher & Decker, 2001; Gaes et al., 2002; Skarbek, 2014, 2016). Despite the strong hold gangs have in prisons, our knowledge regarding gangs in prison is limited (Pyrooz et al., 2011). This lack of information is especially pronounced in the area of disengagement. Specifically, we do not know if members can leave gangs in prison. Further, when considering prison gang members, membership has long been understood to be a lifelong commitment. Researchers often time cite transcripts of prison gang members stating things like “Once in, always in” (Crouch & Marquart,1989, p. 298) and “membership, once achieved, was for life” (Skarbek, 2014) as indication of the stability of this role.

More recently, a small but growing body of literature is has been looking at whether individuals disengage from gangs in prison (Densley & Pyrooz, 2018; Fong et al., 1995; Johnson & Densley, 2018; Pyrooz et al., 2017; Pryooz & Decker, 2019). The findings from these studies seem to suggest that gang members do in fact leave their

gangs while in prison. For example, Pyrooz and colleagues (2017), found that among serious offenders in Philadelphia and Phoenix more people exited than entered gangs while incarcerated. When examining why members leave, research finds similar motives as found among street gang members. For example, Fong and colleagues (1995), using a sample of prison gang members in a Texas prison, found that the most important reason for leaving the gang was the loss of interest in the gang. Other reasons cited ranged from "refusal to carry out hit on a nongang member" to "disagreed with gang direction" to them stating that they "grew out of it." In a more recent study done by Pyrooz and Decker (2019), using a sample of 441 gang members in prison, they found that almost two-thirds of their prison gang sample reported that they had left their gang. The biggest motivation for leaving was found to be disillusionment, with over three-fourths of former gang members citing it as a motivation for leaving. Other motivations ranged from criminal justice involvement, triggering events, gang structure and gang politics to family, work, and religion.

From these studies, it seems that disengaging from gangs in prison follows similar patterns as disengagement on the street. Given the current state of literature, however, we do not know enough to make this conclusion. To assume that disengagement from prisons would follow similar trends as in the street would be premature for two reasons. First, gang members in prisons tend to be older than members on the street, with membership likely being influenced by religious and/or political beliefs and prior affiliation with various street gang (Decker & Pyrooz, 2011). If this is the case, given that older members are at a different development stage as compared to younger members,

their expectations from the gang could be very different, which in turn could affect why and how they leave a gang.

Second, gangs in prison are said to be more organized and more able to effectively govern the behavior of members (Tapia et al., 2014; Phillips, 2012; Skarbek, 2014). For example, it has been found that affiliation to certain gangs in prison, result in members engaging in more violent misconduct (Gaes et al., 2002). Suggesting that there is a relationship between specific gang characteristics and activities. Given this, within a prison setting a well-organized gang may provide their members with more criminal opportunities and illegal goods as well be more prepared to protect them in a dangerous environment (Pyrooz & Decker, 2019). If this is the case, members might feel more satisfied with the gang and will be less likely to disengage. No research has examined this possibility.

Here, it is important to note that in this dissertation I am not arguing exclusively between prison gangs and street gangs. Rather, I am interested in understanding if disengagement occurs within the context of prison. I do this because it prevents from creating a street gang—prison gang dichotomy, which many gang members themselves do not support. Pyrooz and Decker (2019), for example, found that two-thirds of their sample rejected a street– prison gang dichotomy and endorsed the presence of their gang both on the street and in prison. Thus, in referring to street gangs or prison gangs, I am referring to the context of influence on a gang. Such an approach would be more helpful in uncovering the disengagement process for gang members in prison.

Conclusion

The literature review on gang disengagement has demonstrated that gang members, more often than not, leave their gangs. Studies exploring why members leave, have largely been done within the context of gangs on the street and have focused on individual-level factors that influence this process of leaving. Despite members being a part of a group, researchers have overlooked the gang context and how it shapes disengagement. This is an oversight, because we know level of organization impacts criminal behaviors of their members. In the few instances where gang organization has been considered in the disengagement process, these studies have failed to consider the variability and dimensionality of gang organization, thereby preventing a complete understanding of the effects of organization on disengagement. Additionally, even less theorizing and testing has been done to understand the mechanisms that link group level organizational factors with individual behaviors of gang members. This is problematic because it limits the ability of such research to inform policy and practice focused on gang prevention and management. To that end, Chapter 5 of this dissertation will seek to fill some of the gaps in this research using a sample of gang members from Texas prisons.

CHAPTER 3

REINTEGRATION OF GANG MEMBERS

Gang members in prison have generated a host of issues for policymakers, administrators, and correctional staff. Despite making up only 12 to 17 % of state prison populations (Griffin & Hepburn, 2006; Kreinert & Fleisher, 2001), and 9 % of the federal prison population (Gaes et al., 2002), gang members represent one of the biggest challenges for prison management. From being disproportionally involved in prison misconduct to increasing inmate disturbances and controlling the drug trade (Griffin & Hepburn, 2006; Huebner, 2003; Skarbek, 2014, 2020; Shelden, 1991; Tasca et al., 2010; Useem & Reisig, 1999), gang members are a significant reality behind bars. Given the numerous challenges this group of inmates pose, it is encouraging to see a growing number of studies showing that members can leave their gangs while in prison (Pyrooz & Decker, 2019; Pyrooz et al., 2017). Insights gained from these studies are beneficial for informing correctional programs and policies that are aimed at gang prevention and management. That said, however, current studies on gang disengagement within prisons have solely focused on why individuals leave their gangs in prisons, without considering what happens to gang members after they leave. Such a focus is incomplete when trying to help gang members change. This is because the time spent in a gang has lasting consequences on various domains of a person's life. Findings from studies on street gang members find that gang membership is associated with poor educational attainment, health problems, economic struggles and relational difficulties (see Krohn et al., 2011; Pyrooz, 2014). But the consequences of (street or prison) gang membership after leaving

a gang in prison is less understood. Research seems to suggest that gang members are at a great greater risk for recidivism upon release (Huebner et al., 2007; Dooley et al., 2014). These studies, however, have largely ignored gang membership status (i.e., current gang members, former gang member and non-gang member) when investigating the risk for recidivism. Further, even if current and former gang members are at an equal risk for recidivating, current research fails to tell us why. To that end, this chapter will discuss the risk for recidivism among gang members and will make the argument that in order to understand why membership increases this risk, a greater understanding of the reentry experiences of gang members is necessary.

Gangs and Recidivism

Ninety five percent of all state prisoners will be released from prison at some point (Hughes & Wilson, 2005). With this high number of returning prisoners, it is not surprising that researchers policy makers, and politicians are all interested in understanding the extent to which criminal justice systems, programs and treatments are effective in dealing with offenders. Often, the indicator of effectiveness is recidivism (Aos et al., 2006; Beck & Shipley, 1997; Langan & Levin, 2002; Lipsey & Cullen, 2007; MacKenzie, 2006). Recidivism can be broadly defined as a measure of success of systems, programs and treatments to effectively intervene and stop offending (Nakamura & Bucklen, 2014). Depending on the population of interest (pre-trial releases, probationers, released prisoners, etc.) and the recidivism event of interest (rearrests, reconviction, reincarceration, probation/ parole violation, etc.), there is considerable variation in how recidivism is operationally defined and measured (Blumstein & Larson,

1971; Maltz, 1984). Regardless of these differences, however, studies consistently find that a substantial percentage of individuals returning from prisons will recidivate (Beck & Shipley, 1997; Langan & Levin, 2002; Pew Center on the States, 2011). To be sure, a recent report published by the Bureau of Justice Statistics in 2018, found that 68% of formerly incarcerated individuals were rearrested within 3 years of release, 79% within 6 years, and 83% within 9 years of release (Alper et al., 2018).

Despite these high rates, the risk for recidivism is not equal for all who return from prison. Rather it varies by correctional sub-populations (O'Connell et al., 2020). One sub-population for which the risk of recidivism is found to be especially high are gang members. Gang affiliated individuals are not only more likely to recidivate but do so quicker than non-gang affiliated individuals and commit more severe crimes (Spooner et al., 2017). The increased risk of recidivism for gang members has been found among both juvenile samples (Benda & Tollett, 1999; Caudill, 2010; Lattimore et al., 1995; Lattimore et al., 2004; Trulson et al., 2005; Visher et al., 1991) and adult samples (Adams & Olson, 2002; Huebner, et al., 2007; Olson & Dooley, 2006; Pyrooz et al., 2020). It is also found be true for street gang members and prison gang members (Dooley et al., 2014; Saunders et al., 2009). For example, Saunders and colleagues (2009), using 20 years of data on prisoners in Arizona, found that post-incarceration recidivism rates were higher for both prison and street gang members as compared to non-gang affiliated individuals. Specifically, they found that 83.2% of street gang members and 77.4% of prison gang members were found to come back to prison within 3 years, as compared to 42.8% of non-gang members. To further ensure that the gang membership-recidivism

link is not spurious, researchers have also taken into account mental health, behavioral problems, age, and violent offending—factors that have also been found to increase the risk of recidivism—and have continued to find that gang membership exerts a unique effect on recidivism (Huebner et al., 2007; Wolff et al., 2020).

In highlighting the risk of gang membership for recidivism, these studies have proven to be useful in guiding policy and pointing out where resources need to be allocated (McGloin, 2007). That said, however, a number of problems exist with the current state of knowledge. First, these studies have largely failed to consider current gang membership status when studying risk for recidivism (i.e., gang member, former gang member, and non-gang member). An exception is a recent study done by Pyrooz and colleagues (2020), who found that considering gang membership status is important when studying risk for recidivism. Specifically, they found that current gang members have the highest risk for recidivating. Former gang members, on the other hand, were found to have a lower risk for recidivating when compared to current gang members but showed a higher risk when compared to non-gang members. These findings shed light on the continued relevance of gang membership for reentry. And further highlights a major limitation of many gang interventions that work on the premise that membership is a causal factor in criminal behavior. Thus, viewing desistance as an expected outcome following disengagement. Accordingly, if a large proportion of individuals who identify as gang members on entering prison or sometime during their stay in prison, no longer do so upon their release, distinguishing gang affiliates by their current or former status has value for both theory and practice focused on prisoner reentry.

A second problem with the study of reentry of gang members is that by only identifying gang membership as a risk for recidivism, these studies do not shed light on the mechanisms by which gang membership makes individuals more vulnerable to recidivate. This is a major oversight because for research to be informative and productive it must focus on understanding why gang membership acts as a risk (Thornberry et al., 2003), and if these risks continue to have relevance once members leave. Until we are able to give voice to the mechanisms that link gang membership and recidivism, we will be unable to develop programs and policies to effectively mitigate the risk of gang membership after release (McGloin, 2007).

A major reason for a lack of understanding as to why gang membership acts as a risk factor, is our failure to use other indicators of success, such as reintegration, when studying the effectiveness of systems, policies and programs. By solely focusing on recidivism, we ignore the reality that recidivism is directly affected by post prison reintegration and adjustment (Travis & Visher, 2003). Reintegration refers to simultaneously establishing community and social ties and material security (Western et al., 2015). Unlike a recidivism emphasis wherein inmates either succeed or fail, a reintegration emphasis focuses on the positive gains and outcomes that accumulate over time. By focusing on reintegration, we are able to recognize the number of obstacles prisoners have to navigate in order to reestablish themselves as members of the community. For example, returning prisoners are often faced with the problems of finding housing, reconnecting with children and family, finding a job, and earning enough money to support themselves and their families (Visher & Travis, 2003).

Successful navigation of these issues occurs slowly over time and influences the ability of individuals to live crime-free lives (Sampson & Laub, 1993; Bakken & Visher, 2017; Western et al., 2015; Visher & Travis, 2003, 2011). For those who actively build relationships and secure material well-being at an early stage, opportunities to further develop social support and material security will likely present themselves. Conversely, for individuals who are unable to build ties with communities, will stay at the margins of society as they will have limited access to the mainstream, pro-social roles and opportunities that full community participation requires (Western et al., 2015). Thus, to understand why individuals recidivate, we must first understand the experiences after release that serve to integrate individuals or further marginalize them.

While there is no doubt that all returning prisoners face a multitude of hardships that threaten their reintegration into communities, the experience of difficulties after release could be amplified for gang members. Research on gang members on the street find that they are more likely to have problems finding employment, and more likely to have family difficulties (Dong & Krohn, 2016). Suggesting that the added status of "gang member" may serve to create greater difficulties for gang members on their path to reintegration. In fact, Fleisher and Decker (2001) argue that many gang members released from prison are not challenged with reintegration into the legitimate community, but rather they are challenged with initial integration. Because the lives of members before prison largely exist outside of legitimate domains, they suggest that successful integration might require returning gang members to develop new prosocial ties and connections, instead of investing in existing associations. The authors additionally highlight the

potential ease with which gang members can be reabsorbed into continued associations with deviant networks—what Taxman (2017, p.775) refers to as a "commonsense" explanation for recidivism. To that end the next section will speak to the importance of reintegration within the context of reentry and why this process might be different for current and former gang members.

Reintegration of Individuals Returning from Prison

Reintegration can be viewed as a process of transitioning from prison to the community, adjusting to life outside of prison and attempting to maintain a crime-free lifestyle (Harding et al., 2014). It is a complex process that involves establishing community ties and material security (Bakken & Visher, 2018; Western et al., 2015). Prior research has conceptualized and measured reintegration in various ways and in general, these measures can largely be categorized into three components—economic, social, and psychological reintegration (see for example, Visher & Travis, 2003; Western et al. 2014, Bakken & Visher, 2018). The former two components of integration have been used much more commonly when studying reintegration as compared to the latter. Economic integration covers aspects which contribute to economic self-sufficiency. This includes indicators related to income and employment. Employment is especially important for reintegration because it helps build pride, social status, and a daily routine (Sullivan, 1989). Employment can be viewed as a factor that builds resiliency because it has economic and cognitive benefits; and it keeps people from engaging in criminal behaviors (Krienert & Fleisher, 2004). Further, having a job allows formerly incarcerated individuals to build a sense of self-worth and allows them to financially support

themselves and their families (Western, 2018).

Social integration refers to the extent to which formerly incarcerated individuals have reached social stability within the community. This includes participation in community organizations and the amount of social support one receives, be it from their immediate family, friends, or wider community. Social integration is important because ties to others are necessary to feel like one belongs and serves as a source of informal social control (Sampson & Laub, 2003). Durkheim (1897) argued that higher social integration indicates that individuals are better integrated into a society and such integration protects them from distorted beliefs or norms (Turner & Noh, 1983). Further, formerly incarcerated individuals often express their desire to become responsible citizens. This includes participation in a number of civic activities such as voting, volunteer work, "giving back," and neighborhood involvement (Travis et al., 2001, Uggen & Thompson, 2006). Many formerly incarcerated individuals voice the importance of such a role for themselves as they reintegrate into their communities (Maruna, 2001, Solomon et al., 2004, Uggen & Thompson, 2006). Finally, psychological integration encompasses the emotional, mental, and psychological elements of reintegration. It encompasses the sense of belonging, identity and emotional wellbeing one feels. Research finds that when one does not feel a sense of belonging to their communities, this can instigate destructive behaviors, such as violence towards self and others (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). On the other hand, a strong sense of belonging is associated with a greater perception of social support (Hagerty et al., 1996).

In essence, these three components capture an individual's ability to maintain a

sustainable livelihood (economic reintegration), make positive contact within and between groups (social reintegration), and be able to feel an emotional sense of connection with the others (psychological reintegration). To understand how these various components of reintegration are developed once an individual is released from prison and to understand why the process may be more challenging for current and former gang members, the life course perspective will be applied[1].

Life Course Perspective and Reintegration of Gang Members

The life course perspective is a theoretical model that has emerged from various disciplines within the social sciences for the past 50 years. According to Elder, a leading scholar in this area, the life course perspective is a broad theoretical orientation "that guides research on human lives within context" (Elder et al., 2003, p. 10). Central to the study of life course are three concepts—trajectories, transitions, and turning points. Trajectories are long-term patterns of stability and change in a person's life. While trajectories do not have to be straight lines of development, we do expect them to have some continuity of direction. Examples of trajectories include, educational trajectories, marital trajectories, criminal behavior trajectories and health trajectories. These trajectories are shaped and made meaningful by transitions. Transitions are events that evolve over shorter periods of time and are always embedded within trajectories (Elder 1998). An example of a transition could be a first job or the first crime one

[1] It is important to note here that I am only interested in understanding the impact of gang membership on reentry and reintegration, thus, I do not make any distinctions between prison gang members and street gang members. Further, as noted in Chapter 2, gang members themselves do not identify with the street gang—prison gang dichotomy, calling into question the utility of making such a distinction when studying reentry outcomes.

commits. Finally, turning points are events or states that disrupt stable trajectories and have long-lasting consequences (Rutter, 1996). They create substantial change or discontinuity of trajectories. Despite the significant disruption a turning point causes to a trajectory, they usually become obvious only as time passes (Wheaton & Gotlib, 1997). Examples of turning points include victimization, incarceration, marriage and employment (Jacques & Wright, 2008; Sampson & Laub, 1993; Western, 2002).

To appreciate how trajectories, transitions and turning points unfold and to understand the developmental pathways across the life span, the life course perspective provides four guiding principles (Elder, 1998). First, peoples' lives are embedded in, and are influenced by, historical times and multiple contexts. Second, the influence an event has on future life outcomes is dependent on the time of occurrence. Third, peoples' lives are linked and interdependent. Finally, human agency is salient for decision-making, and for the construction of one's own life. Using these concepts and principles within the field of criminology, we have been better able to understand various stages of criminal careers. It has allowed researchers to understand non-random change in individuals' offending behaviors across various stages of development (Loeber & Le Blanc, 1990).

Researchers have also identified the utility of applying the life course perspective to study prisoner reintegration (Mears et al., 2013). To understand reintegration from a life course perspective, we must conceive of the move from prison to the community as a transition that has the ability to shape and direct an individual's pathway to reintegration. For Visher and Travis (2003, p. 96), in order to appreciate how the release from prison shapes reintegration we need to understand the "complex dynamic of the moment of

release." In other words, they argue that the immediate experiences after release provides a useful window into understanding how and why formerly incarcerated individuals may or may not follow a pathway to reintegration. Consider for example, an individual who upon release is faced with a number of problems such as difficulties acquiring housing, problems reconnecting with family, and issues related to health—problems many newly released prisoners experience. The ability and extent to which the individual can successfully navigate these problems will depend on past life experiences, resources available on release and personal agency they bring with them. Failure to successfully address these issues could lead to outcomes such as economic difficulties, psychological problems, and social isolation, thereby preventing reintegration and increasing the risk of relapse to past delinquent behavior (Sampson & Laub, 1993; Western et al., 2015).

The idea that past life experiences impact the reintegration process is especially pertinent to the study of gang members and reintegration. To be sure, research on street gang members has repeatedly found that individuals who have a history of gang membership are more likely to have lower education achievements, experience unemployment and economic hardships, have more family problems, and are more likely to be arrested as compared to their peers (Augustyn et al., 2014; Krohn et al., 2011; Levitt & Venkatesh, 2001a; Levitt & Venkatesh, 2001b; Pyrooz, 2014; Thornberry et al., 2003). These findings suggest that gang membership continues to be relevant to the life outcomes of their members long after they disengage. As the life course perspective has continued to evolve over the years, it has more clearly emphasized the continuity between life trajectories, transitions and turning points in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood

(Elder, 1998; McLeod & Almazan, 2003; Shanahan, 2000). For example, Sampson and Laub (1997), would argue that the reason for long lasting effects of gang membership is the cumulative disadvantage it creates on the lives of members. Specifically, in a later extension of the age graded theory of informal social control, Sampson and Laub (1997) argue that delinquent behaviors have a systematic attenuating effect on the social and institutional bonds linking adults to society (e.g., labor force attachment, marital cohesion). More simply, delinquency may spark a series of events such as arrest, official labeling, incarceration, and other negative life events which in turn may lead to decreased opportunities, including school failure, unemployment and severed bonds to family, increasing the likelihood of later adult crime (Tittle, 1988, p. 80). Based on this argument, because gangs have a facilitation effect for delinquency, being in a gang could result in individuals engaging in a lot more crime, which would lead to the attenuation of social bonds to community. From this perspective, even if one has left the gang, the label of gang member along with one's limited pro-social network serve to have lasting consequences on the life course (Pyrooz, 2014). Consequently, no matter one's gang membership status (i.e., current gang member or former gang member), the transition from prison to the community will result in negative experiences, preventing reintegration for both sub-groups.

While this argument seems plausible, one principle of the life course perspective—human agency—could distinguish current gang members from former gang members. According to the life course perspective, individuals are not passive recipients of social factors and structural constraints, rather they construct their own lives through

the choices and actions they take within the opportunities and constraints that they experience (Elder et al., 2013). When considering current and former gang members, there could be a distinction in their motivation for change that would make reintegration pathways look very different for the two groups. More simply, from the previous chapter we know that a large number of people leave their gangs because they experience a sense of disillusionment. Being disillusioned could in turn change one's expectation for their lives and thus, may make them more motivated to change their current lifestyle. With a motivation for change, efforts to alter one's circumstances will be more possible, and goals will be more likely pursued (Giordano et al., 2002; Paternoster & Bushway, 2008). If this is the case, despite the disadvantages both sub-groups face, former gang members will take transformative action within structural constraints, what Sampson and Laub (1993) referred to as "situated choice," likely transforming an individual's trajectory towards reintegration.

Against this backdrop of transitions, trajectories, cumulative disadvantage and human agency, I argue that gang membership will differentially impact a number of reentry factors soon after release, thereby resulting in different reintegration experiences for current, former and non-gang members. The next section will provide a more in-depth argument about the importance of certain reentry experiences soon after release and how gang membership is likely to impact these factors.

Reentry Experiences and Gang Members

To understand why gang members might have difficulties reintegrating, we need to understand the reentry process and understand how specific reentry factors influence

pathways to reintegration. In general, research identifies a number of factors that influence reintegration such as motivation for change, mental health, family support, peer support and housing (Bomen & Mowen, 2018; Brooks et al., 2006; Helfgott, 1997; Mears & Cochran, 2014; McGarrell et al., 2005; National Research Council, 2008; Petersilia, 2003; Uggen, 2000; Visher & Farrell, 2005). Each of these factors will be discussed below with specific focus on how gang membership impacts these outcomes.

Motivation for Change

Many inmates report considerable stress and anxiety about their release while simultaneously showing high motivation for change upon release (Nelson et al., 1999; Studt, 1967; Travis & Visher, 2003; Uggen et al., 2003). Yet little is known about the effect motivation for change has on reintegration outcomes or future reoffending (Visher & Travis, 2003). According to Maruna (2001), those who have higher levels of motivation for change are more likely to successfully reintegrate into their communities. Thus, even though there may be numerous factors that are involved in the actual process of change (Littell & Girven, 2002), having a sense of one's motivation for change could help identify individuals who are more or less likely to successfully reintegrate. To understand the importance of motivation for change, we can draw from Giordano and colleagues' (2002) theory of cognitive transformations. While a theory of desistance from crime, there are parallels that can be drawn between desistence and reintegration. Most importantly, reintegration outcomes, such as employment and social connections, discussed earlier in the chapter, are often identified as turning points that result in the desistance of crime (Sampson & Laub, 1993, 2001; LeBel et al, 2015). According to the

theory of cognitive transformations, openness to change— the ability of an individual to see that change is possible and desirable—is a necessary step in the desistence process. In the absence of such openness, an individual may not be receptive to prosocial opportunities or will not see them as positive developments for themselves (Giordano et al., 2010). Within the context of reintegration, a motivation for change could function in a similar manner, where individuals who are not motivated to change will not recognize opportunities for reintegration. The idea for motivation for change may be especially pertinent for former gang members. Because a large majority of former members report becoming disillusioned with the gang lifestyle, these individuals may develop greater motivation for make changes in their lives, and thus, will look for opportunities for change. Consequently, improving their chances for reintegration This is a possibility that has not been explored by prior research.

Mental Health

Mental health problems are widespread among formerly incarcerated individual and are found to complicate an already challenging transition from prison to community (Blakken & Visher, 2018; Harding & Roman, 2016; Mallik-Kane & Visher, 2008; Travis, 2005). A recent study conducted by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (2017) found that about 37% of state and federal prisoners were told by a mental health professional at some point in their lives that they had a mental health disorder, with 14% reporting symptoms of serious psychological distress (Bronson & Berzofsky, 2017). Mental health issues are problematic for the reentry process because they reduce productivity and strain intimate relationships (Miech et al., 1999). Formerly incarcerated individuals with mental

health issues may be unable to engage in work or other activities, and their families may be unwilling or unable to support them. For those who are able to find employment, mental health problems increase absenteeism and results in poor work performance (Adler et al., 2006; Lerner & Henke, 2008), thereby increasing the risk for termination.

The additional burden of managing mental health problems, such as accessing health care and making it to appointments can often times be overwhelming for someone who is just returning from prison (Blakken & Visher, 2018). Besides accessing health care, individuals who have poor mental health face an increased risk for adverse outcomes, such as physical illness, relapse into drug use, or inappropriate behavior that provokes a criminal justice response (Gido & Dalley, 2008; Hammett et al., 2001). Prior studies that have considered the effect of mental health on reintegration have found that in the year after leaving prison, men and women with mental health problems report worse health indicators and less satisfactory social factors, such as employment, housing, and family support (Bakken & Visher, 2017).

The finding that mental health hinders the reintegration process is especially troubling for the reentry of gang members. This is because gang members are found to have higher levels of mental health problems (Coid et al., 2013; Connolly & Jackson, 2019; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Fagan, 1989; Gillman et al., 2014; Hill et al., 1996; Thornberry et al., 2003). Gilman and colleagues (2014), for example, using longitudinal data from the Seattle Social Development Project (SSDP) looked at the impact of adolescent street gang membership on various domains of an individual's life, including behavioral and health outcomes at 27 to 33 years. They found that joining a gang in

adolescence was associated with decreases in mental health and increases in substance abuse during adulthood. Individuals who joined a gang in adolescence were about 1.7 times more likely to report poor mental health at age 27, 30, or 33 years. Similarly, Watkins and Melde (2016), using Add Health data sought to understand the association between gang membership and poor mental health. They found that street gang membership was associated with greater levels of depression, suicidal ideation and suicide attempts. Accordingly, it would seem that gang membership would likely result in significant reentry challenges due to mental health. Lower levels of mental health, in turn, is likely to hinder reintegration outcomes for current and former gang members. Unfortunately, the impact of gang membership on mental health problems upon reentry have not received much attention.

Family Support

Reintegration cannot solely be predicted by individual level factors (Visher & Travis, 2003). Rather, factors outside of the individual also play a salient role during reentry. Chief among these factors is family support. Besides providing much needed prosocial ties (Naser & La Vigne, 2006; Phillips & Lindsay, 2011; Taxman, 2017), families who are supportive provide individuals with opportunities to reestablish themselves in the community (Uggen et al., 2004) and offer informal social control for individuals (Western et al., 2015). Further, supportive families can provide a context within which returning individuals are able to engage in identity transformations to develop more prosocial, post incarceration identities (Ekland-Olson et al., 1983). Research repeatedly finds that family support upon release lowers rates of recidivism,

reduces social isolation, and improves employment outcomes (Sirois, 2019; Mowen & Visher, 2015; Neelson et al., 1999; Western et al., 2015; Visher & Courtney, 2006). For example, Nelson and colleagues (1999), tracked and interviewed 49 individuals who were released from either a New York state prison or New York City jail during the initial 30 days immediately after release. They found that family support played a critical role during the first 30 days. Specifically, they found emotional support and housing assistance provided by family members increased positive reentry outcomes such as employment.

Within the context of gangs, few studies have explored the effects of gang membership on family relationships. An exception is a study done by Krohn and colleagues (2011). Using a sample of individuals who joined street gangs during adolescence, they found that gang membership was related to disruptions in family relationships (such as hostility, fighting, and arguing within the family) at age 28. The authors argued that gang membership led to poor family relationships because of precocious transitions into adulthood. They viewed precocious transitions into adulthood as living independently from one's parents, dropping out of school, cohabitating, and becoming a parent during the teenage years. They argued that these transitions make it more difficult for individuals to acquire the human and social capital necessary to make a successful transition to adulthood. The findings of this study suggest that gang membership indirectly affects family relationships by way of premature transitions into adulthood.

While this makes sense and can apply to a number of current and former gang

members who have a history of being in a gang during adolescence, we do not know if gang membership causes similar transitions that negatively impact family relationships when individuals join gangs in adulthood or while in prison. One possible transition that might impact family relations would involve restrictive housing. Restrictive housing has the potential of negatively impacting family ties because when individuals are in restricted housing, family visits are reduced, and sometimes completely prohibited (Browne et al., 2011). Some scholars note that when family visits are allowed, they are conducted by speaker or telephone through a thick glass window, with no opportunity for human touch (Browne et al., 2011, p. 47). Such conditions make it likely that family relationships deteriorate when one is put in restrictive housing. Further, we know that gang affiliates are overrepresented in restrictive housing for indeterminate periods (Pyrooz, 2020; Tachiki, 1995), making it more likely that gang members in prison have fewer opportunities to bond with and remain connected with family members. If this is the case, we would expect that gang members (either former or current) would experience less family support upon release and consequently, will have more trouble reintegrating into communities. Given the current state of literature, however, we do not know if gang members who are released from prison experience lower levels of family support.

Peer Support

Peer criminality is a consistent predictor of deviant behavior, even during reentry (Breese et al., 2000; Boman & Mowen, 2017; Taxman, 2017; Visher & Travis, 2003, 2011). To understand why, researchers often draw on theories from the social learning tradition such as Sutherland's differential association theory (1939, 1947).

According to theory, criminality or the tendency to engage in criminal behavior, arises and develops through the interaction with others who have deeper criminal values and have greater criminal skills (Sutherland, 1947). In studying the effects of peers for reentry outcomes, far less research has considered the positive impact peers can have on individuals (Bowen & Mowen, 2017; Hlavka et al., 2015; Western et al., 2015). This is unfortunate, because peers could be important sources of emotional, social and material support (Taxman, 2017, Colvin et al., 2002). For example, peers may serve to help formerly incarcerated individuals navigate a recently gentrified neighborhood, learn how to use public transit, or get a bank account (Grieb et al., 2014). Indicating that peer support could serve as an important protective factor during reentry. Recently, Bowen and Mowen (2017), using data from the Serious and Violent Offender Reentry Initiative, tested the role of peer support during the reentry process. They found that while peer criminality increased the odds of substance use and criminal offending, peer support was related to significantly lower odds of substance use and offending. Leading the authors to conclude that peer support must be understood as a mechanism that drives desistance independently of peer crime.

Most work on gangs and gang behaviors have focused on an individual's deviant network of friends (e.g., Battin-Pearson, 1998; Decker et al. 2013; Krohn & Thornberry, 2008). This focus on peer criminality is warranted because gangs are deviant groups and membership in these groups would imply exposure to more deviant peers. Less is known about the impact of peer support for gang members behaviors, especially within the context of reentry. Peer support may be especially important for former gang members,

who may have broken away from the gang, and in turn may have cut ties with a large number of deviant peers in their network. Given the current state of literature we do not know if current and former gang members have differential peer support upon release and if this in turn impacts reintegration outcomes. Thus, more research is required to test if peer support acts as a protective factor during reentry for gang members.

Housing Problems

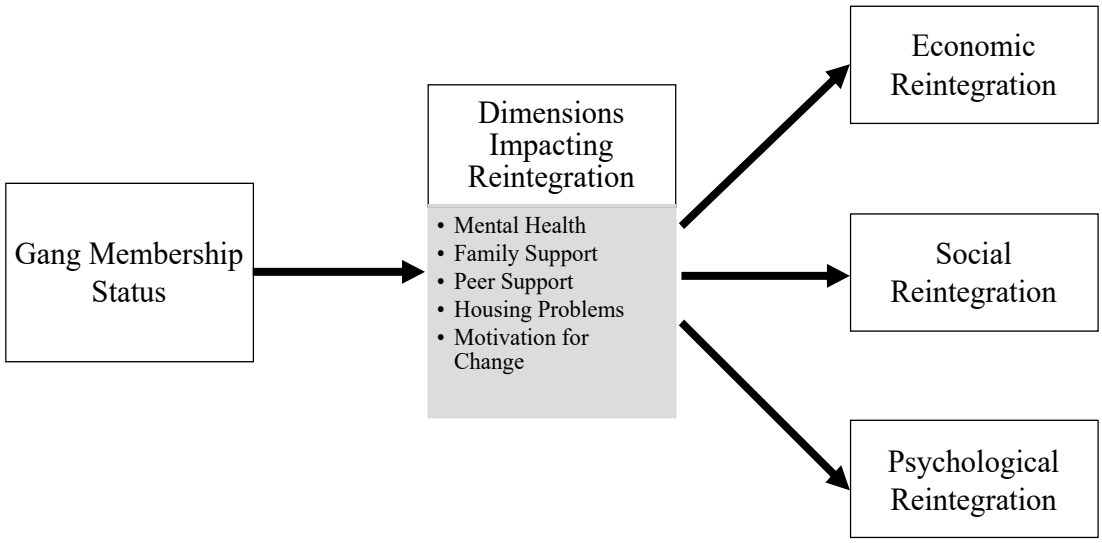
Shelter is a basic human need, essential for the well-being of an individual. Despite this, research finds that formerly incarcerated individuals often experience high rates of homelessness and residential instability (Harding et al., 2013; Western et al., 2015). To be sure, a recent study found that formerly incarcerated individuals are almost 10 times more likely to be homeless than the general public (Couloute, 2018). And while residential instability and homelessness can emerge several years after leaving prison (Remster, 2019), housing difficulties is most common soon after release (Herbert et al., 2015; Metraux & Culhane, 2004; Remster, 2019; Warner, 2015). Reasons for why individuals returning from prison experience housing difficulties, span from prejudices and discrimination against those with a criminal record, to legal barriers that prevent returning individuals from living in certain places. Often, the only option these individuals have are low-income public housing, which are often overrun with drugs, gang violence, and other criminogenic factors (Dunworth & Saiger, 1994), making reintegration more challenging.

Not knowing where one will sleep every night, brings uncertainty to an already unstable life, especially during the first months after prison release (Harding et al. 2014).

Without secure housing, individuals returning from prison may find it difficult to maintain steady employment, maintain family connections, receive much needed physical and mental health care, and avoid substance use (Lutze et al., 2013). For those without secure housing, the time spent trying to find somewhere to live could be spent looking for work (Desmond & Gershenson, 2016) and building relationships with others—both markers for reintegration. Despite the importance of having stable housing for reintegration, no research has looked at whether gang members experience greater housing insecurity than other correctional sub-groups. Thus, more research is required to determine if housing problems are more pronounced for former and current members and if this in turn impacts reintegration for gang members.

From the discussion above, it can be concluded that the successful reintegration of formerly incarcerated individuals is a complex process. The experiences soon after release plays a crucial role in the reintegration outcomes of formerly incarcerated individuals. At the time of release, individuals need to have a motivation to make changes in their lives while also requiring support from family and peers to successfully navigate life after prison. In this dissertation I argue that current and former gang members are less likely to have the support and resources that are essential for reentry, and thus, are likely to show lower levels of reintegration when compared to non-gang members. In comparing current and former gang members, however, I argue that former members will have higher levels of motivation for change, thus, resulting in them showing higher levels of reintegration when compared with current gang members (see Figure 3.1 for the conceptual framework).

Figure 3.1: Conceptual Model Linking Gang Membership Status, Reentry Experiences and Reintegration



Conclusion

Recent times have seen a steady increase in the number of studies about gang members in prison (e.g., Fahmy et al., 2020; Johnson & Densley, 2018; Pyrooz & Decker, 2019; Pyrooz & Mitchell, 2019; Pyrooz et al., 2020). This is a promising development, as this area of study was once referred to as the "final frontier" in gang research (Fleisher & Decker, 2001). Despite this positive move toward understanding gang members in prison, remarkably little is known about the impact of gang membership on the reintegration process. This is unfortunate, because research seems to suggest that gang membership serves as a risk factor for relapsing into criminal lifestyle, which in turn has consequences not only for the individuals returning from prison but also for their families, neighborhoods, and society at large. In focusing on the process by which individuals readjust to life outside prison walls, this chapter argues for the need to

look at the immediate experiences of current and former gang members to understand why gang membership may affect reintegration into communities. Ultimately, with more than 200,000 gang affiliated individuals in prisons throughout the United States, there is great need to better understand why gang membership status impacts reintegration. Such knowledge will have consequences for correctional research, practice and policy.

CHAPTER 4

THE LONESTAR PROJECT

The LoneStar Project is a multi-wave study that explores the trajectories, associations and reentry among a cohort of men from Texas prisons. The main goals of the project were to evaluate the interrelationships between prison gangs and street gangs and to understand how gang membership affects offending, institutional misconduct, recidivism, reentry, and program effectiveness upon release (Mitchell et al., 2018). Texas seems to be a particularly advantageous location to meet these project goals as it has the largest state correctional department (Carson, 2015), housing more inmates than any other state. Further, the prison gang population in Texas has been steadily increasing since the 1980s. Given this, studying gangs and returning inmates in Texas is beneficial, as insights from this project can serve as an example for other correctional departments.

To meet the goals set out, the project includes three waves of data collection, with each wave involving intensive interviews with inmates who were followed for a period of 9 months. Interviews included a battery of questions that covered various topics such as demographic information, physical and mental health, criminological constructs, criminogenic attitudes and behaviors, gang membership, social support, family contact, peers, employment, housing, prisoner subculture, substance use, offending, victimization, and case management. The vast majority of these constructs have been validated and used in prior research. The breadth of topics covered by this project make these data ideal for the purposes of my dissertation. Specific measures used in this dissertation will be discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

Research Design

The project employed a longitudinal research design. Specifically, it has three waves of data collection and followed the same cohort of men for 9 months. Data collection began with the first wave which included in-prison interviews. These interviews were conducted with inmates who were at 2 units—the Huntsville Unit and the Estelle Unit—of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ), both located in Huntsville, TX. All inmates interviewed at wave 1 were schedule to be released within one week after the individual was interviewed. The second wave involved post-release interviews with the same group of men interviewed at wave 1, one-month post-release. One month is an optimal time for follow-up because it is identified as a critical time period with respect to reentry outcomes (Freudenberg, 2001; Harding et al., 2014; Western et al., 2015). Finally, the third wave of data collection took place nine months after inmates returned to their communities. This time period is appropriate because about a third of recidivists are found to be arrested within the first six months of release (Durose et al., 2014). Thus, the nine-month interview can be viewed as a critical window of time to gather information about barriers to reintegration (for more details see Fahmy et al., 2018; Mitchell et al., 2018). Overall, following up with former inmates at least twice while they transition back to the community allows for comparisons across characteristics and behaviors that supplement a healthy and successful reintegration process (Fahmy, 2018).

Data collection for the LoneStar project began in April 2016, with all baseline interviews being completed by December 2016. Wave 2 interviews began in May 2016

and were completed by April 2017. Finally, wave 3 interviews began in January 2017 and were completed by February 2018. All baseline interviews were conducted in-person by trained students hired from Sam Houston State University, while one month and nine-month interviews were conducted over the phone by trained students hired from Arizona State University (ASU), Sam Houston State University, and University of Colorado at Boulder.

Sample and Data

The LoneStar Project's target sample size was 800 males with 400 gang members and 400 non-gang members using disproportionate stratified random sampling to analyze differences between groups regarding reentry outcomes (Daniel, 2011). This sample size was selected because 800 individuals with three waves of data provides enough assurance that small effect sizes addressing gang and non-gang differences will be detected in analyses (Mitchell et al., 2018). The original sampling list consisted of 1,310 potential respondents. Of these, project staff initially approached 850 inmates, 48 of whom refused. Resulting in a final sample size of 802 respondents for the baseline interviews. Because longitudinal multi-wave research designs are vulnerable to low retention rates, project staff had a comprehensive strategy in place to follow up with and track respondents (for more information see Fahmy et al., 2018). Despite this, attrition occurred at waves 2 and 3. Specifically, at wave 2 there was a retention rate of 66.3%, with 532 respondents completing interviews one month after release. At wave 3, a total of 515 individuals in the sample completed interviews, resulting in a retention rate of 64.2%. Overall, 632 individuals completed at least one follow-up interviews, resulting in

a total retention rate of 77.7% (see Fahmy et al., 2018). For the purpose of this dissertation, all three waves will be examined. Specifically, wave 1 data will be used to address the first research question and waves 1, 2 and 3 will be used to address research questions 2 and 3.

Sample Characteristics

Table 4.1 provides an overview of gang membership within the sample. Of the 802 individuals interviewed at wave 1, a little over half of the sample (55%, *n*=441) has a history of involvement in gangs in their lifetime. Of these, 9% identified being a member of a street-only gang, 19% identified being a member of a prison-only gang, and 73% identified being a member of a gang that had a presence both on the street and in prison. Further, of the 441 individuals who identified as ever being in a gang, around 32% identified as current gang members while 68% identified as former gang members. All individuals reported being involved in no more than two gangs in their lifetime. Finally, within the sample of gang-members, individuals identified 46 different gangs they were a part of. In comparing the self-reported measures of gang membership status with official prison reports, Pyrooz and colleagues (2020) found a high rate of concordance (82%). Suggesting the reliability of using self-reported gang membership.

Table 4.2 provides an overview of sample characteristics broken down by gang membership status—current, former and non-gang member. Overall, the mean age of the sample is 39.05 years, with current gang members (m=32.43) found to be younger, on average, compared to former gang members (m=38.58) and non-gang members (m=42.10). Looking at the racial and ethnic composition of the sample, Hispanics make

Table 4.1 Self-Reported Gang Membership *(N=802)*

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Gang Membership		
Gang Member	441	55%
Non-gang Member	361	45%
Gang Type		
Street Gang	39	8.86%
Prison Gang	82	18.64%
Both Street and Prison Gang	319	72.5%
Gang Membership Status (n=441)		
Current Gang Member	140	31.75%
Former Gang Member	301	68.25%

up the majority of the sample with 39.15%. This is followed by Whites and Blacks who makeup 28.80%, 25.94% of the total sample, respectively. Other racial groups or those that identified as mixed race make up 5.74% of the sample. When comparing race and ethnicity for current, former, and non-gang member groups, it is found that Hispanics make up the majority for both current (50.71%) and former members (48.50%), while Whites make up the majority among non-gang members (39.83%). The majority of the sample report having less than a high school education. This is especially the case for current and former gang members, with 70% of current members and 69.44% of former members falling into this category. While “less than high school” is also the most commonly reported category for non-gang members, this group reports a higher percentage of individuals having more than a high school education when compared to current and former gang members. Turning to relationship status, 49.88% of the total sample were not married, 14.59% were married and 35.41% were divorced. When

looking at the three groups, former and non-gang members show a similar breakdown across all relationship categories. Current gang members, on the other hand, fall into the "single" category at a much higher percentage when compared to former and non-gang members. Finally, current, former and non-gang members reported having a similar number of children with the mean number of children for the total sample being 1.89 (SD=1.96).

Moving on to criminal history, in general, we see that former gang members are the most deeply involved in the criminal justice system. For example, the mean number of incarcerations of the total sample, including the current incarceration was 1.99. Former members, however, are found to have a slightly higher number of incarcerations (m=2.24) compared to current members (m=1.78) and non-gang members (m=1.87). When considering the times served, the total sample served an average of 4.91 years, with former gang members (m=5.93 years) serving the longest term (m=5.92), on average, as compared to current (m= 4 years) and non-gang members (m= 4.42 years). Moving on to prison misconduct, we see a slightly different trend, with current gang members having the highest number of official misconduct cases (m=12.01), followed by former gang members (m=10.22) and non-gang members (m=5.81). Finally, looking at the type of offenses committed, current, former and non-gang members show relatively similar trends for violent crime. A greater percentage of current and former gang members, however, seem to be incarcerated for drug crimes as compared to non-gang members. Current gang members also report more instances of property crime (25%) as compared to former and non-gang members.

Table 4.2 Sample Characteristics

Variables	Current Member *(n=140)* Mean/% (SD)	Former Member *(n=301)* Mean/% (SD)	Non-Member *(n=361)* Mean/% (SD)	Total Sample *(n=802)* Mean/% (SD)
Age	32.43 (7.83)	38.58 (9.40)	42.10 (12.50)	39.05 (11.22)
Race and ethnicity				
Black	27.86%	25.25%	25.63%	25.94%
Hispanic	50.71%	48.50%	26.74%	39.15%
White	17.14%	21.26%	39.83%	28.80%
Other	4.29%	4.65%	7.24%	5.74%
Education				
Less than High School	70%	69.44%	46.80%	59.35%
High School Graduate	23.57%	21.26%	30.64%	25.81%
More than High School	6.43%	9.30%	22.28%	14.71%
Relationship Status				
Single	61.43%	46.51%	47.91%	49.88%
Married	11.43%	16.61%	14.21%	14.59%
Divorced	27.14%	36.88%	37.60%	35.41%
Have Children	1.97 (2.39)	1.94 (1.96)	1.82 (1.76)	1.89 (1.96)
Criminal History				
Number of Incarcerations	1.78 (.94)	2.24 (1.29)	1.87 (1.27)	2 (1.2)
Time Served (in years)	4 (3.94)	5.92 (6.06)	4.42 (5.74)	4.91 (5.64)
Number of Official Misconducts	12.01 (15.85)	10.22 (12.69)	5.81 (12.05)	8.58 (13.25)
Offense Type				
Violent	37.86%	40.86%	39.28%	39.53%
Property	25%	17.94%	18.66%	19.70%
Drug	22.86%	19.27%	12.53%	16.83%
Other	14.29%	21.93%	29.53%	23.94%

CHAPTER 5

GANG MEMBERSHIP STATUS AND REINTEGRATION

The Current Study

This study builds on research done in the area of disengagement from gangs. A growing body of evidence shows that gang membership is temporary, with most members leaving within two years of joining (Pyrooz, 2012). While largely explored within the context of street gangs, few studies have shown similar trends of leaving gangs in prisons (Densley & Pyrooz, 2018; Fong et al., 1995; Johnson & Densley, 2020; Pyrooz et al., 2017; Pryooz & Decker, 2019). In fact, one study found that more individuals exit rather than enter gangs when incarcerated (Pyrooz et al., 2017). While encouraging, the studies done on gang disengagement in prison tell us little about why members leave. Primarily descriptive in nature, these studies show that the often-cited reasons for leaving include becoming disillusioned with the gang, becoming involved with the criminal justice system, family responsibilities, and "finding God" (Fong et al., 1995; Johnson & Densley, 2018; Pyrooz & Decker, 2019). Moreover, the reasons for leaving have largely been focused on individual members and events unique to them. No studies have explored if the group context influences gang disengagement in prison. This is an oversight because prior studies have found that the level of gang organization impacts member behaviors such as delinquency (Bjerregaard, 2002; Bouchard & Spindler, 2010; Decker et al., 2008 Pyrooz et al., 2012; Sheley et al., 1995; Scott & Maxson, 2010). To that end, the current study examines the effect of gang organization on gang disengagement in prisons.

Accordingly, the current study extends the disengagement research in important

ways. First, using a large sample of gang members in prison, this study provides one of the first attempts at linking gang organization and gang disengagement in prisons. Second, this study explores the dimensionality of gang organization. Specifically, the aspects explored include leadership, roles, rules, punishments, and money management. By doing so, the study sheds light on the group context, an overlooked area within the study of gangs. Further, by exploring dimensionality, the study provides a comprehensive analysis of gang organization effects on gang disengagement. This is done by examining if various factors of gang organization differentially influence gang disengagement. Third, by using the concept of disillusionment and arguments posed by the congruence model of organization analysis (Nadler & Tushman, 1980) the study attempts to uncover the mechanisms by which gang organization links to gang disengagement. In summary, this study helps identify the extent to which gang organization influences gang disengagement in prison, through its effects on one's sense of disillusionment with the gang. Specifically, the following hypotheses are tested.

Hypothesis 1: Gang organization is a multidimensional construct.

Hypothesis 2: All factors of gang organization will be negatively related to disengagement from gangs in prisons.

Hypothesis 3: The relationship between gang organizational factors and gang disengagement will be mediated by an individual's sense of disillusionment with the gang.

Measures

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable for this study is *gang disengagement* which is captured using a self-reported measure of de-identification (see 'defining gang disengagement' section in Chapter 2 for in-depth discussion). This measure indicates whether an individual who once identified as being a member of a gang, no longer identifies as a gang member. Such an operationalization has been widely used in prior research on gang disengagement (see, Roman et al., 2017; Tonks & Stephenson, 2019). To capture if one has de-identified from the gang, individuals are asked "Have you left your gang."[2] Responses are coded so that *no* = 0 and *yes* = 1. Of the 441 individuals who identified as ever being in a gang, 301 or 68.25 % indicate that they have left the gang, while 140 or 31.75 % indicate that they are still in the gang. For individuals who indicate that they have left their gang, they are asked if they left their gang while in prison. Sixty-two individuals (20.74%) indicate that they had left their gang on the street. Since no further data are available about the duration of time that has lapsed since leaving their gangs and entering prison, these 62 cases are removed from the analysis for the purposes of reliability and validity.

The self-reported method is shown to be a valid and reliable method of indicating a person's association to a gang in a street and prison setting (Decker et al. 2014b; Esbensen et al. 2001; Pyrooz et al., 2020; Webb et al. 2006) and has been used in

[2] Here "gang" could refer to either street gang, prison gang, or both. Specifically, this question asked respondents to think about the most recent gang they were a member of.

previous research to operationalize disengagement from the gang (Melde & Esbensen 2011, 2013). For example, Pyrooz and colleagues (2020) found a high degree of correspondence between prison administrative data and survey data (82%) related to gang membership. Thereby, providing sound evidence for the validity of the self-reported measures of gang membership used in this study.

Independent variables

The main independent variable for this study is *gang organization*. To measure gang organization, 28 items capturing the different components of organization discussed in Chapter 2 (i.e., leadership, roles, rules, meetings, and money) are used. The 28 items ask respondents to determine the extent to which certain statements are true when describing their most recent/current gang. Specifically, respondents are asked if the statements are 0% true, 25% true, 50% true, 75% true, or 100% true of their current or most recent gang[3]. The items include*, "*Your street/prison gang has leaders who make decisions about the gang."; "Your street/prison gang has meetings where gang business is discussed."; "Your street/prison gang has rules that gang members are supposed to follow."; and "Your street/prison gang invests profits back into the gang." (see Appendix A for all items). As discussed in Chapter 2 and drawing on research from the field of organizational psychology, the construct of organization may be multidimensional with different items tapping into different dimensions of the construct of gang organization (Dalton et al., 1980; James & Jones, 1976; Katz & Kahn, 1978; Mintzberg, Burns and

[3] Only 39 respondents indicated that they were in a street-only gang. For these individuals, responses describing their street gangs were considered when measuring gang organization. For the rest of the sample, their responses describing their prison gang were used to measure gang organization.

Stalker, 1979). If this is the case, some constructs may be more important for gang disengagement than other. This idea, however, has only been tested marginally within the gang literature. For this reason, in the current study, the items are first analyzed to determine if gang organization is a multidimensional construct. While prior research and theory guide this analysis, given the lack of conceptualization of gang organization, no predictions regarding the number of constructs underlying gang organization are made. The analyses can be viewed as an exploratory endeavor, making exploratory factor analysis (EFA) an appropriate method of investigation (Rocque, 2012). More information about EFA and the steps followed in the analyses are provided in the next section.

The mediating variable for this study is a *sense of disillusionment* with the gang. A sense of disillusionment is defined a "unmet expectations produc[ing] a psychosocial state of discontent." (Bubloz & Simi, 2015, p. 336). According to the cognitive-emotional theory of gang exit, individuals leave their gang when they experience a sense of disillusionment with the gang because they experience an incongruence in self-appraisals in identity (Bubloz & Simi, 2015). This incongruence leads to negative affect, social distress and anger, encouraging members to suppress gang roles and promote non-gang roles. In this study a sense of disillusionment is measured using responses to a number of open-ended questions[4]. All questions reflect reasons for why individuals have left or think they will leave their gang in the future. Specifically, for individuals who indicate that they have left their gang (n=239), they are asked "Thinking about the gang you most

[4] Given the open-ended format of the questions, respondents were not given any responses options but were rather allowed to come up with their own reasons for why they left or will leave in the future.

recently left, what were the reasons why you left?" Similarly, for individuals who indicated that they are still in a gang (*n=140*), they are first asked if they plan to leave their gang in the future. For individuals who indicate that they plan to leave their gangs in the future (*n=71*), they are asked, "Why do you plan to leave?" For individuals who indicate that they never plan to leave (*n= 66*), they are asked "Why do you plan on staying with the gang?"

Given the open-ended nature of the question, a content analysis is conducted to code for themes of disillusionment with the gang as a reason for leaving. Following from previous work (e.g., Carson, 2018; Decker & Pyrooz, 2014; Roman et al., 2014; Pyrooz & Decker, 2019), a broad conceptualization of disillusionment is adopted to identify any incongruence between personal goals and those of the gang. Thus, any responses that indicate one is tired of the gang lifestyle, one is seeking independence from the gang or if one feels that the gang sold them a bill of goods, are coded as disillusionment. These responses are used to create a binary variable, *sense of disillusionment*, which is coded as 1=*yes* and 0=*no*. Approximately, 62% of the sample indicate that they are not disillusioned with the gang, while 38% indicate that they are disillusioned with their gang.

Control Variables

To ensure that the relationship between gang organization and gang disengagement is not confounded by other factors, a number of demographic variables that may be related to gang disengagement are controlled for in the analyses. Specifically, *age* (in years), which is the respondents age at the time of the baseline interview. The age

of the sample used in this study range from 19 years to 73 years and have a mean age of 36 years (SD=9.55). *Latino/Hispanic* capture those who report being of primarily Hispanic descent (*n* = 189; 50%) and is the reference category in all models. *White* represent those who report being primarily of Caucasian descent (*n* = 77; 20.37%) and *Black/African American* capture those who report being Black (*n* = 93; 24.60%). *Other race* represents respondents who report being American Indian, Alaskan native, Asian, East Indian, and/or of mixed race (*n* = 18; 4.76%). Education in the sample is captured using three dummy variables: *less than high school* (*n* = 272; 71.96%), *high school graduate* (*n* = 74; 19.58), and some *college* (or college graduate; *n* = 32; 8.47%) with *less than high school* as the reference group.

Further, because romantic relationships may play an important role in gang disengagement (Roman et al., 2017; Sampson & Laub, 2001), relationship status is included as a control variable. This is coded into three categorical dummy variables: *single* (*n* = 198; 52.38%), *in a relationship*, which includes having a partner or being in a common law marriage (*n* = 53; 14.02%) and *divorced or widowed* (*n* = 127; 33.6%). *Single* is the reference group in all analyses. Similarly, having children may be an important factor for gang disengagement (Pyrooz et al., 2017) and is controlled for in the analyses. *Has children* is a dichotomized variable indicating whether the respondent has any children (1 = *yes*, 0 = *no*). Within the sample, 28.57 % (*n*=108) did not have kids, while 71.42 % (*n*=270) had at least one child.

Analytic Strategy

The main aim of this analysis is to determine why individuals leave gangs in

prison. Given this, the analyses in this chapter only make use of those individuals who indicate that they are in a gang (n=441). From this sub-sample, another 62 individuals are removed from the analysis as they indicate that they left their gang prior to entering prison. An additional 8% of individuals (n=29) have missing data on key items that are used for the analysis. Missing data were carefully examined and are not found to follow a discernable pattern. Little's MCAR test (Little, 1998) indicate that there is no covariate dependence on missing data. As a result, listwise deletion is determined as an appropriate method by which to deal with missing data. Thus, the final analyses are done on 349 individual who indicate that they were ever in a gang.

The analyses follow four stages. The first stage focuses on examining the dimensionality of gang organization. To do this, a factor analysis is conducted. A detailed explanation of the steps followed for the factor analysis is provided below. Once the best fitting structure is determined, the analysis moves to the second stage. This involves running bivariate statistics to examine the associations among the key variables of interest. Third, given the dichotomous nature of the dependent variable (having left the gang or not), logistic regressions models are estimated (Menard, 2002). Logistic regression is well suited for these analyses for several reasons. First, it does not require normally distributed independent variables. Second, it does not assume linearity of the relationship between the dependent and the independent variables. And finally, it does not assume homoscedasticity (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). In this study, logistic regressions are used to assesses if gang organization is associated with gang disengagement and if an individual's sense of disillusionment mediates this relationship.

To do this, a modified version of Baron and Kenny's (1986) four step approach to testing mediation is followed. Specifically, four models are estimated.

Model 1 is the baseline model including only the control variables (i.e., age, race, education, relationship status and has children). In Model 2, the gang organizational factors identified through EFA are included in the analyses. The Wald chi-square ($\chi 2$) and likelihood-ratio tests are used to ensure the explanatory variables in the model are significant such that they add meaning to the model and provide a better fit than the baseline model (Britt & Weisburd, 2010). Next, because I am interested in understanding if a sense of disillusionment mediates the link between gang organization and disengagement, Model 3 regresses sense of disillusionment on the organizational factors, while holding all control variables constant. Because Model 3 is found to be insignificant, a final model, Model 4, is estimated, treating sense of disillusionment as a second predictor for gang disengagement. All models are estimated in Stata 16 (StataCorp LP, 2019).

Exploratory Factor Analysis

There are two types of factor analyses, namely confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and exploratory factor analysis (EFA). CFA is a way to test whether theoretical relationships specified provide a good fit to the data. In a CFA, the researcher must have a theoretical model in mind before conducting the analysis. The relationships between items and latent traits (as well as between latent traits) are specified by the researcher rather than allowing the program to uncover such patterns without any restrictions (DeCoster, 2000; DeVellis, 1991; Long, 1983). EFA, on the other hand, can either be a

principal components analysis or a factor analysis. The former serves to reduce the amount of data or items with no empirical relationships being specified (Albright and Park, 2009). Principle components analysis is not suitable for the purposes of examining theoretical constructs, as it incorporates both shared and unique variance and ignores the underlying latent structure of the data (Costello & Osborne, 2005). Thus, making it unsuitable for the purposes of this dissertation. An EFA using factor analysis, however, can examine theoretically expected relationships between items and latent variables (Roque, 2012). Given this, and because I am testing whether items identified *a priori* have the theoretically expected relationship to the latent variable of interest while not 'confirming' previous results or models, an EFA using factor analysis would suffice for the purposes of this dissertation. Further, CFA using SEM techniques often require a model with constraints to be tested. But as the purpose of this analysis is simply to determine whether particular items "belong" to shared latent factors, I do not have hypotheses for factor loadings or other constraints.

To conduct the EFA, I first examine descriptive statistics of all items and run polychoric correlation analyses for the 28 items that measure gang organization (Appendix A provides all items used to measure gang organization). All items are identified as theoretically belonging to the same latent construct (see Chapter 2 for more information). Because all measures are ordinal, polychoric correlations are recommended by researchers when conducting an EFA (Garrido et al., 2013; Holgado–Tello et al., 2008; Timmerman & Lorenzo-Seva, 2011). Polychoric correlations are examined to ensure that a sizable number of correlations exceed ±.30, so as to establish that EFA is

appropriate (Hair et al., 2010). Once correlations are established, an EFA, using iterated principal factor method (IPF) and oblimin (promax) rotations, is conducted to identify the underlying factor structure of gang organization. The IPF method is an extension of the principal factor method that seeks improved estimates of the communality. In the IPF method, the initial estimates of the communality are used to find new communality estimates from the loadings. Further, an oblimin rotation is chosen because it is found to provide the best-defined factor structure within this dataset. Such a rotation produces factors that are correlated, which is often seen as producing more accurate results for research involving human behaviors (Costello & Osbourne, 2005). A number of factor models of gang organization are compared and well-established criteria (e.g., eigenvalues, scree plot, parallel analysis, communalities and factor loadings) are used to determine the final model and assess how well particular items represent a given factor.

Results

Factor Analysis

The data are first screened for factorability using several well described criteria such as correlations, sample size or variable ratio, Kaiser–Myer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sample adequacy, and Bartlett's test of sphericity (Costello & Osborne, 2005; Spicer, 2005; Matsunaga, 2010; Beavers et al. 2013). First, the data are screened for univariate outliers. All items are found to be adequate for analysis. Next, with a final sample size of 349, a ratio of 12 cases per variable is found, the variables were deemed to be adequate for factor analysis (see generally MacCallum et al., 1999). After examining the correlation matrix, it is observed that all 28 items correlated with at least one other item

at the magnitude of ±.30, suggesting reasonable factorability (Hair et al., 1995; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). The KMO measure of sampling adequacy is then analyzed. Using the commonly recommended value of .6 (Spicer, 2005), 7 items were removed from the initial 28 items. Once removed, the KMO increased from 0.34 to 0.86. Finally, using the 21 remaining items, the Bartlett's test of sphericity was found to be significant (χ^2 (210) = 2451.630, $p < .05$). Given these overall indicators, factor analysis is deemed to be suitable with 21 of the 28 items.

Using IPF analysis, eigenvalues are then examined to determine the number of factors to retain. Using Kaiser's rule—which recommends retaining factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 (Kaiser, 1960)—and a visual inspection of the scree plot (Cattell, 1966), three factors are identified for extraction. The three factors explained 51%, 14%, and 8% of the variance respectively. To further determine the number of factors to retain, a parallel analysis (PA, Horn, 1965) is conducted. PA is one of the most accurate methods for determining the number of factors to retain (e.g., Velicer et al., 2000; Zwick & Velicer, 1986). Using PA, researchers have suggested to retain only those factors which have an actual eigenvalue that are greater than the parallel average random eigenvalue. Factors that have actual eigenvalues less than or equal to the parallel average random eigenvalues, are considered to be a result of sampling error (Glorfeld, 1995; Horn, 1965; Zwick & Velicer, 1986). Examining the results of the PA in this study, there seems to be a possibility for more than 3 factors. Thus, solutions for more than three factors are also analyzed. Ultimately, however, it is decided that a three-factor solution

explaining 73% of the variance, provides the simplest factor structure. Given this, I decide to retain only three factors.

Next, to determine the number of items to be retained, factor loadings and communalities of the 21 remaining items are examined. Two items are found to have communalities lower than the recommended cutoff of 0.4 (Osborne et al., 2008). In addition, another 6 items had cross-loading of over .3. For example, "Your gang communicates gang business in person" had factor loadings of .38 and .30 on Factors 1 and 2 respectively. Similarly, "In your gang, everybody in the gang has responsibilities" had factor loadings of .41 and .46 on Factors 1 and 3 respectively. Due to this, an additional 8 items are eliminated from the analyses.

In the final stage, an IPF analysis of the remaining 13 items are conducted using oblimin (promax) rotations. All items in this analysis have primary loadings over the suggested cutoff of .45 on a single factor (Floyd & Widaman, 1995). The factor loading matrix for this final solution is presented in table 5.1. Overall, these analyses indicate that three distinct factors underly gang organization. Based on prior literature and the items that hung together, the labels proposed for the 3 extracted factors are as follows—Rules and Punishment; Profit Generation; and Leadership. Internal consistency of the three scales is examined using Cronbach's alpha. The alphas were good: .82 for items identified as Rules and Punishment (6 items), .74 for Profit Generation (5 items), and .83 for Leadership (2 items). No substantial increases in alpha for any of the scales could have been achieved by eliminating more items. The final factor, Leadership, is retained even though it has only two items because of the high factor loadings of the two items

Table 5.1 Factor Loadings Matrix

Item	Rules and Punishment	Profit Generation	Leadership	Communality
Factor 1: Rules and Punishment				
Your gang disciplines its own members if they make the gang look bad or weak.	0.82			0.64
Your gang does not hesitate to use violence against another gang regardless of the costs.	0.71			0.5
Your gang punishes someone who claims to be a member but really isn't.	0.72			0.56
Your gang has meetings where gang business is discussed.	0.46			0.75
Your gang has rules that gang members are supposed to follow.	0.78			0.79
In your gang, if someone violates the rules of the gang, they will be punished.	0.9			0.81
Factor 2: Profit Generation				
Your gang makes money selling sex through prostitution		0.77		0.59
Your gang makes money taxing the sales of drug dealers.		0.73		0.67
Your gang makes money taxing the sales of legitimate businesses.		0.74		0.58
Your gang makes money providing protection to people or groups.		0.64		0.49
Your gang makes money transporting people or goods between cities, states, or countries		0.71		0.51
Factor 3: Leadership				
Your gang has leaders who make decisions about the gang.			0.87	0.84
Your gang follows a chain of command for making decisions.			0.88	0.84

(.87 and .88) and high correlation between the two items (*r*=.71). Further, given the theoretical salience of leadership for gang organization (see Chapter 2), it seemed important to retain the factor when measuring gang organization.

Factor scores are created using regression methods (the default in Stata). For all three factor scores, higher scores indicate greater organization of the gang. Descriptive statistics are presented in table 5.2. Because an oblimin rotation is used, correlations between each of the composite scores exist: .32 between rules and punishment and profit generation; .39 between rules and punishment and leadership; and .42 between profit generation and leadership.

Gang Organization and Disengagement from Gangs: Bivariate Results

Having identified three factors of gang organization, the analyses moves on to the second stage. Bivariate correlations are run to confirm associations among the study variables (see table 5.4 for all bivariate correlations among the study variables). Interestingly, only rules and punishments are found to be (weakly and insignificantly) related to gang disengagement in the expected direction (*r*=-.07, 95% CI= -0.178, 0.029). Profit generation (r= .17, 95% CI=0.068, 0.271) and leadership (r=.11, 95% CI=0.007, 0.213), however, are found to have significant relationships with gang disengagement. In that, greater levels of the two are associated with disengaging from the gang. The directions of these relationships are not as expected. Despite this, the analysis moved on to the next stage. The unexpected findings will be discussed in Chapter 7.

Table 5.2 Descriptive Statistics of Gang Organization Factors

Factor	Cronbach's alpha	Variance explained (%)	Number of items
Rules and Punishment	0.82	51	6
Profit Generation	0.77	14	5
Leadership	0.83	8	2

Table 5.3 Descriptive Statistics (N=349)

Variables	Mean/%	SD
Dependent Variable		
Gang Disengagement	62.86%	
Independent Variables		
Rules and Punishment	3.94	0.82
Profit Generation	1.74	1.29
Leadership	3.06	1.34
Disillusionment	37.90%	
Control Variables		
Age	36.39	9.55
Race and Ethnicity		
Black	24.60%	
Hispanic	50.00%	
White	20.37%	
Other	4.76%	
Education		
Less Than High School	71.96%	
High School Graduate	19.58%	
More Than High School	8.47%	
Relationship Status		
Single	52.38%	
Married	14.02%	
Divorced	33.60%	
Have Children	71.43%	

Gang Organization and Disengagement from Gangs: Multivariate Results

The association between disengagement and gang organization is now examined at the multivariate level using logistic regression models. Table 5.5 presents the results from the logistic regressions. To test if gang organization is linked to gang disengagement, I run two models—a baseline model and a model including gang organization factors. Both models have significant LR test statistics (Model 1 = 50.50, $p \leq 0.00$; Model 2 = 59.63, $p \leq 0.00$), indicating good model fit. In terms of collinearity, all variables used in the models have variance inflation factors (VIFs) and condition indices under the standard thresholds. All VIFs are under 1.52 and have a mean VIF of 1.25 and the condition index is 21.91, which is below the standard cutoff of 30 (Mason & Perreault, 1991). Model 1, the baseline model, includes gang disengagement and the five control variables (e.g., age, race and ethnicity, education, relationship status and has children). In this model, only age and having children are found to be significantly related to disengagement. The finding for age is in line with prior work. That is, as respondents get older, the probability of disengaging from the gang increases, when all other variables in the model are held constant ($\beta = 0.09$, $p \leq 0.00$). Having children, however, was negatively related to disengaging from the gang ($\beta = -0.14$, $p \leq 0.001$). While surprising, prior work on parenthood and disengagement can shed some light on the matter. In one of the first attempts to quantitatively study parenthood and disengagement from gangs on the street, Pyrooz and colleagues (2017), found that having a child only leads to disengagement from the gang when male gang members live with their child. Further, in

Table 5.4 Bivariate Correlations Among the Study Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Gang Disengagement	-															
Rules and Punishment	-.07	-														
Profit Generation	.17	.29	-													
Leadership	.11	.31	.43	-												
Disillusionment	.23	.02	.07	.07	-											
Age	.32	.07	.30	.26	.08	-										
Hispanic	.00	.06	-.07	-.33	.03	.00	-									
White	.04	-.01	.05	.16	.06	.13	-.51	-								
Black	-.04	-.03	-.01	.24	-.11	-.10	-.57	-.29	-							
Other	.01	-.03	.11	-.01	.01	-.03	-.22	-.11	-.13	-						
Less Than High School	.03	.01	.09	.10	.07	.01	.09	-.07	-.05	.01	-					
Highschool	-.08	-.05	-.09	-.17	-.04	-.09	-.02	.04	.01	-.03	-.78	-				
More Than High School	.07	.06	-.02	.09	-.05	.15	-.12	.05	.07	.03	-.50	-.15	-			
Single	-.11	-.13	-.10	-.07	-.04	-.33	-.14	-.06	.19	.06	.06	-.01	-.08	-		
Married	.08	-.01	.03	-.05	.00	-.11	.11	-.07	-.04	-.04	-.07	.01	.10	-.43	-	
Divorced	.07	.15	.09	.11	.05	.28	.07	.11	-.17	-.03	-.01	.01	.01	-.75	-.28	-
Have Children	-.06	.06	.06	.04	-.02	.20	.06	-.14	.07	.00	-.08	.07	.02	-.22	.18	.11

studying desistence from crime, Giordano et al. (2011) found that having children do not lead to desistence among males who are socioeconomically disadvantaged and when the pregnancy is unwanted. Hence, it would seem that the relationship between parenthood and disengagement from gangs are conditioned on several other factors. Suggesting that a simple binary measure of having children used in this study may not be adequate to fully understand the role children play in the process of disengagement in prison. Several factors could influence this relationship including the number of children one has, responsibilities of child support payments, or if the children were planned. Suggesting that this finding should be considered with caution.

Model 2 includes the gang disengagement measure, the control variables and three factors of gang organization. Model 2 is found to be statistically significant with a modest overall level of fit/predictive accuracy (Nagelkerke R^2=0.21). Further, in comparing Model 2 with Model 1, the LRT test ($\chi2$=11.68, p<0.008) and Wald test ($\chi2$=11.07, p<0.011) are both found to be significant, indicating that the addition of the three gang organization factors results in a statistically significant improvement in model fit. To further test the fit of the logistic model, I run a Hosmer-Lemeshow (H-L) test that yielded a $\chi2$ of 4.63 and was insignificant (p>0.05) suggesting that the model fit to the data well (Peng et al., 2002). Given that Model 2 is a better fit for the data, I proceed to examine the coefficients of the variables. I find that rules and punishment is significantly

Table 5.5 Logistic Regression Predicting Disengagement from Gangs

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 4		
Variable	***b***	**SE**	**OR**	***b***	**SE**	**OR**	***b***	**SE**	**OR**
Rules and Punishment				-0.43**	0.19	0.65	-.43**	0.13	0.65
Profit Generation				0.24**	0.11	1.28	.29**	0.16	1.33
Leadership				0.01	0.11	1.01	-0.06	0.11	0.94
Disillusionment							1.06***	0.77	2.87
Age	0.09***	0.02	1.09	0.08***	0.02	1.09	0.08***	0.02	1.09
White	0.08	0.31	1.08	-0.09	0.34	0.97	0.03	0.37	1.03
Black	-0.05	0.28	0.95	-0.12	0.32	0.88	0.02	0.34	1.02
Other	0.32	0.56	1.38	-0.05	0.59	0.95	-0.21	0.52	0.81
Highschool	-0.36	0.28	0.70	-0.33	0.30	0.72	-0.46	0.20	0.63
More than Highschool	0.09	0.44	1.09	0.38	0.47	1.46	0.35	0.66	1.41
Married	0.29	0.37	1.34	0.38	0.40	1.46	0.43	0.65	1.53
Divorced	0.14	0.28	1.15	0.16	0.29	1.17	0.13	0.35	1.13
Have Children	-0.14**	0.06	0.86	-0.15**	0.06	0.86	-0.14**	0.06	0.87
Constant	-2.34***	0.52	0.10	-0.82	0.90	0.40	0.93	0.37	0.39
Overall Model Evaluations									
Likelihood Ratio Test	50.50***			57.7***			65.33***		
McFadden's R2	0.10			0.12			0.15		
Nagelkerke R^2	0.17			0.21			0.26		
Goodness-of-fit Test									
Hosmer & Lemeshow	9.88			10.46			9.67		

Notes: Model 3 was not included because it was not significant
**p,.05, *** p<.001

associated with disengagement in the expected direction ($\beta = -0.46$, $p \leq 0.014$)[5]. That is, a one-unit increase in rules and punishments is associated with a decrease in the odds of disengaging with the gang by a factor of 0.63. As with the bivariate results, profit generation is found to be positively and significantly related to disengaging with the gang ($\beta = 0.31$, $p \leq 0.006$). Indicating that a one-unit increase in profit generations is associated an increase in the odds of disengaging with the gang by a factor of 1.37. This finding is contrary to what was hypothesized and will be discussed further in Chapter 7. The third factor of gang organization–leadership—is not found to be significantly associated with disengaging from the gang. Finally, age ($\beta = 0.08$, $p \leq 0.000$) and having children ($\beta = -0.15$, $p \leq 0.05$) are the only control variables that continue to be significantly related to disengagement.

Qualitative Examination of Disillusionment with The Gang

To further understand why gang organization might impact gang disengagement, it is hypothesized that a sense of disillusionment with the gang might mediate this link. As discussed in Chapter 2, using the congruence model of organization analysis (Nadler & Tushman, 1988), I argue that when the gang context is unable to meet the expectation of their members, it results in feelings of disillusionment with the gang, thereby leading to disengagement. To understand if individuals become disillusioned with the gang, a content analysis is conducted on responses to various open-ended survey questions that ask respondents why they left the gang or why they plan to leave the gang in the future.

[5] This is an interesting finding since the bivariate correlation was found to be weak and insignificant. When further analyses were conducted it was found that profit generation had a suppression effect on rules and punishments, likely masking the effect of gang rules on gang disengagement.

Of the individuals who disengaged from the gang, 97 (47.32%) indicate that they left because they became disillusioned with it. While 33 (24.09%) of those who are still in the gang indicate that they will leave the gang because they are disillusioned by it.

Disillusionment with the gang is expressed in several ways ranging from being tired with the gang lifestyle to the lack of loyalty shown by fellow gang members. The most common reason for leaving the gang centered around being tired with the lifestyle. For example, an individual who no longer identifies as a gang member said that he left because there "was just too much violence and some of the violence wasn't even justified." Another respondent, who also left the gang said, "I got tired of losing people I grew up with, get tired of deaths, got tired of getting stabbed, got tired of all the stuff, could have been home 2005 or 2006 but I have been down here for 15 years."

Another commonly listed reason for becoming disillusioned with the gang, was that the lifestyle was no longer in line with what members wanted for their life. For example, one respondent who is still in a gang said that gang life "doesn't go with my goals." Another said that the gang is "not for me anymore. I just don't have no love in it like I used to."

The lack of loyalty in the gang and gang politics were other recurring themes that represented feelings of disillusionment with the gangs. For example, one respondent explained that he left the gang because he "got tired of the politics and got backstabbed by my own gang friend." Another said that he left the gang "because certain people that were leaders were just using other people to benefit themselves, it was supposed to be everybody benefiting but only a few were benefiting." Similarly, one respondent who is

still in the gang, said that he would leave in the future because he was "getting old, and there was not as much loyalty on the street as prison." Finally, others stated that they left or will leave the gang because it is not what they thought it would be. One respondent, who had left the gang stated that the gang "wasn't what it was supposed to be, everything started changing and no one was doing what they were supposed to be." Another said that he did not need the gang because "It wasn't what it was supposed to be." And that he "can do 'me' without it" One respondent still a part of a gang said, "My experience in the gang wasn't what I expected."

Other than being disillusioned, many left the gang or said they would leave the gang because of reasons ranging from "finding God" to the termination of the gang. For example, one respondent indicated that he "needed God" in his life and so he decided to "serve God." Others explained that they left the gang because they wanted to leave prison and leaving the gang was crucial for this to happen. One respondent clearly explained this reason when he said "I was almost close to leaving TDCJ on parole. I backed off when I left my last unit because I made parole. That is the rule. Anything that has to do with parole, we cut ties. We want you to go home. If you are there you need to be there for them, but we won't stop you from going home." While another claimed that he left the gang "to get out of seg [administrative segregation]; to get out of state-sponsored torture"

Consistent with prior work in this area, some respondents cited family as a reason for leaving the gang. For example, one respondent noted that he left the gang because he "wanted to make parole and get out of seg. My family kept dying so I wanted to get out and spend time with them, I kept losing one a year." Another pointed out that he left

because “his girlfriend told him he had to, or he would lose her.” Even among those who were still in the gang, family was listed as a reason for them leaving in the future. As one respondent pointed out he wanted to “grow up, get married, and have a family eventually” suggesting that gang life would not be in line with these goals. Finally, many others indicated more technical issues for why they left or would leave the gang in the future. Among those who had left the gang, gang dissolution or coming to prison (respondent was in a street gang) were cited as reasons for leaving. For a several members who were in a prison gang, they expected to leave the gang upon release because their gang only operated in prison.

Finally, many individuals indicated that they would never leave because the gang was important to them. This was visibly expressed by one member who said that he “believes in the message (of the gang).” Others explained that they would never leave the gang because the gang was like family to them. When talking about his fellow gang members, one respondent said that “they have been my family when I didn’t have family. It’s friendship and protection and leadership. Just friendship and closeness.” For many others, leaving was not something they planned for because they made commitments to the gangs and leaving was not an option for them.

Gang Organization, Disillusionment and Disengagment

The final stage of analysis involves testing if sense of disillusionment with the gang meditates the link between gang organization and gang disengagement. To do this, Model 3 regresses sense of disillusionment on gang organization factors and the study control variables. The results of this analysis, however, show that the logistic regression

is not significant ($\chi2$=11.07, p<0.011) indicating that the model is not a good fit. Given this, it is concluded that sense of disillusionment does not mediate the link between gang organization and gang disengagement in this sample. Consequently, a final model, Model 4, is estimated where sense of disillusionment is included as an independent variable. Model 4 regresses gang disengagement on the three gang organization factors, sense of disillusionment and the study control variables. This model is found to be statistically significant with a modest overall level of fit/predictive accuracy (Nagelkerke R^2=0.25). Further, in comparing Model 4 with Model 2, the LRT test ($\chi2$=16.20, p<0.008) and Wald test ($\chi2$=15.28, p<0.000) are both significant, indicating that the addition of sense of disillusionment results in a statistically significant improvement in model fit. To further test the fit of the logistic model, I run a Hosmer-Lemeshow (H-L) test that yields a $\chi2$ of 9.67 which is insignificant (p>0.05) suggesting that the model fits to the data well (Peng et al., 2002).

Like Model 2, rules and punishment continue to have a negative and statistically significant association with gang disengagement (b= -0.43, p≤ 0.014). That is to say, a one-unit increase in rules and punishments is associated with a decrease in the odds of de-identifying with the gang by a factor of 0.65. Similarly, profit generation is found to be positively and significantly related to gang disengagement (b= 0.29, p≤ 0.006). Indicating that a one-unit increase in profit generations is associated with an increase in the odds of gang disengagement by a factor of 1.33. Leadership continues to be insignificant in the model, while age and having children remain significant. Finally, and as hypothesized, a sense of disillusionment with the gang is found to be positively and

significantly related to disengaging from the gang ($\beta = 1.06$, $p \leq 0.000$). Indicating that being disillusioned with the gang increases the odds of gang disengagement by a factor of 2.87. The implications of these findings will be discussed in Chapter 7.

Summary

This chapter presented the analyses that explored why individuals leave their gangs in prison. Specifically, 3 hypotheses were tested. The first examined the dimensions of gang organization, while the other two hypotheses explored the relationships between gang organization, sense of disillusionment and gang disengagement. Of these, hypothesis 1 was supported, hypothesis 2 was partially supported and hypothesis 3 was not supported. First, an EFA showed that gang organization is a 3-factor construct made up of rules and punishment, profit generation and leadership. Next, to examine the relationship between gang organization factors and gang disengagement, logistic regressions were run. This analysis showed that rules and punishments was significantly and negatively related to gang disengagement. Unexpectedly, however, profit generation was significantly and positively related to gang disengagement. Finally, leadership was not found to be significantly related to gang disengagement. To determine if a sense of disillusionment with the gang mediated the relationship between gang organization and gang disengagement, additional logistic regressions were estimated. The results showed that sense of disillusionment was not associated with the three factors of gang organizations, but it was positively and significantly related to gang disengagement. Chapter 7 will explore the implications of these findings for theory, research, and policy.

CHAPTER 6

GANG MEMBERSHIP AND REINTEGRATION

The Current Study

This study builds on past research examining the relationship between gang membership and reentry. As demonstrated in Chapter 5, the majority of gang members will leave their gangs. Despite leaving, former members continue to be at an increased risk for recidivism when compared to those who were never affiliated with a gang (Pyrooz et al., 2021). While not surprising, given that gang membership has lasting effects on the social, economic and psychological outcomes of their members long after they leave (Carson & Vechio, 2015; Decker & Pyrooz, 2011; Krohn et al., 2011; Pyrooz & Decker, 2019), little is known about the mechanisms through which former members are put at an increased risk for recidivism. Understanding the mechanism that link gang membership to recidivism is important for developing programs and policies to effectively mitigate the risk of gang membership after release. To that end, the current study addresses this gap by exploring and comparing the reentry experiences of current, former, and non-gang members one month after their release from prison. Further, the reentry experiences are explored to determine if they affect reintegration outcomes nine months after release from prison. Specifically, it is expected that current gang members will face the maximum number of difficulties upon release and thus, will be the group that is the least reintegrated. They will be followed by former gang members. Finally, non-gang members are expected to face the least number of difficulties and thereby experience the highest levels of reintegration nine months after release.

By exploring the reentry experiences and reintegration outcomes for current, former and non-gang members, the study contributes to the literature on gangs and reentry in a number of ways. First, despite a large body of literature highlighting the enduring consequences of gang membership and a growing body of literature finding gang membership to be a risk for reentry, these two lines of investigation are largely disconnected. The study brings these bodies of work together by using our knowledge of enduring consequences of gang membership to understand the obstacles (i.e., motivation for change, mental health, family support, peer support and housing problems) gang members may face upon their release and reintegration into communities. Second, the study considers how experiences soon after release create opportunities for reintegration. In doing so, this study assesses the usefulness of moment of release measures (Visher & Travis, 2001) in explaining the link between gang membership status and later reintegration into the community. Specifically, Visher and Travis (2001, p. 96) argue that understanding the "pathways of reintegration after prison release" involves focusing on "the complex dynamic of the moment of release." Suggesting that the long-term pathways of reintegration are partly dependent on the many individual experiences of the first month after prison release (Western et al., 2016). In this study, I focus on five reentry experiences that are found to impact reintegration—motivation for change, mental health, family support, peer support and housing problems. Finally, by looking at the extent to which the reentry process differs for current, former and non- gang members, this study sheds light on the different needs and problems the three groups face upon their return to communities. Such a distinction has value for both theoretical

development and practical applicability in the study of prisoner reentry. For example, if former gang members experience specific difficulties at a greater frequency than other groups, interventions can be designed to focus on addressing the difficulties when individuals are identified as former members. The same is true for current and non-gang members. In this way, interventions can be more tailored to the needs of different individuals.

Measures

Dependent Variables

The main outcome of interest for this study is reintegration 9 months after an individual is released from prison.[6] Reintegration is broadly defined as the re-inclusion or re-incorporation of a returning prisoners into their community. To be successfully reintegrated into a community means that an individual is participating in the labor market, is participating in the social life of a community and feels connected to others, including family, friends and community members (Fonseca et al., 2015; Ruben et al., 2011). Thus, reintegration is viewed as a multifaceted process that involves the reestablishment of economic, social and psychological ties. To capture the multifaceted nature of reintegration, three different indicators—economic reintegration, social reintegration, and psychological reintegration—are used. All three indicators are measured at wave 3. E*conomic reintegration* measures an individual's ability to be economically self-sufficient. Economic self-sufficiency is important during the

[6] Since more than a third of recidivists are arrested within the first six months of their release (Durose et al., 2014), 9 months would seem to an appropriate amount of time to measure reintegration (for more details see Fahmy et al., 2018; Mitchell et al., 2018).

reintegration process because it builds self-worth, it introduces structure to the daily lives of formerly incarcerated individuals and it increases informal social control (Krienert & Fleisher, 2004; Western, 2018). To capture economic reintegration in this study, three binary variables are used. A score is calculated by summing the responses to the items to create an economic integration index (alpha=.68). Specifically, respondents are asked "Since your last interview have you 1) gotten a job?; 2) Supported self with a legal, taxed job; and 3) Have had difficulty finding/getting/keeping a job?". Responses to the third question are reverse coded. The scores on this index ranged from 0 to 3, with higher scores indicating higher levels of economic reintegration (m=2.01; SD=1.11).

Social reintegration captures an individual's ties to the community 9 months after release. Research finds that many formerly incarcerated individuals highlight their desire to become more active in their communities by giving back through various civic activities, such as voting and volunteering (Maruna, 2001, Solomon et al., 2001, Uggen et al., 2003). Participating in the community activities allow individuals to build ties to prosocial others and provides them the opportunity to develop a sense of belonging. To capture social reintegration, a social reintegration score is calculated using responses to a set of 9 questions that capture civic participation (alpha=.67). Specifically, respondents are asked "Since your release have you 1) mentored peers, youth, or other community members? ; 2) Participated in the activities of a church, mosque, temple, or other religious group?; 3)Participated in local sports teams?; 4) Volunteered in community programs; 5)Voted in any political election?; 6) Served in neighborhood watch/patrol?; 7) Take part in ethnic/nationality club?; 8) Taken part in business/civil group?; 9) Taken

part in neighborhood ward group/political org?" All responses are measured using a binary scale, with 0 indicating "No" and 1 indicating "Yes". Responses to all questions are added up to create a social reintegration score. Scores range from 0 to 9, with higher scores indicating higher levels of social integration (m=1.12; SD=1.44).

Finally, *psychological reintegration* captures a participant's sense of belonging, identity, and emotional wellbeing 9 months after release. When one does not feel connected to the people around them or feels a sense of isolation, destructive behaviors towards self and others are more likely to occur (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Thus, understanding the extent to which individuals feel a sense of connection to people around them is an important factor for reintegration. In this study, psychological reintegration is operationalized as an index averaged across responses to five items that measure the extent to which respondents feel connected and supported by others (alpha=.73). Specifically, inmates are asked if they strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree with the following statements. 1)"You feel angry at the people around you quite often."; 2) "You consider yourself to be a loner."; 3) "No one seems to care about you."; 4) "You feel neglected quite often."; 5) "It is more important to look out for yourself than to look out for other people." Responses to all questions are reverse coded so that that higher scores indicate higher levels of psychological reintegration (m=1.89; SD=0.48).

Independent Variable

The main independent variable for this study is *gang membership status*. Gang membership is explored to understand if being a current, former and non-gang member differentially impacts reentry and reintegration. To measure gang membership status, a

self-nomination measure is used. Such an approach is found to be a valid indicator of gang membership and is widely used in gang research (Decker et al., 2014; Esbensen et al., 2001; Maxson et al., 2012; Pyrooz et al., 2020). Specifically, at wave 1 respondents are asked whether they have ever been in a street or a prison gang. Respondents who report that they have never been in a gang are recorded as *non- gang members (n*=359*)*. For those who reported that they have been a gang, they are then asked if they have left their most recent gang. Respondents who reported that they have left their gang, are recorded as being *former gang members (n*=301*)*. Finally, respondents who reported that they are still in a gang are recorded as *current gang members (n*=140*)*.

Reentry Variables

To explore why gang membership status might hinder the reentry process, a closer examination of the dimensions that are known to impact reentry is warranted. In general, research identifies mental health, family support, peer support, housing and motivation for change as important factors influencing reentry outcomes (Brooks et al., 2006; Helfgott, 1997; Mears & Cochran, 2015; McGarrell et al., 2005; National Research Council, 2008; Petersilia, 2003; Uggen, 2000; Visher & Farrell, 2005). Thus, the three groups—gang members, former gang members, and non-gang members—will be compared on all reentry dimensions identified above, which are measured at wave 2.

Mental health issues complicate an already challenging move from prison to community (Blakken & Visher, 2018; Harding & Roman, 2016; Mallik-Kane & Visher, 2008; Travis, 2005). Mental health problems make engaging in work or other daily activities difficult and can strain relationships that are important for providing the support

formerly incarcerated individuals need to successfully transition from prison to community. To capture mental health in this study, responses to 10 questions are averaged to create a mental health index (alpha=.83). Specifically, respondents are asked, "In the last month, how often have you felt… 1) calm and peaceful?; 2) angry or irritable?; 3) full of energy?; 4) you have trouble concentrating or making decisions?; 5) lonely; 6) hopeful about the future; 7) you have trouble sleeping?; 8) depressed?; 9) like not eating?; 10) so down that nothing could cheer you up?" Response options range from all of the time, most of the time, sometimes, none of the time. Responses to questions 1, 3 and 6 are reverse coded, so that higher scores on the mental index indicate higher levels of mental health problems one month after release from prison (m=.61; SD=.51).

Family support is important during the reentry process. Family support increases the opportunities for prosocial ties (Naser & La Vigne, 2006; Phillips & Lindsay, 2011; Taxman, 2017), help individuals reestablish themselves in the community (Uggen et al., 2004), provide individuals with the help they need during a job search (Sullivan, 1989), and offers informal social control for individuals (Western et al., 2015), thereby helping individuals successfully reentry communities. Given the important role family plays during the transitions from prison to community, it is captured using 5 questions measuring the extent to which a respondent's family has supported them in the first month after release (alpha=.93). Specifically, respondents are asked "Do you have someone in your family who would; 1) provide help or advice on finding a place to live.; 2) provide help or advice on finding a job.; 3) provide support for dealing with a substance abuse problem.; 4) provide transportation to work or other appointments if

needed; 5) provide financial support." Response options range from strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree. Responses to all 5 questions are averaged to create a family support index, with higher scores indicating higher levels of family support (m=2.35; SD=.64).

Peer support, like family support, serves as a protective mechanism during the reentry process. Peers can be an important source of emotional, social and material for individuals transitioning into communities from prison support (Taxman, 2017; Colvin et al., 2002). In this study, peer support is measured using responses to 5 questions (alpha=.95). Specifically, respondents are asked if they have a friend who would... 1) "provide help or advice on finding a place to live."; 2) "provide help or advice on finding a job."; 3) "provide support for dealing with a substance abuse problem."; 4) "provide transportation to work or other appointments if needed."; 5) "provide you with financial support.?" Response options range from strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree. Responses to all questions are averaged to create a peer support index, with higher scores indicating greater peer support (m=1.86; SD=.81).

Housing problems is another factor that is found to hinder the reentry process (Jacobs & Gottlieb, 2020; Western et al., 2015). Having a house upon release can serve as a stabilizing force, giving people a base from which they can access services, engage with others and participate in a community. To measure if individuals have housing difficulties in the first month after release, respondents are asked to describe their living arrangement. Response options include your own house, your own apartment, someone else's house or apartment, a shelter, a halfway house, a hotel or motel, on the street/you

are homeless, no set place or you move around a lot, some other place or situation. Respondents are also asked how many times they have moved since their release. All individuals who reported living in a transitional housing program, in a shelter, in a hotel, or on the streets or if they indicated moving multiple times since release, are recorded as having housing problems. 29.19% (n=155) of the sample indicated that they have a housing problem. Such an approach has been used in prior research (e.g., Western et al., 2016).

Finally, *motivation for change* reflects an individual's readiness for change. According to Maruna (2001), individual's with higher levels of motivation for change are more likely to successfully reintegrate into their community after prison. And while numerous factors are involved in the actual process of change (Littell & Girven 2002), having a sense of one's readiness to change could help identify individuals who are more or less likely to successfully reintegrate. In this study, motivation for change is measured using responses to 4 questions (alpha=.70). Specifically, respondents are asked 1) "You are tired of the problems caused by the crimes you committed."; 2) "You are working to get your life straightened out."; 3) "You think you will be able to stop committing crimes."; 4) "You are trying to give up friends and hangouts that get you into trouble." Response options ranged from strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree. Responses to all questions are averaged to create a motivation for change index, with higher scores indicating higher levels of motivation for change (m=2.65; SD=.45).

Control Variables

As reintegration is likely to vary based on demographics (e.g., age, marital status),

personal characteristics (e.g., past mental health) and prior involvement with the criminal justice system (e.g., number of years imprisoned), a number of controls will be used in the study. Specifically, *age*, which is the respondents age at the time of the baseline interview (m=39.48; SD=11.10). Race which is measured using a number of binary variables. *White* represents those who reported being primarily of Caucasian descent (29.10%, *n* = 181). *Latino/Hispanic* captures those who report being of primarily of Hispanic descent (38.91%, *n* = 242) and *Black/African American* captures those who report being Black (25.56%, *n* = 159). *Other race* includes respondents who report being American Indian, Alaskan native, Asian, East Indian, and/or of mixed race (5.95%, *n* = 37). Education in the sample is measured using three dummy variables: *less than high school* (59.32%, *n* = 369), *high school graduate* (24.12%, *n* = 150), and some *college* (or college graduate; 16.40 %, *n* = 102). Some high school is used as the reference group because it is the most common education level for prisoners (Harlow, 2003). Relationship status is measured using three dummy variables: *single* (50.96%, *n* = 317), *in a relationship*, which includes having a partner or being in a common law marriage (13.02%, *n* = 81), and *divorced* or widowed (35.85%, *n* = 223).

In terms of personal characteristics, a *history of mental illness* is included as a control, because past mental illness is a strong indicator of current mental health problems (Nishida et al., 2016). It is measured using a binary variable indicating if a respondent has reported having received mental health treatment in the past. 22.54% (*n*=140) of the sample indicated having received help for mental health problems in the past. Furthermore, because *substance abuse problems* have been shown to negatively

affect the reentry process (e.g., Chandler et al., 2009; Malik-Kane & Visher, 2008), it is controlled for in the analyses. Substance abuse problems is coded as a binary variable (1=Yes, 0=No) with 53.54% (*n*=333) of the sample indicated that they ever had a drug problem.

Finally, a number of institutional variables are controlled for, including years incarcerated and prison misconduct. Because the amount of time spent in prison can adversely affect reintegration outcomes after prison, a variable for *time served* is included in the analyses. It indicates the amount of time an individual has been incarcerated with the years ranging from .5 years to 35 years (m=5.25, SD=5.89). Similarly, inmates who engage in misconduct, violent misconduct in particular, are more likely to have difficulties during reentry and are more likely to recidivate (Cochran et al., 2014). Thus, *prison misconduct* is also included as a control variable, ranging from 0 to 146 infractions (m= 8.85, SD=13.80). The descriptive statistics for all study variables are presented in table 6.1.

Attrition Analysis

Attrition is a significant challenge in longitudinal studies, particularly those involving high-risk populations such as released prisoners. In the past, attrition in studies that have followed formerly incarcerated individuals have ranged from as low as 9% to as high as 68% (LaVigne & Kachnowski, 2003; LaVigne & Mamalian, 2003; Nelson et al., 1999; Visher & Courtney, 2007; Watson et al., 2004; Western et al., 2015). Studying formerly incarcerated individuals is challenging because this group of individuals are more likely to have high rates of substance abuse, housing problems, and weak social

systems (Bronson & Carson, 2019; Chamberlain et al., 2019; Fahmy & Wallace, 2019; Harding et al., 2019; Karberg & James, 2005; Geller & Curtis, 2011; Greenberg & Rosenheck, 2008; Remster, 2019; Western, 2018)—factors that are associated with attrition. Given the inherent problem of attrition among longitudinal studies, the LoneStar team had a detailed plan to proactively deal with the issue of attrition, including providing cash incentives and having phone check-ins (for more details see Clark et al., 2020; Fahmy at al., 2018).

Despite these efforts, participants dropped out at waves 2 & 3. Attrition ranged from 33.79% to 35.03% for wave 2 and wave 3 respectively. Specifically, at wave 1, the total sample size was 802 individuals. Of these, 140 were current gang members, 301 were former gang members, and 359 were non-gang members. At wave 2, 531 individuals completed the survey. Of these, 86 were current gang members, 200 were former gang members, and 245 were non-gang members. Finally, at wave 3, 513 individuals completed the survey, of which 77 were current gang members, 190 were former gang members, and 246 were non-gang members. Given that attrition is present in this data, examining the pattern of drop-out becomes essential because if missingness is not completely at random (Rubin, 1987), there is a possibility that missingness can introduce bias in the data (Allison, 2009; Brame & Paternoster, 2003; Mitchell et al., 2021) and can threaten the validity of the study findings by reducing study generalizability and power (Asendorpf et al., 2014). If biased, the data can impact the conclusions we draw from the results and subsequently, the recommendations for future

Table 6.1 Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

Variables	%/mean	SD	Range
Gang Membership Status			
Non-Member	44.88%	-	0-1
Former Member	37.78%	-	0-1
Current member	16.88%	-	0-1
Reentry Variables			
Motivation for change	2.65	.45	0-3
Mental health	.61	.51	0-3
Family support	2.35	.64	0-3
Peer support	1.86	.81	0-3
Housing problems	29.32%	-	0-1
Reintegration Variables			
Economic Reintegration	2.01	1.11	0-3
Psychological Reintegration	1.89	.48	0-3
Social Reintegration	1.12	1.45	0-9
Controls			
Age	39.48	11.10	19-73
Less than high school	59.32%	-	0-1
High school	24.12%	-	0-1
More high school	16.4%	-	0-1
Single	50.96%	-	0-1
Married	13.02%	-	0-1
Separated	35.85%	-	0-1
Hispanic	38.91%	-	0-1
White	29.1%	-	0-1
Black	25.56%	-	0-1
Other	5.95%	-	0-1
Past mental illness	22.54%	-	0-1
Drug problems	53.54%	-	0-1
Time served	5.25	5.87	0-35
Misconduct	8.58	13.25	0-146

research. Thus, before moving ahead with the study analyses, an exploration of the nature of missingness is conducted using an attrition analysis.

To do this, a dichotomous variable is created to indicate missingness (1= Yes, 0= No). That is, any respondent who had missing data on the study variables were coded as 1, while those with no missing data at any wave was coded as 0. A total of 418 individuals had completed data, resulting the total missing rate of 47.88%. Because the purpose of the analysis is to determine if missingness was dependent on any of the study variables, I perform a logistic regression using the missing data variable as the dependent variable, and all other measures used in the study as independent variables. A statistically significant coefficient for any of the variables means that there is a difference between those who have completed data compared to those who dropped out. Understanding if there is a difference between the two groups and possible correlates of attrition is important for a proper interpretation of the results of longitudinal analyses (Deeg, 2002; Mitchell et al., 2021). The results of this analysis are presented in table 6.1. From the results, we can see that individuals who have a history of past mental illness were less likely to have missing data in the study, while those who were former and current gang members were more likely to have missing data. Because some of my study variables impact having missing data at either wave 2 or 3, this indicates that my data were missing at random (Rubin, 1987). To address the potential bias produced by missing data (Allison, 2002) and following the recommendation of various researchers to remedy the problem (Asendorpf et al., 2014; Schafer & Graham, 2002; Sterne et al., 2009), multiple

Table 6.2 Attrition Analysis

Variables	*b*	(SE)	*z*
Gang Membership Status			
Former Member	0.89	0.29	3.09**
Current member	0.98	0.34	2.85**
Reentry Variables			
Motivation for change			-0.71
Mental health	-0.19	0.27	1.42
Family support	0.37	0.26	0.43
Peer support	0.08	0.20	1.54
Housing problems	0.24	0.16	-0.29
Reintegration Variables	-0.08	0.27	
Economic Reintegration			0.38
Psychological Reintegration	0.04	0.10	-1.79
Social Reintegration	-0.50	0.28	0.12
Controls	0.01	0.08	
Age			-0.43
High school	-0.01	0.01	0.75
More high school	0.21	0.28	0.88
Married	0.31	0.35	-0.87
Separated	-0.32	0.37	-0.41
White	-0.11	0.28	-0.04
Black	-0.01	0.30	-1.12
Other	-0.35	0.31	-0.58
Past Mental Illness	-0.34	0.59	-2.97**
Drug problems	-1.03	0.34	0.69
Time served	0.17	0.24	-1.24
Misconduct	-0.03	0.03	-0.64

*Note: ** $p < .01$*

imputation is employed.

Imputations involved a procedure where 10 imputed data sets are generated by a missingness equation that included all study variables for the present study (Acock, 2005; White et al., 2011) and visual inspection of imputation convergence led to the conservative choice of 10 burn-in iterations (van Buuren, 2012). The results from 10 imputed data sets using pooled parameter estimates were combined to account for the possible underestimation of standard errors observed in single imputation procedures (Schafer, 1997). Auxiliary variables where included in the missing imputations, including measures for housing problems, family support, peer support, and metal health at wave 3. Given the different contexts of prison and community, only data for individuals who completed at least one of the follow-up interviews either at wave 2 or wave 3 were imputed. Thus, all individuals who only completed baseline interviews (n=180) are removed from subsequent analyses. Imputed values compare reasonably to observed values, and results using listwise deletion are similar to MI, so imputed results are presented. By doing so, 78% of total study participants were retained in the study sample (n = 622).

Analytic Strategy

The current study aims to determine if gang status impacts reentry experiences soon after release (one month) and to explore if reentry experiences impact reintegration 9 months after release. To that end, the current analysis consists of two phases. The first

phase involves comparing the immediate reentry experiences for current, former and non-members. Comparisons begin by examining bivariate relationships between gang membership status and study variables. Next, multivariate regression models are fitted for each reentry variable—mental health, family support, peer support, housing problems, and motivation for change—while controlling for important covariates. Because these variables follow different distributions, they require different modeling strategies. Specifically, ordinary least-squares (OLS) regression models are estimated for variables that have relatively normal distributions (i.e., mental health, motivation for change, family support and peer support) and binary logistic regression models are estimated for dichotomous variables (i.e., housing problems).

In the second phase of analyses, a series of multivariate regression models for each reintegration variable—economic, psychological and social —are estimated. Specifically, Poisson regression models are estimated for economic reintegration[7], OLS regression models are estimated when examining psychological reintegration, and negative binomial regression models are estimated when examining social reintegration[8]. Each reintegration indicator is regressed on the gang membership status and control variables to determine if reintegration outcomes differ by gang memberships status. Next, the reentry variables are included in these models to determine if the experiences soon

[7] Poisson regression models were chosen because economic reintegration is a count variable (Coxe et al., 2009)

[8] Negative binomial is the appropriate method because social reintegration is a an over dispersed discrete count variable. Negative binomial regression can be regarded as an extension of Poisson regression, and it relaxes the assumption of Poisson regression that the variance is equal to the mean by introducing an additional parameter which estimates the extent of over-dispersion in the model.

Table 6.3 Bivariate Correlations Between Study Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
1																									
2	-.70***																								
3	-.42***	-.36***																							
4	-.02	.13***	-.14***																						
5	.04	-.09*	.06	-.18***																					
6	-.05	.02	.04	.19***	-.24***																				
7	-.02	-.05	.09*	.10*	-.17***	.28***																			
8	.09*	-.04	-.07	.03	.07	-.22***	-.12**																		
9	-.01	.04	-.04	.16***	-.32***	.15**	.08	-.09																	
10	.05	.01	-.09*	.19***	-.40***	.17**	.08	-.07	.21***																
11	.03	.03	-.08	.05	-.01	.08	.18***	-.04	.01	.06															
12	.24***	-.03	-.28***	-.02	.12**	-.16***	-0.1089*	.14**	-.21***	.11*	.09*														
13	-.23***	.16***	.10**	-.02	.09*	.01	.00	-.07	-.10*	-.17***	-.05	-.14***													
14	.10**	-.08*	-.03	.04	-.11**	-.01	.01	.00	.13**	.11*	-.04	.04	-.71***												
15	.19***	-.12***	-.10**	-.03	.02	-.01	.00	.09*	-.03	.10*	.12**	.15***	-.50***	-.25***											
16	-.04	-.05	.11**	.02	.01	.07	.04	.01	.04	-.08	-.04	-.37***	.11**	-.05	-.10**										
17	-.01	.04	-.04	-.05	-.07	.02	.03	-.03	.08	.07	.05	.07*	-.05	-.01	.09*	-.41***									
18	.04	.02	-.08*	.02	.05	-.09*	-.06	.01	-.09*	.03	.01	.34***	-.08*	.06	.05	-.74***	-.31***								
19	-.23***	.15***	.11**	-.03	-.02	.08	-.06	-.06	.04	.03	-.06	-.10**	.19***	-.11**	-.13***	-.07*	.07*	.02							
20	.22***	-.13***	-.12***	.01	.04	-.16***	-.02	.04	.04	.03	-.05	.16***	-.15***	.08*	.10**	-.11**	-.01	.12***	-.51***						
21	-.01	-.01	.02	.04	-.02	.06	.11*	.01	-.08	-.06	.11*	-.05	-.05	.05	.01	.16***	-.04	-.13***	-.47***	-.38***					
22	.06	-.04	-.03	-.04	-.02	.05	-.02	.01	-.03	.01	.02	.01	-.01	-.02	.05	.04	-.06	.00	-.20***	-.16***	-.15***				
23	-.04	.05	-.02	-.03	.31***	-.10*	-.04	-.06	-.14**	-.08	.01	.11***	.04	-.01	-.04	.01	-.08*	.05	-.11**	.07	.07	-.03			
24	.04	.01	-.07	-.06	.18***	-.09*	-.09*	.07	-.02	-.05	-.05	.14***	-.07	.02	0.07*	-.09*	.07	.04	.03	.17***	-.17***	-.06	.12***		
25	-.08*	.14***	-.08*	.09*	-.01	.07	.02	.12**	-.04	.14**	.05	.32***	.06	-.05	-.02	.00	-.08*	.06	-.05	.02	.04	-.01	.01	-.07*	
26	-.19***	.10**	.12***	.04	-.01	.05	.04	.09*	-.07	-.07	-.01	-.16***	.17***	-.09*	-.12***	.20***	-.12***	-.12***	-.03	-.11**	.16***	-.04	.07	-.07	.39***

Note: *p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p<.001

Table 6.3a Numbered Variable List

1	Non-member
2	Former Member
3	Current member
4	Motivation for change
5	Mental health
6	Family support
7	Peer support
8	Housing problems
9	Economic Reintegration
10	Psychological Reintegration
11	Social Reintegration
12	Age
13	Less than high school
14	High school
15	More high school
16	Single
17	Married
18	Separated
19	Hispanic
20	White
21	Black
22	Other
23	Past mental Health
24	Drug problems
25	Time served
26	Misconduct

after reentry mediate this link. All models are estimated on Stata 15 (Stata Corp). All analyses use unweighted data. [9]

[9] As the weights in the data are determined by gang status, sampling weights are not used in these analyses. Because gang status is included in the models, the variation in the sampling rate is exogenous, and unweighted estimation is applicable (Solon, Haider, &S Wooldridge 2015:310–11). As noted by Pyrooz et al., 2020, including sample weights can lead to issues in efficiency (Angrist and Pischke 2009). Further, given that I am comparing groups by gang status, using unweighted estimates can reduce the sampling variance and increases the precision of my estimates.

Results

Bivariate results

The analyses begin in table 6.3 with an overview of the bivariate associations between gang membership status and reentry and reintegration outcomes. As seen in the table, being a former gang member is positively and significantly related to motivation for change (r= .11), while it is negatively and significantly related to mental health (r= -.09). Current gang members on the other hand are more likely to have peer support (r= .09), while they are more likely to have lower levels of psychological reintegration (r= -.09). As expected, being a current gang member is negatively related to motivations for change (r= -.10). Further, when examining reentry experiences and reintegration, we find that mental health problems are negatively related to psychological reintegration (r= -.39), while family support (r= .16) and motivation for change (r= .19) are associated with higher levels of psychological reintegration. Peer support is found to be the only variable that is significantly related to social reintegration (r= .16). Suggesting that higher levels of peer support leads to higher levels of social reintegration. Finally, in examining the correlations for economic reintegration, we see that higher levels of family support (r= .15) and motivation for change (r= .16) are linked to higher levels of economic reintegration, while more mental health problems are linked to lower levels of economic reintegration (r= -.32). Overall, these correlations are found to be in the expected directions, with relationships between variables being weak to modest (correlations range from .08 to .39). The takeaway from table 6.3 is that gang membership status, immediate reentry experiences, and reintegration outcomes are meaningfully linked. Having

Table 6.4a Effects of Gang Membership Status on Reentry Experience (n=622)

	Motivation for Change			Housing problems [a]			Peer Support		
Variables	***b***	**(SE)**	**t**	**OR**	**(SE)**	**t**	***b***	**(SE)**	**t**
Non-Member	-.050	(.040)	-1.24	1.219	(.284)	0.85	.041	(.088)	0.47
Current Member	-.186	(.056)	-3.35**	0.917	(.269)	-0.29	.197	(.101)	1.94
Age	-.006	(.002)	-2.62**	1.027	(.012)	2.27*	-.008	(.004)	-2.15*
High school	.041	(.042)	0.97	1.193	(.287)	0.73	.008	(.084)	0.09
More high school	.017	(.053)	0.32	1.508	(.415)	1.49	.081	(.108)	0.74
Married	-.064	(.055)	-1.15	0.672	(.223)	-1.2	.088	(.121)	0.72
Separated	.027	(.041)	0.66	0.799	(.190)	-0.94	-.018	(.080)	-0.23
White	-.005	(.046)	-0.10	1.019	(.268)	0.07	.102	(.090)	1.14
Black	.061	(.043)	1.40	1.184	(.302)	0.66	.183	(.100)	1.82
Other	-.116	(.084)	-1.38	1.155	(.542)	0.31	.008	(.156)	0.05
Past mental Health	-.057	(.045)	-1.26	0.608	(.153)	-1.97*	-.067	(.096)	-0.7
Drug problems	-.043	(.037)	-1.17	1.507	(.311)	1.99*	-.116	(.074)	-1.55
Time served	.008	(.004)	2.02*	1.013	(.018)	0.71	.011	(.007)	1.43
Misconduct	-.001	(.001)	-0.79	1.017	(.008)	2.22*	.000	(.003)	-0.16

Note: [a] Logistic Regression Model
**p < .05; ** p < .01*

demonstrated statistically significant bivariate correlations between gang membership, some reentry variables and reintegration outcomes, the next step in the analysis is to see if these relationships continue to be significant in a multivariate context. But before proceeding with these models, it is necessary to conduct a series of model diagnostics to determine whether collinearity will bias the parameter estimates. In particular, bivariate correlations between the independent variables do not exceed an absolute value of .40, which is below the traditional threshold of .70, and variance inflation factors are under 1.50, which is well below the standard conservative cut off of 4.0 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2012). According to this evidence, the observed correlations between the independent variables should not result in biased estimates or inefficient standard errors due to multicollinearity.

Reentry Experiences

At this stage of analysis, a number of regression models are run to determine if current, former and non-gang members differ in their reentry experiences one month after release from prison. To do this, the reentry variables (mental health problems, family support, peer support housing problems and motivation for change), will serve as the dependent variables. Tables 6.4a and 6.4b display the relationships between gang membership and reentry experiences net of control variables[10]. The multivariate results

[10] The model *F*-test for each multivariate model, which Stata reports in place of a model chi-square when using multiple imputed data, indicates that the null hypothesis that all coefficients are equal to zero can be rejected. *F* and chi-squared statistics are really the same thing in that, after normalization, chi-squared is the underlying F distribution as the denominator degrees of freedom goes to infinity (Gould, 2013). The chi-square is usually applied to problems where only the asymptotic sampling distribution is known. In multiply imputed data, however, the sampling distribution across the different samples ($m = 10$) is known, which is why an *F* is used in place of a chi-square (Gould, 2013).

indicate that current, former, and non-gang members do not significantly differ in the amount of family support, peer support or housing problems they have 1 month after release. This is an unexpected finding. A possible explanation for such a finding might lie in the measures of reentry used in this study. More specifically, research shows that these post-release experiences are important for reintegration outcome for a majority of formerly incarcerated individuals (Bomen & Mowen, 2018; Brooks et al., 2006; Helfgott, 1997; Mears & Cochran, 2014; McGarrell et al., 2005; National Research Council, 2008; Petersilia, 2003; Uggen, 2000; Visher & Farrell, 2005), regardless of gang status. Consequently, these measures do not account for factors that might be unique to gangs and their members. A more in-dept discussion about these findings can be found in Chapter 7.

When comparing the three groups in their levels of motivation for change and mental health, I find no difference between former and current gang members. However, current gang members show significantly lower levels of motivation for change soon after release as compared to former gang members (b=-.19, SD=.06, $p<0.01$), net of age, race/ethnicity, relation status, past drug problems, time served in prison, and the amount of misconduct one engaged in while in prison. While no prior work has looked at gang members' motivation for change, this finding seems to suggest that motivation for change might play an important role in explaining why former members show lower levels of risk for recidivism when compared to former members (see Pyrooz et al., 2021). A more detailed discussion of this finding and its implications for both research and treatment of gang members is provided in Chapter 7. Similarly, current gang members are found to

Table 6.4b Effects of Gang Membership Status on Reentry Experiences (n=622)

	Family Support			Mental Health		
Variables	***b***	**(SE)**	**t**	***b***	**(SE)**	**t**
Non-Member	.026	(.070)	0.37	.074	(.044)	1.67
Current Member	.018	(.090)	0.21	.140	(.064)	2.18*
Age	-.012	(.003)	-3.69***	.005	(.002)	2.05*
High school	.039	(.070)	0.56	-.165	(.048)	-3.42
More high school	.085	(.083)	1.02	-.043	(.056)	-0.78
Married	.083	(.081)	1.03	-.097	(.067)	-1.45
Separated	-.016	(.066)	-0.24	-.033	(.051)	-0.65
White	-.196	(.078)	-2.52*	-.004	(.052)	-0.08
Black	-.020	(.070)	-0.29	-.032	(.054)	-0.59
Other	.013	(.115)	0.11	-.018	(.092)	-0.2
Past mental Health	-.082	(.074)	-1.11	.362	(.058)	6.26***
Drug problems	-.036	(.058)	-0.62	.133	(.043)	3.12**
Time served	.019	(.005)	3.52***	-.002	(.004)	-0.4
Misconduct	-.002	(.002)	-0.72	.000	(.002)	-0.29

*Note: *p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p<.001*

have significantly higher levels of mental health problems as compared to former members, one month after release (*b*=.14, SD=.06, p<0.05). This finding is in line with other research that show current gang members have higher levels of mental health problems (Baćak et al., 2021; Washington & Meyers, 2005; Wood & Dennard, 2017).

Other than gang membership status, a number of control variables impacted reentry experiences of returning inmates. Unsurprisingly, when considering history of drug problems, we see that those who indicate a past issue with substance are more likely to experience mental health problems (b=.12, SD=.04, p<0.05). Further, having a past history of drug problems increases the odds of having housing problems by 51% (odds ration=1.51, SD=.21, p<0.05). These findings are in line with prior research that find drug issues to increase housing insecurity and increase the likelihood for mental health comorbidities (Kelly & Daley, 2013; McQuistion et al., 2014; North et al., 2010; Ross & Peselow, 2012). Similarly, individuals who have had past mental health issues, are more likely to have current mental health problems (b=.36, SD= .05, p<.001). This finding is expected and is in line with prior work (Plana-Ripoll et al., 2019). Interestingly, having prior mental health issues, reduced the odds of having housing problems by 40% (odds ratio=.60, SD=.25, p<.05). Because research finds that mental health increases the risk for homelessness upon reentry (e.g., Mallik-Kane & Visher, 2008), this finding is unexpected. That said, few have looked at the effect of receiving mental health treatment for housing—which is what past mental health is measuring in this study. This will be further discussed in Chapter 7. Finally, time served was found to have a weak positive effect on family support. This finding is counterintuitive but must be considered with

caution. Because family support was measured one month after release, this measure might capture the "honeymoon phase" of reentry wherein family support could be the highest, following which it slowly declines (Pettus-Davis et al., 2017a). This experience might be particularly pronounced for individuals who have spent a longer time away from their families, who might show great excitement and enthusiasm to help formerly incarcerated individuals upon their release, as compared to those who have been in prison for shorter periods of time.

The next section will consider if gang membership status, along with the reentry experiences discussed above impacts various aspects of reintegration 9 months after release.

Economic Reintegration

One of the purposes of this dissertation was to understand the reintegration experiences of current, former and non-gang members. The major argument I put forth in Chapter 3 is that gang members (former and current) will have more problems upon reentry (as measured by family support, peer support, housing problems, motivation for change and mental health), this in turn will reduces their likelihood of becoming reintegrated 9 months after release. To that end, table 6.5 presents the results for economic reintegration 9 months after release. While current and non-gang members are

Table 6.5 Effects of Gang Membership Status and Reentry Experiences on Economic Reintegration (n=622)

			Economic Reintegration [a]			
Variables	***b***	**(SE)**	**t**	***b***	**(SE)**	**t**
Non-Member	-.024	(.053)	-0.45	.001	(.049)	0.01
Current Member	-.148	(.078)	-1.9	-.088	(.074)	-1.19
Age	-.013	(.003)	-4.29***	-.010	(.003)	-3.26**
High school	.144	(.053)	2.73**	.096	(.052)	1.84
More high school	.014	(.081)	0.17	.000	(.079)	0
Married	.084	(.072)	1.16	.043	(.071)	0.61
Separated	-.004	(.061)	-0.07	-.022	(.059)	-0.37
White	.041	(.057)	0.72	.056	(.056)	1.01
Black	-.064	(.067)	-0.96	-.077	(.064)	-1.2
Other	-.081	(.119)	-0.68	-.071	(.118)	-0.6
Past mental Health	-.141	(.064)	-2.19*	-.034	(.066)	-0.52
Drug problems	-.033	(.048)	-0.68	.016	(.049)	0.32
Time served	.009	(.005)	1.71*	.006	(.005)	1.19
Misconduct	-.005	(.002)	-2.17***	-.004	(.002)	-1.95
Motivation for change				.132	(.073)	1.81
Mental health				-.306	(.075)	-4.08***
Family support				.055	(.048)	1.15
Peer support				-.002	(.035)	-0.05
Housing problems				-.057	(.067)	-0.85

Note: [a] Poisson Model
**p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p<.001*

Table 6.6 Effects of Gang Membership Status and Reentry Experiences on Psychological Reintegration (n=622)

			Psychological Reintegration			
Variables	***b***	**(SE)**	**t**	***b***	**(SE)**	**t**
Non-Member	-.013	(.048)	-0.28	.022	(.045)	0.48
Current Member	-.129	(.065)	-1.97*	-.056	(.062)	-0.89
Age	-.001	(.002)	-0.45	.002	(.002)	0.77
High school	.152	(.049)	3.14**	.091	(.044)	2.08*
More high school	.145	(.061)	2.38*	.131	(.058)	2.26*
Married	.093	(.072)	1.28	.066	(.067)	0.99
Separated	.028	(.050)	0.55	.011	(.047)	0.24
White	-.038	(.052)	-0.73	-.041	(.049)	-0.82
Black	-.070	(.059)	-1.18	-.091	(.059)	-1.56
Other	-.038	(.090)	-0.42	-.025	(.076)	-0.33
Past mental Health	-.055	(.050)	-1.09	.072	(.049)	1.46
Drug problems	-.069	(.043)	-1.6	-.012	(.043)	-0.27
Time served	.017	(.004)	4.21***	.015	(.004)	4***
Misconduct	-.004	(.001)	-2.86**	-.004	(.001)	-2.83**
Motivation for change				.157	(.049)	3.17**
Mental health				-.339	(.051)	-6.6***
Family support				-.003	(.039)	-0.08
Peer support				.013	(.033)	0.4
Housing problems				-.049	(.059)	-0.83

*Note: *p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p<.001*

shown to have lower levels of economic reintegration, these effects are not found to be significant at the 0.05 level. Suggesting that gang membership status is not significantly linked to economic reintegration outcomes. Turning to the control variables, we see that respondents who experienced mental health issues in the past, show significantly lower levels of economic reintegration (b= -.14, SD= .06, p<.05). Further, compared to individuals with a less than high school education, respondents who are high school graduates show higher levels of economic reintegration 9 months after release (b=.14, SD= .05, p<.05). Finally, as one gets older (b= -.01, SD= .003, p<.000) and as the number of infractions in prison increase (b= -.004, SD= .002, p<.05) the level of economic reintegration reduces. These effects, however, are small.

Once the reentry variables are included into the model, age is the only control variable that continues to significantly impact economic reintegration outcomes (b= -.01, SD= .003, p<.05). The most important factor impacting economic reintegration is mental health. Specifically, poorer mental health at one month after release is linked to lower levels of economic reintegration at 9 months after release (b= -.31, SD= .08, p<.001). Neither peer support nor family support impact economic reintegration outcomes, as was expected based on prior research (Hlavka et al., 2015; Mowen & Bomen, 2018; Visher, 2005).

Psychological Reintegration

Psychological reintegration encompasses the emotional, mental, and

psychological elements of reintegration. It reflects an individual's sense of belonging, identity, and emotional wellbeing. The results for the analyses on psychological reintegration are presented in table 6.6. From the table we see that current gang member show lower levels of psychological reintegration at 9 months (b=-.13, SD=.07, $p \leq .05$) when compared to former gang members. No differences are found in the levels of psychological reintegration when comparing former members from current gang members. Moving on to the control variables, respondents who have a high school education (b= .15, SD=.05, $p<.05$) or those that have a greater than high school level of education (b= .15, SD=.06, $p<.05$) show higher levels of psychological reintegration as compared to those with a less than high school education. Further, the level of misconduct in prison (b=-.003, SD=.001, $p<.05$) is weakly related to psychological reintegration. Interestingly, we see that the time spent in prison is positively related to psychological reintegration (b=.02, SD=.003, $p<.05$), suggesting that as longer stays in prison will results in higher levels of psychological reintegration at 9 months.

When the reentry variables are included in the model, gang membership does not continue to have an impact on psychological reintegration outcomes at 9 months. Rather, the two reentry experiences that current and former gang members differed on—mental health and motivation for change—are found to be important factors impacting psychological reintegration at 9 months. Suggesting that these variables mediated the link between current gang membership and psychological reintegration. Specifically, we see

Table 6.7 Effects of Gang Membership Status and Reentry Experiences on Social Reintegration (n=622)

				Social Reintegration [a]		
Variables	***b***	**(SE)**	**t**	***b***	**(SE)**	**t**
Non-Member	-.085	(.127)	-0.67	-.096	(.127)	-0.75
Current Member	-.193	(.176)	-1.1	-.259	(.174)	-1.49
Age	.007	(.006)	1.24	.011	(.006)	1.89
High school	-.038	(.125)	-0.31	-.021	(.129)	-0.16
More high school	.335	(.136)	2.46*	.310	(.133)	2.33*
Married	.191	(.158)	1.21	.159	(.157)	1.01
Separated	.066	(.124)	0.53	.052	(.121)	0.43
White	-.028	(.142)	-0.19	-.037	(.144)	-0.26
Black	.324	(.145)	2.24*	.254	(.143)	1.78
Other	.171	(.207)	0.83	.195	(.213)	0.92
Past mental Health	-.007	(.132)	-0.06	-.004	(.140)	-0.03
Drug problems	-.137	(.106)	-1.29	-.101	(.103)	-0.98
Time served	.006	(.010)	0.67	.001	(.009)	0.08
Misconduct	-.001	(.004)	-0.33	.000	(.004)	-0.04
Motivation for change				.059	(.120)	0.49
Mental health				.059	(.144)	0.41
Family support				.073	(.097)	0.75
Peer support				.291	(.067)	4.31***
Housing problems				-.067	(.123)	-0.54

Note: [a] Negative binomial

**p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p<.001*

that mental health is negatively related to psychological reintegration (b=-.34, SD=.05, p<.001), suggesting that higher levels of mental health issues at 1 month after release is linked to lower levels of psychological reintegration at 9 months. Further, motivation for change is positively and significantly related to psychological reintegration at 9 months (b=.16, SD=.05, p<.01). Indicating that those who are open to making changes in their lifestyle are more likely to feel a greater sense of belongness at 9 months. All other reentry indicators—peer support, family support and housing problems—were not found to be significantly related to psychological reintegration.

Social Reintegration

With many returning prisoners expressing the importance of embedding themselves in their communities (Maruna 2001, Solomon et al., 2004, Uggen & Thompson, 2006), studying social integration becomes important to understand the factors that impact this process. Social reintegration in this study reflects the extent to which formerly incarcerated individuals are participating in various community activities such as attending a religious institution, and volunteering with local organizations. Social reintegration is important because it allows individuals to develop prosocial ties and can impact informal social control. The results of social reintegration 9 months after release are presented in table 6.7. From the table we see no significant differences between current, former and non-gang members in their levels of social reintegration 9 months after their release. The only factors found to increase the levels of social reintegration were having more than a high school education and being Black. Specifically, those who have more than a high school education show higher levels of social reintegration (b=.34,

SD=.14, p<.05) as compared to those with a less than high school education. Additionally, Blacks are found to have higher levels of social reintegration as compared to Hispanics who were the comparison group in this analysis (b=.32, SD= .14, p<.05).

Once reentry variables are included into the model, Blacks are no longer found to have higher levels of social reintegration compared to Hispanics. On the other hand, having more than a high school education continues to positively impact social reintegration outcomes 9 months after release. The only other factor that is found to impact social reintegration is peer support at one month after release. Specifically, higher levels of peer support result in higher levels of social reintegration (b=.29, SD= .07, p<.001). This finding in important as it supports more recent arguments about the dual role peers play during the reentry process. Specifically, peer criminality serves as a risk for recidivating, however, at same time friends can provide much needed support to help formerly incarcerated individuals reestablish themselves in communities (see Boman & Mowan, 2018). A more detailed discussion about this finding is provided in Chapter 7.

Summary

This chapter explored the reentry and reintegration experiences of current, former, and non-gang members. Specifically, two research questions guided this chapter 1) Do reentry experiences of current, former and non-gang members differ?; 2) Do these reentry experiences affect reintegration outcomes for the three groups? With respect to reentry experiences, the analyses show that the three groups do not differ in their levels of peer support, family support, and housing problems 1 month after release. Further, former and non-gang members show similar levels of motivation for change and mental health.

When comparing former and current gang members, however, former members are found to have higher levels of motivation for change and lower levels of mental health problems. Possibly indicating that leaving the gang positively impacts mental health and motivation for change—factors that treatment programs can capitalize on. I provide a more detailed discussion about the implication of these findings in Chapter 7.

In comparing reintegration experiences, the three groups do not show significant differences in economic and social reintegration outcomes. Current gang members, however, are found to show lower levels of psychological reintegration when compared to former gang members 9 months after they are released from prison. This difference in psychological reintegration is mediated by motivation for change and mental health. Finally, when considering the effects of reentry experiences for reintegration outcomes, mental health seems to play an important role for both economic reintegration and psychological reintegration. With lower levels of mental health at one month being associated with lower levels of reintegration. Further, greater levels of motivation for change are found to be associated with higher levels of psychological reintegration 9 months after release. Lastly, social reintegration was most consistently related to the amount of peer support one receives 1 month after release. The implications of these findings for theory, research, and policy will be discussed in Chapter 7.

CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION

The study of gangs and their members has a long tradition in criminology. From Thrasher's (1927) pioneering work in the early twentieth century to the theoretical work of Cloward and Ohlin (1960), contemporary criminology has been significantly shaped by the study of gangs. To demonstrate, gang studies were some of the earliest ethnographic and neighborhood studies in criminology (e.g., Short & Strodtbeck, 1965; Shaw & McKay, 1931; Thrasher, 1927; Whyte, 1943). Prominent criminological theories, such as strain and differential association were also based on studies done with street gang members (see Howell, 2011). And the widely used risk factor framework was shaped by early work on gangs (Decker et al., 2013). Today, gangs and their members continue to spark interest among researchers—as is seen by the exponential growth of studies on the topic. Unlike the early 20th century, however, the study of gangs has moved beyond Chicago to include a wide range of cities (e.g., Los Angeles, Milwaukee, New York City, St. Louis and Phoenix) and employs several academic disciplines (e.g., anthropology, sociology, psychology, and criminology), and methodologies (e.g., ethnographies, social network analyses, and longitudinal analyses).

Increased interest in the study of gangs has been crucial for our understanding of why individuals join gangs, the costs and consequences of gangs, and the efficacy of policies directed at these groups (Howell, 2019). This research has also sparked healthy empirical debates about the proper definitions and measurements of key concepts related to gangs and gang members (see for e.g., Aldridge et al, 2012; Carson &Vecchio, 2015;

Webb et al., 2006; Winfree et al., 1992). Importantly, however, the bulk of research has focused on understanding the individual and environmental factors that are related to gangs, while overlooking the role of group level processes. The unequal advancement in research on gangs highlights what Short (1985) referred to as the "level of explanation problem." According to Short, there are three levels of explanation—macro, micro and individual. Each level of explanation focuses on different factors (e.g., neighborhood variables, individual variables, and group variables) to explain a particular problem and a researcher's implicit level of explanation will influence the way theory and research is developed and conducted. Short argued that the variables used to understand a problem will not only ask different types of questions but will also draw from perspectives that are not easily compatible (Decker & Pyrooz, 2021). To demonstrate this point, he drew from the street gang literature, highlighting how most gang theories are rooted in either macro-level explanations (e.g., social disorganization and sub-cultural norms) or individual-level explanations (e.g., self-control, general strain, and social learning), while overlooking micro-level arguments (e.g., group process, gang structure). For Short (1998), this is a problem because focusing on micro-level explanations is necessary to answer "why" questions, such as why do gangs influence member behaviors?

More than three decades have passed since Short's critique, and the study of gangs continue to suffer from an uneven state of knowledge (Decker et al., 2013; Decker & Pyrooz 2021). From groups processes to gang organization, we know little about the micro-level factors that are present in a gang. For example, we do not know how, and to what extent gang organization impacts group activities of the gang. Our limited

knowledge about gang organization is especially concerning given that it is the second most specific aspect of gangs after criminal activity (Howell, 2012). Consequently, a defining feature of the gang remains a black box due to the lack of research (Decker et al., 2013). In recognizing the importance of gang organization, more recently, researchers have attempted to study this topic by employing various methods such as social network analysis and longitudinal analyses (see generally Leverso & Matsueda, 2019; Melde et al., 2012; Sierra-Arevalo & Papachristos, 2015). For example. Melde and colleagues (2012), using longitudinal data, found that with higher levels of gang organization, members are more likely to become stable members (i.e., stay in the gangs for 2 years or longer). Collectively, these works have demonstrated that gang organization not only influences the function and processes of the group, but it also shapes the criminal behaviors of members (Bouchard & Spindler, 2010). The problem with these studies, however, is that few have focused on the conceptualization and measurement of gang organization. Specifically, many of these studies have measured gang organization as a binary variable, thereby assuming that a gang is either organized or not. In reality, gangs are more variable in their levels of organization, with some (e.g., Decker et al., 2008) suggesting that the gang organization lies on a continuum between disorganized (i.e., informal-diffuse) and organized (i.e., instrumental-rational; see Chapter 2 for discussion). Subsequently, by using binary variables, these studies have failed to capture variability in the degree of gang organization that might exist across gangs, and thus, may fail to capture the extent to which organization matters for member behaviors.

Besides conceptualization, studies on gang organization are limited in scope.

These studies have largely focused on understanding how group level factors influence criminal behaviors and violent experiences among members (Pyrooz, 2012). They have failed to understand how gang organization factors can influence non-criminal behaviors, such as gang disengagement—a growing but understudied area in the field of gang research. Studies have repeatedly shown that former gang members exist (Decker & Lauritsen, 2002; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Horowitz, 1983; Moore, 1991; Padilla, 1992; Quicker, 1983; Sanchez-Jankowski, 1991; Short & Strodtbeck, 1965; Thrasher, 1927/1963; Vigil, 1988) and suggest that membership typically lasts for 1 to 2 years (Esbensen & Huizinga 1993; Hill et al., 2001; Melde & Esbensen, 2014; Pyrooz, 2014; Thornberry et al., 2004; Thornberry et al., 2003). In exploring why members leave, researchers have largely drawn on individual levels of explanation. And much like other areas of gang research, they have overlooked the gang context. With gang organization being important for shaping gang relationships and behaviors, it has the potential to influence an individual's decision to stay or leave the gang. Accordingly, understanding gang organization may be essential to obtain a more complete understanding of gang disengagement.

Ultimately, a more complete understanding of disengagement can serve to design gang responses that help members leave their gangs. This is important because reducing the amount of time an individual spends in a gang, will serve to diminish the short- and long-term deleterious effects of the gang (Krohn et al., 2011). Enduring consequences of gang membership highlights not only our need to develop a more well-rounded understanding of gang disengagement, but also underscores the need to fully understand

why gang membership puts one at risk for negative outcomes after one leaves the gang. From employment struggles to family difficulties, researchers continue to find a host of problems that former members experience after they leave the gang (e.g., Krohn, 2011; Pyrooz, 2012). More recently, studies have found that gang membership serves as a risk for recidivism (Huebner et al., 2007; Dooley et al., 2014; Saunders et al., 2009; Wolff et al., 2020), even after one has disengaged (Pyrooz et al., 2021). Understanding the mechanisms that put gang members, either current or former, at risk for recidivism will help design programs and policy tailored to meet the unique needs of gang populations both in prison and upon release. Despite the importance of such research, few studies have paid specific attention to the reentry challenges of gang members.

Against this backdrop, I aim to fill the gaps in research on gang organization, gang disengagement and gang reentry, with a fundamental goal to inform policy and programs that aim to help individuals out of gangs and help them reintegrate into communities. To do this, this dissertation uses data from two different contexts—prison and community—to examine three primary research questions; 1) Does gang organization matter for disengagement from gangs in prison? —in asking this question, I explore the degree and dimensionality of gang organization; 2) Do reentry experiences of current gang members, former gang members and non-gang members differ?; 3) Do these reentry experiences affect reintegration outcomes for the three groups? Collectively, in asking and answering the questions above, I attempt to bring together micro-level and individual level factors that lead to gang disengagement, while also uncovering the mechanisms that lead to poor reentry outcomes for gang members. Accordingly, the

remainder of this chapter discusses the key findings regarding these questions and their core implications for theory, research and policy.

Summary of Key Findings

To answer the first research question— Does gang organization matter for disengagement from gangs in prison—I first explore the dimensionality of gang organization. Using factor analysis, I find that gang organization is a multidimensional construct made up of three factors namely rules and punishment, profit generation and leadership. Each factor was hypothesized to have a negative relationship with gang disengagement, with a greater degree of each of these factors being associated with lower likelihood that an individual will disengage from a gang. The findings, however, tell a different story. As expected, with more rules and regulations within a gang, the lower the likelihood of disengagement. This suggests that in the absence of clear rules and procedures to govern member behaviors, members will experience high role ambiguity and conflict (O'Neill et al., 2016), which in turn could result in them feeling dissatisfied with their gang. Furthermore, having clear rules could indicate that the gang has consistent and equitable procedures for everyone, providing a framework for members to understand what is expected of them and what will happen if they violate the rules.

Unlike rules and regulations, (illegal) profit generation was positively and significantly related to disengagement. The finding suggests that as gangs increase their involvement in profit generation activities, the likelihood a member will disengage, increases. While unexpected, this finding may highlight the role of violence and victimization in the process of disengagement. In this study, profit generation reflected

the extent to which a gang engages in illegal actives such as drug sales and prostitution. By engaging in illegal activities, members are more likely to be vulnerable to victimization and violence, as there will be a greater number of situations where members are exposed to motivated offenders (e.g., rival gang members) and fewer capable guardians (Taylor et al., 2007; 2008; Wu & Pyrooz, 2015). There is also a greater likelihood that gang members are unable to report violence to law enforcement or correctional staff, if the gang is engaging in illegal activity, due to fear of formal repercussions, thereby increasing the risk of being victimized (Barnes et al., 2012). Being victimized or being exposed to violence, is in contradiction to why many individuals join a gang—protection and a sense of safety (Hill et al., 1999; Katz et al., 2011; Klein & Maxson, 2006; Short & Strodtbeck, 1965). In turn, the constant exposure to violence, may result in "violence fatigue" (Bjorgo, 2002; Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Spergel, 1995; Vigil, 1988), an often-cited reason for leaving the gang (see Roman et al., 2018; Tonks & Stephenson, 2019). Thus, even though profit generating activities might provide opportunities for economic gain (another commonly cited reason for joining a gang), exposure to violence might play a more salient role in the decision-making process to stay or leave a gang. Future research should explore this possibility, to understand when and under what conditions violence will lead to disengagement.

Finally, leadership was not found to be significantly related to disengagement. [11] This null finding, while unanticipated, points to a more important argument about gang

[11] In this study, leadership reflects if there is a clear chain of command in the gang and extent to which leaders make decisions about the gang. It does not reflect leadership style or qualities of the leader.

organization—factors vary in their relevance and importance depending on the outcome of interest. More simply, this means that while the degree of leadership is unimportant in the disengagement process, it may play a crucial role for other outcomes of interest, such as criminal behaviors of members—a possibility that future research must explore. Collectively, the finding that gang organization is made up of multiple factors that have distinct relationships with disengagement, suggests that future studies should test the dimensionality of gang organization and examine how each factor influences a range of criminal and non-criminal outcomes including criminal behavior, victimization, mental health and peer relationships.

To further understand why organization might be important in the process of disengagement I use the congruence model of organization from the open systems theory of organization behavior (Nadler & Tushman, 1980, see Chapter 2 for detailed discussion). In doing so, I link two levels of explanation—micro and individual. This is important because while micro-level processes in isolation yields important knowledge, this knowledge is of greatest value when placed within either macro- and/or individual-level contexts (Short, 1998). Using the congruence model, I argue that individuals join gangs with certain expectations (Bubloz & Simi, 2015). After spending time in the gang, however, members find that the gang lacks the organization to fulfill one's expectations, causing them to become disillusioned with the gang, which will ultimately lead to disengagement. More simply, I hypothesize that disillusionment with the gang mediates the link between gang organizational factors and disengagement. As expected, (e.g., Roman et al., 2018), disillusionment was found to be an important factor in the

disengagement process. Specifically, 38% of the sample indicated that they were disillusioned with the gang. The amount increased to 47% when only those that have disengaged were considered, compared to just 24% of those who were still in the gang. This finding adds to the growing body of work that demonstrates the important role disillusionment plays in the disengagement process (see generally Tonks & Stephenson, 2019). When gang organizational factors are included in the model, however, I find no support for my hypothesis. That is, I do not find a relationship between gang organizational factors and disillusionment with the gang. Suggesting that gang organization has no bearing on feelings of disillusionment with the gang. Given that so many individuals become disillusioned with the gang, the question that future research must answer is why?

Moving on to the second research question—Do reentry experiences of current gang members, former gang members and non-gang members differ—the results indicate a more complex picture than initially hypothesized. Specifically, it was hypothesized that current gang members will experience the greatest number of problems among the reentry variables being measured (i.e., motivation for change, mental health, family support, peer support and housing problems), followed by former members and lastly, non-gang members. The analyses show that former gang members and non-gang members do not differ on any of the reentry factors. While former and current gang members only differ in their levels of motivation for change and mental health. Specifically, former gang members are found to have higher levels of motivation for change and lower levels of mental health problems in the first month after release from

prison. The finding that individuals do not differ in their experiences related to family support and peer support regardless of the gang membership status, was unexpected. One reason for the null finding could lie in the measures used. Specifically, support, both family and peers, was measured at one point in time (i.e., one month after release), thereby assuming that support is a static measure. Recent research, however, suggests that social support is dynamic, with social support seeing initial spikes upon reentry to the community, followed by slow but steady declines after the first 6 months post incarceration (Fontaine et al., 2012; Pettus-Davis et al., 2017a, 2017b; Seal et al., 2007). Indicating that individuals might experience a "honeymoon" phase soon after release during which time support remains high. Declines in support begin long after the one-month mark of release, indicating that while the three groups (current, former, non-gang members) might not show initial differences in the amount of support they receive from family and friends, declines in support, months after release might be more dramatic for gang members, followed by former members and non-members. Future research must test this possibility, given that low or poor social support is one of the "big four" risk factors for general recidivism (Andrews et al., 2006).

Moving on to housing problems, it was found that past drug problems had the biggest effect in predicating who might experience housing instability one month after release. This finding is in line with prior work and reflects various practices and policies that have been used to exclude formerly incarcerated individuals with drug issues from the private and public housing markets (see Williams, 2016 for a review). Given that some research suggests that gang members are more likely to experience drug problems

(Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Gillman et al., 2014), it is surprising that no differences were found in housing problems between the three groups. It must be noted, however, that these studies of substance abuse and gang membership have been conducted among street gang members. Given that the sample analyzed in this study were all in prison and because more than half of state prisoners meet criteria for substance disorders (Bronson et al., 2017), it could be that gang membership status is not an important predictor for drug abuse problems in prison. Similarly, because formerly incarcerated individuals are 10 times more likely to experience homelessness when compared to the general public, the issue of housing is so widespread among formerly incarcerated individuals, that the additional risk of being a gang member has little effect on housing difficulties upon release, thereby resulting in the null finding. Given that housing is an important catalyst for program effectiveness (Pleggenkuhle et al., 2016), future research should continue to explore if gang members experience unique housing difficulties upon release.

Relatedly, another unexpected finding was that those who received mental health treatment in the past were less likely to experience housing problems one month after release. This finding is anomalous as research finds that mental health issues increase the likelihood of housing difficulties upon release (Aidala et al., 2014; Brown et al., 2013; Council of State Governments, 2006; Fries et al., 2014; Herbert et al., 2015; MacDonald et al., 2015; Mallik-Kane & Visher, 2008). One possible explanation for this finding could lie in the way past mental health problems was measured. In this study, respondents were asked if they received help for mental health problems in the past. Suggesting that receiving help for past mental health problems improves housing outcomes upon release.

While no studies have looked at the enduring effects of mental health treatment on housing stability for formerly incarcerated individuals, related research has found that mental health support services have lasting effects for housing stability among homeless adults with mental illness (Stergiopoulos et al., 2019). Future research would benefit from studying the enduring effects of mental health treatment on housing problems.

Moving on to mental health and motivation for change, former and non-members show no significant differences. One explanation is that when individuals leave their gangs in prison—which is what the study examined—individuals get access to more treatment programs such as Gang Renouncement and Disassociation Process (GRAD). These programs could help teach former members skills to mitigate the negative effects of past gang experiences, thereby reducing mental health problems that may arise from past gang affiliations and might motivate individuals to change their behaviors. This finding highlights the need to evaluate the effectiveness of programs available in prisons that target gang members. Preliminary results of GRAD appear to be promising for helping members disengage and reenter communities (Pyrooz & Decker, 2019). When comparing former members and current members, however, it is not surprising that these groups show differences in mental health and motivation for change. To be sure, mental health problems are increasingly found to be a collateral consequence of joining a gang (Baćak et al., 2021; Washington & Meyers, 2005; Wood & Dennard, 2017). Given this finding, future research must explore the types of mental health problems and difficulties current gang members face upon reentry and identify programs to mitigate these difficulties. Turning to motivation for change, while not widely studied within the context

of gangs or reentry, a possible explanation for the differences observed could lie in the fact that many respondents in the LoneStar sample left their gangs because they became disillusioned and associated many of their current difficulties (e.g., incarceration) to their membership. In associating their problems to the gang life, former members might become more motivated to make changes in their lives so as to distance themselves from the gang life. This might include having plans to cut of ties with gang peers and avoid places that might increase risk for reoffending. Future research must test this possibility.

Finally, considering reintegration outcomes at 9 months—the third research question for this dissertation—I find that the three groups did not differ in their levels of economic and social reintegration. Current gang members, however, were found to show lower levels of psychological reintegration, while no differences were found between former and non-gang members. When reentry variables were included into the model, the difference in psychological reintegration between current and former gang members were erased, with mental health and motivation for change becoming significant predictors of psychological reintegration. Suggesting that mental health and motivation for change meditates the link between gang membership and psychological reintegration. When considering the effects of reentry experiences for reintegration outcomes, mental health also plays an important role for economic reintegration. This finding adds to the growing body of work that show how mental health problems can decrease employment prospects for both formerly incarcerated populations as well as general populations (Bakken & Visher, 2014, 2018; Olesen et al., 2013; Perkin & Rinaldi, 2019).

Social reintegration was most consistently related to the amount of peer support

one receives 1 month after release from prison. This finding points to the potential protective effects of peers during the reentry process. While there is a large body of literature that discuss the negative influence of peers to incite criminal behaviors and recidivism (see generally Pratt et al., 2010), more recently Boman and Mowen (2018), found support for the dual role peers play during reentry. Specifically, they found that a group of peers can provide support to individuals when they return to communities, while simultaneously the same group or a different group may have a criminogenic influence. In terms of support, peers can help recent releasees find their way around a gentrified neighborhood, learn how to use public transit, or get a bank account (Grieb et al., 2014), and thus, have the potential to play an important role in reintegration. Future research must look further into the dual role peer influence plays during the reentry process, especially when it comes to gang members and former gang members who are likely to have strong ties to criminal peers.

Implications of Key Findings for Theory, Research and Policy

Having summarized the key findings, the question remains—why do these findings matter? This section addresses the core implications of my dissertation and its results for theory, research and policy.

Theoretical Implications

In terms of theoretical implications, the findings highlight the need for theory development related to gang organization. To date, limited work has been done in this area, in part, because of the lack of meaningful data available on the topic. As discussed earlier, past studies have spent little time discussing and theorizing the concept of gang

organization—in fact not much has been done since the instrumental-rational and informal-diffuse argument discussed by Decker et al. (2008) more than a decade ago. Instead, researchers have chosen to view gang organization as a quality that is either present or absent in a gang (Pyrooz et al., 2012). In doing so, these studies have not only simplified a fairly complex, multidimensional construct but have also constrained the variability of the construct. Thereby reducing the likelihood of uncovering the various factors that make up organization. Moving forward, gang researchers will benefit by borrowing from the field of organizational psychology to develop a more comprehensive conceptualization of gang organization. While gangs are not formal organizations, it is important to recognize that gang organization, like formal organizations, is a multifaceted concept, and thus, there is utility in learning from the extensive work done in organizational psychology. For example, the large body of literature on formal organizations could provide researchers a good starting point to explore and discover the various factors that make up gang organization. Further, criminologists could borrow and modify various measures and analytic strategies used in the field of organization psychology, so as to develop better measures to capture gang organization. This task, while daunting, will contribute to stronger theoretical development of gang organization, while also allowing us to more fully understand and appreciate the gang context in shaping the activities of gangs and their members.

Relatedly, the findings from this research highlights the need for more theoretical development to understand why gang organization matters for individual level behaviors. To say that gang context matters for member behaviors, without understanding and

uncovering the mechanisms that link the two levels of explanation, does little to inform policy and programs aimed at gangs and their members. Researchers have to do more to understand how gang organization factors might interact and affect macro and individuals level factors so as to influence gang activities and member behaviors. The congruence model of organizational behavior, which was applied in this study (Nadler & Tushman, 1980), provides a useful starting point to encourage researchers to build and develop a theory of gang behavior and organization. While no relationship was found between gang organization and disillusionment, the study makes a case for how gang organization might shape the gang context which in turn could influence individual behaviors. Future research must not view the null findings as evidence that gang organization is unrelated to individual level factors, but rather should view this as an opportunity to explore and conceptualize other possibilities that link the gang level factors to various individual level factors. As discussed in the congruence model, the larger environment within which an organization operates matters for organizational structure and individual behaviors. Similarly, the environments within which gangs' function can have profound impact on how gangs are organized, and in turn, can impact the behaviors of members. Moving forward, it is imperative that researchers develop theory that link the different levels of explanations to understand gang behaviors.

Research Implications

The findings of this dissertation have several implications for research on gang organization, disengagement and reentry. The first implication is related to gang embeddedness and gang organization. Gang embeddedness is found to play an important

role for continuity and change in gang membership (Pyrooz et al., 2014) and is suggested to be "capable of overcoming the group processes that reinforce gang membership'' (Klein & Maxson 2006, p. 234). This suggestion, however, is based on our limited understanding of gang organization. As demonstrated by the results in Chapter 5, gang organization has not been adequately conceptualized and tested in the gang literature. Thus, arguing that gang embeddedness is more important than group process can be misleading, given the current state of literature. As rightly argued by Pyrooz et al. (2014), it is likely that gang embeddedness draws from aspects of gang organizational structure. Future research must develop more nuanced measures of gang organization, and study gang organization in conjunction with measures of embeddedness to fully understand how the two factors are related to each other and to the behaviors of members.

A second implication for research concerns the conceptualization and measurement of gang disillusionment. Thus far, research on gang disengagement has largely used qualitative accounts to identify if a member has become disillusioned with the gang. This dissertation is no exception. Specifically, using open ended responses to questions asking members why they left the gang, responses are coded into a binary variable indicating if a member is disillusioned with the gang or not. By using this measure, research has repeatedly identified that disillusionment plays a pivotal role in disengagement. The problem with such a measure, however, is that it tells us little about the mechanisms and antecedents that make one disillusioned. Future research must focus on developing innovative methods to capture and measure disillusionment that go beyond qualitative responses. It is likely that disillusionment consists of multiple aspects such as

affective components and cognitive components (e.g., loss of trust, change in perceptions; see for e.g., Bubolz & Simi, 2015; Maher et al., 2020; Niehuis & Bartell, 2006), which are not captured through existing methods of measurement. Thus, by developing better measures for disillusionment, we would be better able specify the intervening processes through which one becomes disillusioned. In doing so, we can better explain variation in gang experiences and identify the factors that promote disengagement. Ultimately, we need to move beyond saying disillusionment matters and understand why it matters.

In terms of implications for gangs and reentry, this study highlights the need for more research to understand why gang membership continues to be relevant for recidivism even after one leaves the gang. One avenue for research would be to continue to explore various risk and protective factors that are found to impede reentry. For example, researchers have discussed the important role of family conflict for negative reentry outcomes (e.g., Fosco et al., 2012; Mowen & Visher, 2013). Family conflict is problematic because it leads to negative effects on social and emotional health; and increases the likelihood for drug use and crime upon reentry (Pettus-Davis et al., 2017a). Family conflict can exist even in the presence of family support. That is, the same family members who help individuals navigate life after reentry, can also hinder long term reentry outcomes if high levels of conflict exist in these relationships. This knowledge is especially relevant for current and former members because gang membership strains family ties (Scott, 2004). For example, one former member in the LoneStar project indicated that he lived with family upon release. At the time of the interview, however, he

was in hospital recovering from an injury that was inflicted by a family member—who was also taking care of him in the hospital. In this case, the respondent would score high on family support, as his family provided him with housing and transportation (measures used in this study), among other things. However, the measure of support does not capture the chaos and stress that his relationship with his family brings to his life and it certainly does not reveal how conflict in a supportive relationship impacts reintegration. This case, while extreme, clearly demonstrates the importance of studying how conflict in relationships impact short- and long-term reentry outcomes. Further, while this study takes into account common experiences that have been found to impact reentry for formerly incarcerated individuals such as family support, housing problems and mental health, these measures do not account for factors that might be idiosyncratic to gangs and their members. For example, Lee and Bubolz (2020), discuss the role of stigma among former gang members in impeding future avenues of success and social integration upon reentry. Current and former members may also experience more psychological trauma than non-gang members, due to their greater exposure to violence, which might impact reintegration outcomes. Moving forward, researchers should explore reentry experiences that might be unique to current and former members.

In terms of reintegration, this study makes use of measures that capture economic, social and psychological reintegration. This approach was chosen because recidivism, an often-used indicator for reentry success, is a limited marker. It points to just one outcome in a reentry process that requires other expectations and changes to occur, such as housing and employment (Lattimore et al., 2012). Further, in addition to capturing

reoffending behaviors, recidivism, as a measure of success, reflects the decision-making outcomes of actors in the criminal justice system (Austin, 2001; Grattet et al., 2011). This is especially relevant for former members, who often anticipate and experience stigma on behalf of the police (Lee & Bubolz, 2020). The limitations inherent with recidivism outcomes have resulted in many scholars warning against the sole use of such a measure when studying correctional outcomes (e.g., Butts & Schiraldi, 2018; Lynch, 2006; Maxwell, 2005). While this makes sense, the problem is that no measures have been developed and consistently applied to capture reentry success beyond recidivism. To fully understand what gang members, need to successfully reintegrate into communities, we must first develop standardized measures of reintegration. Thus, future research should build on the ideas and measures used in this study to ultimately develop more effective measures of reintegration.

Finally, despite the limitations of using recidivism as a measure of reentry success it will always be a feature of criminal justice policy and practice. This is because it is "the most visible and intuitive indicator of correctional program success from both a political and public safety viewpoint" (Wright & Cesar, 2013, pp 375-376). Consequently, the usefulness of designing reintegration policy and programs for formerly incarcerated individuals would be limited, if recidivism rates remain high. Given the salience of this measure in encouraging politicians, administrators, and the general public to adopt policy and programmatic changes, it is crucial that researchers employ some measure of recidivism in their studies. Thus, if researchers want to understand and capture a more well-rounded picture of the process of reintegration while influencing policy, future

research must continue to focus on measuring various aspects of reintegration along with exploring how the reintegration measures impact recidivism.

Policy Implications

The key policy implications from this study concerns appropriate support interventions for gang members. One of the main findings of this dissertation is that former members have higher levels of motivation for change compared to current members. While future research must explore what motivation for change means in terms of accessing resources in the community and making behavioral changes in one's life, this finding suggests that prison and community programs can capitalize on the motivation for change among former members to help address criminogenic needs (see generally Bonta & Andrews, 2007). Higher levels of motivation for change may indicate greater receptivity to prosocial opportunities (Giordano et al., 2010) and is a feature of specific responsivity within the Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) Model—the dominant treatment paradigm for offenders (Blanchette & Brown, 2006; Ward et al., 2007). While motivation for change is understudied and inconsistently defined (Mossière & Serin, 2014), programs can begin to pay more attention to this factor among former members and understand what change these individuals would like to implement in their lives. Accordingly, former members can be matched to programs that appear to offer opportunities to reach their desired goals.

Another policy implication is regrading mental health upon release. It is found that mental health problems are significantly related to both psychological and economic reintegration at 9 months. This is an important finding as a bulk of research on the

desistance from crime has focused on key turning points, like employment, that are important for transitioning out of crime (Sampson & Laub, 1993; Uggen, 2000). In demonstrating that mental health upon release impacts economic outcomes such as employment, this study expands our understanding about the factors that might prevent one from experiencing certain turning points. From a correctional standpoint, it means that programs targeting mental health needs—which is currently lacking—must be an essential component of reentry programing. Currently, the vast majority of correctional programs are related to mental illness, substance abuse, or comorbidities (Wallace & Wang, 2020). Mental illness and mental health, however, are two different concepts. According to the American Psychiatric Association, mental illness refers to all diagnosable mental disorders. Whereas mental health involves effective functioning in daily activities that result in productive activities (e.g., work, school), healthy relationships and the ability to adapt to change. The bulk of research on mental illness and reentry, finds that mental illness is a weak predictor of recidivism. (for the results of a recent meta-analysis see Bonta et al., 2014). Less focus has been given to general wellbeing (i.e., mental health), leaving many with no diagnosable mental illness without support for daily functioning. Focusing on providing more programming for general wellbeing may be especially beneficial for current members, who are found to have significantly higher levels of mental health problems one month after release.

Limitations of the Study

Despite the many implications for research and practice, the findings of this dissertation must be considered within the context of its limitations. First, with an entirely

male sample, the findings are missing much of how the process of disengagement, reentry and reintegration might vary across gender (O'Neal et al., 2016; Pettus-Davis et al., 2017b). For example, females may have unique factors (e.g., trauma, sexual abuse and motherhood) that shape their disengagement and reentry experiences (Holtfreter et al., 2004; Kruttschnitt & Gartner, 2003). Understanding if disengagement and reentry is different among female gang members is important because studies show that most gangs are mixed-gendered, with females comprising as much as 30% of gang members (Curry, 1998, Gover et al., 2009, Miller & Brunson, 2000). Further, a recent report by the National Gang Intelligence Center (2013) shows that all-female street gangs are on the rise in many areas and that female participation and status in gangs have escalated in recent years. While estimates of female gang members in prison are lacking, Winterdyk and Ruddell (2010), found that 44% of respondents in their study estimated that female Security Threat Group members have increased in the past five years. With female imprisonment rates showing great increases, it is imperative research start focusing on women's special circumstances and conditions (Sawyer, 2018; The Sentencing Project, 2015). Relatedly, given that data were collected from men in prisons in the state of Texas, it is important to note that gang members may have different experiences and gang membership might have different consequences in other states and more importantly, in other countries. Accordingly, the results of this dissertation may be limited to this sample.

The second limitation of this dissertation deals with perceptions rather than objective reality. Specifically, gang organization was measured using gang members subjective perception of the organizational features of a gang. Such an approach was

adopted because no matter how organized or disorganized a gang maybe, of consequence is how a member perceives it. As Thomas and Thomas (1928, p. 572) eloquently put it, "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences." Thus, even if a gang is extremely organized, if a member does not perceive it as such, the effect of gang organization on the individual's behavior might be minimal. That said, future research could benefit from obtaining more objective measures, such as administrative data on gangs, to capture the extent of gang organization and compare it to perceived gang organization in order to further understand the full impact of group level factors on individual behaviors.

The third limitation focuses on the cross-sectional nature of the data used to study gang disengagement and gang organization. Both measures were captured at wave 1, and thus, no claims can be made about the temporal order of organization and disengagement. Further, more recent studies suggest that perceived gang organization might change over time (Leveroso & Matsueda, 2019), indicating that gang organization is more dynamic rather than static. Accordingly, a longitudinal design would be more appropriate to determine whether organization leads to disengagement, or if one's perceptions of organization are impacted by disengagement. Further, Decker and Pyrooz (2021) argue unlike individual level traits (which are largely static) and macro- level variables (which may be slow to change), the groups level factors are dynamic. They are sensitive to new members, new threats (from rival gangs or the police), and new opportunities (criminal and non- criminal), thus, adopting a longitudinal framework could also shed light on the dynamic nature of gang organization and further shed light on how it evolves. While the

LoneStar data certainly have longitudinal measures of gang organization and disengagement, the current study was focused on gaining a better understanding of the concept of gang organization and disengagement in prison. Measures of gang organization and disengagement obtained at waves 2 and 3 can and will certainly be used in future analyses to explore the relationship between the two factors.

Another limitation of this study has to do with the measures used to capture reentry experiences. The reality is that these factors represent only a portion of the many issues people experience upon reentry into communities (see Bahr et al., 2010). Thus, this dissertation does not provide a full test of factors that might be important for reentry and reintegration. For example, the current study only looks at peer support, but fails to look at peer criminality and its influence for reintegration. Because peer criminality is associated with higher levels of recidivism and is extremely relevant to gang members who are likely to have a network of criminal peers (Boman & Visher, 2018; Mowan & Boman, 2018), including peer criminality might reveal important differences across the three groups—current, former and non-gang members, and could have important consequences for reintegration. Unfortunately, such a measure was not available at wave 2 of the LoneStar data and thus, was not captured in this study. Future research must expand on the current study by including various experiences and factors that might play an important role in the reentry and reintegration process of gang members.

Conclusion

While the data presented here may have their own set of limitations, the key findings in this dissertation should not be dismissed. The study adds to the growing body

of research that demonstrates the transitory nature of gang membership, regardless if gang members are on the street or in prison. By including measures of gang organization this study not only helps shine a light on the "blackbox" of gang research, but it also highlights the need for researchers to continue to uncover the group level factors that affect member behaviors. Importantly, while conclusions such as "most gangs are disorganized" might be true, this study demonstrates that they ignore a more important point—even low levels of organization matter for member behaviors. Besides disengagement, this study also emphasizes the need for researchers to explore the non-criminal consequences of gang membership. In studying the reentry and reintegration experiences of current and former members, the study highlights the complexities involved in identifying unique experiences of gang members upon their release. Further, it points to the need for more research to explore reentry factors that go beyond commonly identified risk and protective factors. The fact is, gang membership, either current or past, puts individuals at a unique risk for recidivism (Pyrooz et al., 2021), and thus, researchers need to explore the unique factors that are present among gang members that make them vulnerable to reentry failure.

In the end, this dissertation makes clear that gangs and their members are complex subjects, influenced by a host of factors present at the macro, micro and individual levels of explanation. Further, while gang membership might only occupy a short period of time in a person's life, the time spent in a gang has enduring effects. Researchers have been slow to uncover these effects beyond the more visible criminal justice outcomes. To fully understand the many consequences of gang membership, researchers need to embrace the

complexity involved in the study of gangs, while simultaneously adopting a more interdisciplinary lens to study these issues. Parsing out the complexity would ultimately have beneficial effects on public safety and recidivism. Specifically, by gaining a better understanding of why individuals leave gangs and the problems they face after leaving, would help craft more effective responses that reintegrate current and former gang members into communities, and thereby improve public safety. Beyond the benefits for developing more effective responses, by highlighting the various factors that influence gang leaving and demonstrating the enduring consequences of gang membership, we will be able to humanize gang members, who are often viewed as "hardened criminals." This can help develop compassion for gang members and garner greater confidence for more rehabilitative approaches for gang members. Ultimately, as Maruna and King (2008, p.347) put it, "[j]ustice is, at its heart, an emotional, symbolic process, not simply a matter of effectiveness and efficiency" and thus, to increase confidence in community interventions researchers must tap into "widely shared belief[s] in redemption, the need for second chances, and beliefs that all people can change."

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APPENDIX A

GANG ORGANIZATION ITEMS

How true is this statement of your current/most recent gang? (0% true, 25% true, 50% true, 75% true, 100% true)

Expressive

Your street/prison gang tolerates disrespect from police or prosecutors. Would you say that is..

Your street/prison gang tolerates disrespect from other gangs if there is money to be gained.

Your street/prison gang disciplines its own members if they make the gang look bad or weak.

To your street/prison gang reputation is everything.

Your street/prison gang does not hesitate to use violence against another gang regardless of the costs.

Your street/prison gang punishes someone who claims to be a member but really isn't.

Your street/prison gang will target police officers if they cross the line.

Instrumental

Your street/prison gang has leaders who make decisions about the gang.

Your street/prison gang claims a turf or territory.

Your street/prison gang defends the areas it claims from other gangs at all costs.

Your street/prison gang has meetings where gang business is discussed.

Your street/prison gang follows a chain of command for making decisions.

Your street/prison gang believes it’s every man for himself.

Your street/prison gang has rules that gang members are supposed to follow.

In your street/prison gang, if someone violates the rules of the gang, they will be punished.

In your street/prison gang, everybody in the gang has responsibilities.

Your street/prison gang pretty much allows anybody into the gang if they are down to join.
Profit generation
Your street/prison gang makes money selling drugs, contraband, or other substances
Your street/prison gang makes money selling sex through prostitution
Your street/prison gang makes money taxing the sales of drug dealers.
Your street/prison gang makes money taxing the sales of legitimate businesses.
Your street/prison gang makes money providing protection to people or groups.
Your street/prison gang makes money transporting people or goods between cities, states, or countries
Your street/prison gang invests profits back into the gang.
Communication
Your street/prison gang communicates gang business online using social media such as Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube.
Your street/prison gang communicates gang business using cell phones.
Your street/prison gang communicates gang business using typed or handwritten letters.
Your street/prison gang communicates gang business in person.