



CHAPTER 8

Getting into Gangs

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Miller's concern here is with issues of joining gangs. However, there are two important distinguishing features of her work: it specifically involves female gang members' pathways into gangs and her research strategy utilizes ethnography and personal interviews with females in two separate cities, facilitating comparative analyses and lending further validity to her findings. Miller finds neighborhood peer networks, serious family problems, and the influence of gang-involved family members to be of particular importance in the pathways to female gang membership. Note that it is the accumulation of these various factors that best explains gang membership, a point that will be elaborated and further discussed in the next article.

Gang membership doesn't happen overnight. Research shows that youths typically hang out with gang members for some time—often as much as a year—before making a commitment to join.¹ Moreover, there are pushes and pulls even earlier in life that increase the likelihood that young people will associate with gangs in the first place. The goal of this chapter is to explore girls' pathways into gangs by painting a picture of the broader contexts and precipitating events that lead young women to spend time with gang members and to join gangs.

On the whole, cities like Columbus and St. Louis have not had gang problems long enough to have intergenerational gang involvement within

families. Consequently gangs remain concentrated among adolescents and young adults. The young women in this study typically began hanging out with gang members when they were quite young—around age twelve on average—and they joined at an average age of thirteen. In fact, 69 percent of the girls in the sample described joining their gangs before they turned fourteen. . . . In considering girls' motives for joining gangs, it is important to keep their youthfulness in mind.

Three themes emerged in my research with regard to the life contexts that contribute to girls' gang involvement, at least among the kinds of gang girls in my sample. What's notable is that they emerged independently, both in the surveys—as factors distinguishing gang from nongang girls—and in the in-depth interviews, as contexts that young women attributed to their becoming gang-involved. First were girls' neighborhood contexts, and their exposure to gangs via both neighborhood peer and other friendship networks. A second theme that emerged for some young women was the existence of serious family problems, such as violence and drug abuse, which led them to avoid home, contributed to their weak supervision, and pushed them to attempt to meet social and emotional needs elsewhere. Finally, many young women described the strong influence that gang-involved family members—particularly older siblings in Columbus and siblings and cousins in St. Louis—had on their decisions to join.

While each young woman revealed her own trajectory into gang life, there were many common circumstances across girls' stories. In fact,

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the three themes noted above rarely stood alone in young women's stories of how they came to join their gangs. Instead they were overlapping in girls' accounts. As each told of individual life experiences, most recounted complex pathways into gangs that involved, in varying ways, the themes I've just described. Before I delve into each of these themes in greater detail, it is important to have a clear picture of the extent of their interrelationships, and how they differed for gang and nongang girls.

... Figure 8.1 illustrates how young women accounted for their gang involvement. Girls were classified as having neighborhood exposure to gangs when they said there was a lot of gang activity in their neighborhood, or they reported gang members living on their street. Gang-involved family members included girls with a sibling in a gang, with multiple family members in gangs, or girls who described another family member (e.g., a cousin or aunt) as having a decided influence on their decision to join. Girls with family problems included those with three or more of the following: violence between adults in the home, having been abused, drug or alcohol abuse in the family, or family members in jail. Four additional girls who did not report three of these were also categorized as

such because of their discussions of the impact of family problems. These included Heather, who was sexually abused by multiple members of her family; Rhonda and Latisha, who reported frequent abuse and witnessed physical violence among adults in the family; and Jennifer, whose parents were killed in a car crash, the loss of whom she felt was a turning point in her life.

What's striking about Figure 8.1 is the extent to which young women reported multiple dimensions of these risk factors. Taken individually, a majority of girls fit within each category: 96 percent described living in neighborhoods with gangs (of these, 69 percent explicitly described their neighborhood and peer networks as factors in their decisions to join). Likewise, 71 percent recognized family problems as contributing factors, and 71 percent had siblings or multiple family members in gangs, or described the influence of gang-involved family members on their decisions to join. In all, 90 percent of the gang members in the study report two or more dimensions of these risk factors, and fully 44 percent fit within the overlap of all three categories. ... In Figure 8.1, the names of young women involved in ongoing serious delinquency are italicized. It is notable that only a third of the gang members were involved in serious offending. The majority of girls, despite their gang involvement, were not. ...

Figure 8.2 provides a similar picture of nongang girls' exposure to the risk factors highlighted by gang girls. Nongang girls were classified using the same survey criteria as gang girls. ... Young women listed outside the diagram met none of these criteria, though they nonetheless had some exposure to gangs. Several things are notable in comparing Figures 8.1 and 8.2. First, while the vast majority of gang girls (90 percent) fit in overlapping categories, only a third of the nongang girls experienced multiple of these risk factors for gangs, and only four nongang girls (9 percent, versus 44 percent of gang girls) reported all three dimensions. These data will be broken down individually in Tables 8.1 through 8.3. Those contexts most likely to be shared between gang and nongang girls were neighborhoods that exposed them to gangs, which 59 percent of nongang girls reported. However, only 26 percent of the nongang girls reported serious family problems,

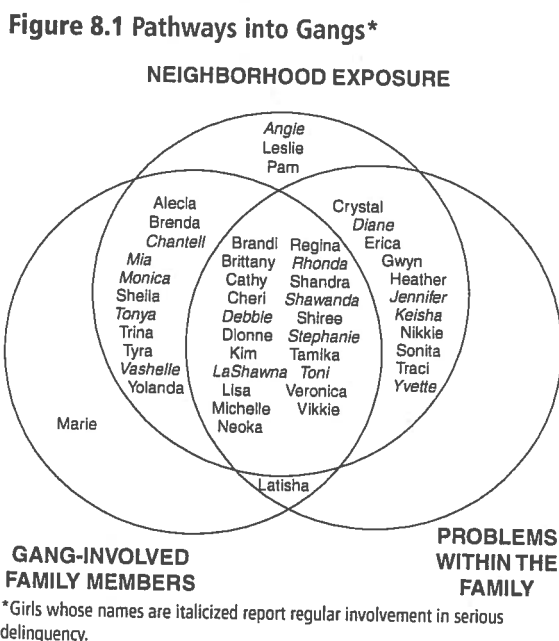
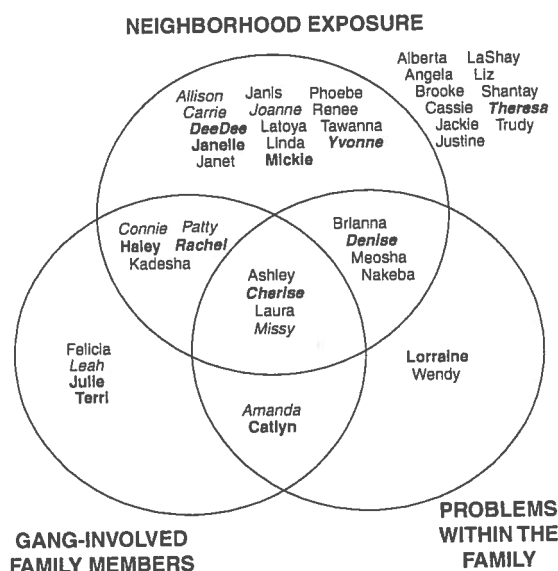


Figure 8.2 Nongang Girls' Exposure to Risk Factors for Gangs

Note: Girls whose names are italicized report half or more of their friends are gang members; girls whose names appear in boldface have considered joining gangs.

compared to 71 percent of gang girls. Likewise, 71 percent of gang members reported significant gang-involved family members, while only a third of the nongang girls had gang members in their immediate family or multiple gang members in their extended family. Thus, while the majority of nongang girls had gangs around them, most didn't have other experiences that could tip the scales in favor of gang involvement. . . .

Neighborhood Contexts and Networks

Scholars long have recognized factors such as neighborhood characteristics, poverty, and limited opportunities as being associated with the extent and nature of gangs in communities.² Recent studies of female gang involvement likewise have made the connection between these factors and young women's participation in gangs.³ In fact, many scholars have pointed to the gang as a means for inner city youths—male and female—to adapt to the oppressive living conditions imposed by their environments. According to Karen Joe and Meda

Chesney-Lind, "the gang assists young women and men in coping with their lives in chaotic, violent, and economically marginalized communities."⁴ . . .

In both [Columbus and St. Louis] there is substantial racial inequality, but on the whole Columbus is more socioeconomically stable than St. Louis. But what about the neighborhoods of the girls in my sample? . . . In both cities, the vast majority of girls in the study lived in neighborhoods that were economically worse off and more racially segregated than the city as a whole. Their neighborhoods had substantially lower median incomes and higher rates of poverty and unemployment than the citywide averages. . . . [Y]oung women in St. Louis were drawn from more [racially] segregated and economically devastated neighborhoods, on average, than young women in Columbus. In fact, two-thirds of the gang members in St. Louis lived in neighborhoods that were 80 percent or more African-American. . . .

Living in these neighborhoods means living in places with substantial amounts of crime.⁵ In recent times, it often also means living in neighborhoods with street gangs. It goes without saying that in order to join a gang a young woman must have some exposure to gangs—at least the one she's joining. It's useful, then, to examine girls' descriptions of the extent of gang activity in their neighborhoods, but also the meanings they attribute to it. An important component of this is the extent to which they view gangs in the neighborhood as having facilitated or contributed to their decisions to join.

Table 8.1 illustrates girls' characterizations of the extent of gang activity in their neighborhoods. In both Columbus and St. Louis, the vast majority of young women described some exposure to gangs in their neighborhoods. . . . My interest here . . . is the extent and proximity of gang activity in girls' neighborhoods. As Table 8.1 shows, gang members were significantly more likely than nongang girls to report "a lot" of gang activity in their neighborhoods, and to note that there were other gang members who lived on their street.⁶ While the vast majority of the gang members . . . described gang activity in their neighborhoods in these terms, just over half of the nongang girls did so. While all of the girls in the study could be characterized as at

Table 8.1 Exposure to Gangs

	Gang Members (N = 48)	Nongang (N = 46)
There is a lot of talk about gangs around the neighborhood	38 (80%)	31 (67%)
There is a lot of gang activity around the neighborhood	40 (83%)	25 (54%)*
There are other gang members living on the same street	39 (81%)	21 (46%)*
There are rival gangs close by	35 (73%)	26 (57%)

* $p < .05$

risk for problem behaviors and detrimental life consequences, only half of them had joined gangs. It appears then, that coupled with other factors, living in neighborhoods with gangs in close proximity increases the likelihood that young women will choose to become gang-involved themselves.

Documenting the existence of gang activity in girls' neighborhoods provides one piece of the puzzle. But what meanings do gang-involved girls attribute to gangs in their neighborhoods, and to what extent do they perceive neighborhood gangs as having had an impact on their decision to join? Because one goal of my study was to try to come away with an understanding of gang life from girls' points of view, this is an important line of inquiry. Other scholars have suggested that gangs can function to alleviate the boredom experienced by inner-city youths, who have few options for recreation or entertainment. John Quicker summarizes, "to be in a gang is to be part of something. It means having a place to go, friends to talk with, and parties to attend. It means recognition and respected status."⁷ In addition, many scholars talk about the protective functions of gangs.⁸ A number of the young women in my study had been victims of crime, prior to as well as after joining gangs. Many articulated a specifically gendered sense of protection that they saw resulting from being in gangs that were predominantly male. . . .

Not surprisingly, the majority of the gang girls suggested that their decision to become gang-involved stemmed in part from exposure to gangs through their neighborhood peer networks. Most often, they described a process in which they began

to hang out with older gang-involved kids around the neighborhood as they reached adolescence, and these associations eventually led them to want to join. For instance, Angie was fifteen when we spoke, and had joined her gang at age eleven. She described how changes in her neighborhood shaped her desire to become a gang member:

It's like, our neighborhood started changing a little bit, people started movin' in and out, and I was associating with the people who moved in and out, you know, and I was just, then, they was, a lot of 'em was in gangs, or things like that, and I wanted to be in a gang.

Because she was so young when she joined, it was a couple of years before she became actively involved. Instead, it appears that the older members thought it was cute that a young girl from the neighborhood wanted to be a member, but had few expectations for her participation. She explained:

They was just like, "Hey, you wanna be a member?" I was like, one day, and I was like, "Yeah, yeah! I wanna be one, I wanna be one, I wanna be one!" Then they put me in and I was in, but then I, and as the years went by that's when I started really gettin' involved wid 'em, but then [at that time] I didn't, I didn't see them that much.

Chantell also described her neighborhood context as the overriding factor leading to her gang membership. She was fourteen when we spoke, and became gang-involved at age twelve. Chantell lived with her mother, grandmother, and siblings in a neighborhood where gangs were "just like everywhere." She described her childhood as one in which she grew up with gangs. She explained, "when I was little, I mean when I was young, I grew up around 'em. Just grew up around 'em, basically. Then when you grow up around 'em and you see 'em so much, until you want to get initiated."

At the time she decided to join, many of Chantell's neighborhood friends also were joining, as well as her older sister. "It was like a lot of gang-banging, I mean, it was just like, people were just like gettin' in it and having fun." Though she was somewhat torn about joining—"like wonderin' should I or shouldn't I, stuff like that, or what would happen if I did, or if I didn't"—eventually she decided to go ahead. "I was around 'em so

much, the things they did I did," she explained, "so I said, since I grew up with 'em, I'm already hanging out with 'em, couldn't be no difference, so."

Chantell's comments about seeing other young people "gettin' in it and having fun" were echoed by a number of young women who described joining gangs in part because of their desire to belong to a neighborhood group, fit in, and have fun. This was especially the case for girls who joined quite young. Crystal joined at age twelve, noting, "you see other people doing it and you just think it's cool." And Nikkie, who also joined at twelve, explained, "if you ain't in it you just be . . . you just be feelin' left out. You be like, 'oh they all in a gang and I'm just sittin' here.'" As a result, she said, "I was like, 'I wanna get in it.' And I got in it." Latisha joined at twelve and explained, "it's fun. That's why I joined, 'cause it was fun and I seen what they was doing and I thought it was fun and it was cool or whatever." Likewise Pam joined at thirteen, and noted:

They just [were] having fun, going to parties, kickin' it, staying out all night, new clothes, new shoes, selling drugs and all that. I wanted to be like that too. I wanted to wear name brand shoes, name brand clothes, I wanted my hair done and everything just like that so that's what I done.

In addition, residential instability appeared to be a factor shaping the influence of neighborhood gangs on girls' decision making. Over half of the gang members in the sample (52 percent in both cities) described having moved within the year prior to our interview, and two-thirds had moved within the previous two years. In comparison, 28 percent of the nongang girls had moved in the last year, and 48 percent within the previous two years. Moreover, these figures do not include such things as running away from home or spending time in detention or placement facilities—experiences that a large number of girls reported and that are indicative of further residential instability. While this instability is likely related to other family and economic problems that may be linked to risks for gang involvement, it is also the case that, upon arrival in a new environment, becoming involved with a local gang provides young women with a means of fitting in with a new crowd and becoming known. As Shawanda described, "I just needed

some friends, [joining the gang] was a quick way to make me a friend." In fact, several girls explicitly described joining gangs upon moving to new places, and others decided to join when they met gang members in residential facilities.

For instance, Traci had only recently moved to Columbus when we spoke, and likewise had recently joined her gang. She explained that moving to a new city, she "wanted to be like other people." At the same time she began noticing "all these blue scarves and red scarves and stuff," she got to know the neighbor in the apartment above hers—a young man who was a member of a neighborhood Crips set. Shortly thereafter she joined the gang and began going out with the young man. Traci felt that joining the gang was a way both to make friends, and to fit into her new environment. LaShawna was sent to Columbus to live with relatives when she was thirteen, and had been gang-involved since age twelve in the large city where she previously lived. In Columbus she became gang-involved when she "hooked up with" another gang member in a residential facility, where her knowledge of "big-city gangs provided her with status and reputation.

A handful of young women, mostly in Columbus, described becoming gang-involved as result of friends' involvement, rather than through neighborhood peer networks. Jennifer, Leslie, and Heather joined their gangs after a close friend introduced them to other gang members. For instance, Heather said of her decision to join: "I [was] at my friend Chad's house and they [gang members] had just came over 'cause they was friends with Chad and we just started talkin' and hangin' out and then they started talkin' about a gang and it's like then I just got in there." Likewise, Jennifer joined her gang after her best friend introduced her to the C ("Original Gangster," e.g., leader). She explained "my friend was already in it and she would come over and she'd talk about all the, how it's real, just real cool to be in and everything like that." Once Jennifer met the OG, she began spending time with the other gang members, and eventually was allowed to join.⁹

Leslie had run away from home, and became friends with a gang girl she met at a local shelter for teen runaways. She returned home, but later ran away with my friend. And she took me down to

and introduced me to [the gang]." Leslie talked to the OG, who "told me that I would, it was an easy way to be protected and, um, I wouldn't have any problems. I wouldn't have to worry about money, food, clothing, a place to stay, 'cause I'da have all that because I was in the gang." At the point we interviewed, Leslie was pregnant and planning to sever her ties to the gang. Her outlook on it was decidedly negative. Of her initial conversation with the OG and decision to join, she surmised, "it was a bunch of lies . . . and I fell into the trap and believed him."

JM: And why do you say it was a lie now?

LESLIE: Because I was almost in the gang for about a year and a half. And, just bein' in there, you didn't go anywhere. You, um, you really didn't, I mean, succeed in anything 'cause the stuff that you were doin' was wrong. And, half, that's why half of 'em, half the guys are in here [the detention center] now, it has to do with some kind of gang-related somethin'.

. . . Young women in St. Louis were more likely to describe their neighborhood gangs as wary of outsiders, and thus new people—unless they were the relatives or friends of youths in the neighborhood—were less able to quickly assimilate into the local gang as girls in Columbus described.¹⁰ Pam, for instance, joined her neighborhood gang when she was thirteen. She said, "I grew up with some of them, went to school with some of them, and by me knowing them I just knew the other ones 'cause they used to be around." Much like Chantell, Pam joined because she'd "been knowing them anyway all my life for real." But she described a gang with somewhat tighter boundaries than what Chantell had described. Pam explained that for someone to join her gang:

They just got to be known or something. You can't just be no anybody. They got to know you or they been knowing you or they grew up with you or something like that or you family. Other than that, they just don't put you in there like that. . . . 'Cause anybody that is in the gang, everybody grew up together for real. It's just not like no anybody, like they gonna get anybody. You want to be in this gang? It ain't like that. You got to know a person, you got to grow up around it or be around it.

Tyra articulated much the same beliefs as Pam, noting, "If you ain't in our streets or nothin', live on our streets, you ain't joining nothin'." She said she joined her gang because "I grew up in that neighborhood with them." Moreover, Tyra suggested that part of the nature of gangs in St. Louis is attributable to how dangerous many neighborhoods are. She explained: "Growing up on the North Side [of St. Louis], you got to be like that 'cause everywhere you look, you turn around and somebody is getting killed. I don't care what nobody say, I think the North Side worse than any side."

Very few of the young women described getting involved with their gangs because their boyfriend was a member. In fact, only three girls—Rhonda, Marie and Stephanie—described this as a specific motivating factor. This is not to suggest that young women didn't have boyfriends, including within their gangs. For instance, Traci became gang-involved at around the same time her gang-involved neighbor became her boyfriend. But she didn't attribute her desire or decision to join the gang as having to do with him. Instead she said, "I just wanted to join, I don't know why, when I moved out here [to Columbus] I just *had* to join a gang." It is significant that only a handful of girls described a relationship with a boyfriend as a factor influencing their decision to join a gang, with most describing broader neighborhood peer networks as having greater importance. This finding challenges some long-held beliefs about young women in gangs, but also is in keeping with other research which suggests that, despite being overlooked by many scholars, girls' friendships are an important factor for explaining both their gang involvement and their delinquency.¹¹

While neighborhood and friendship networks help answer the question of how and why girls come to join gangs, these remain only a partial explanation. In fact, as Figure 8.1 illustrates, often there are other precipitating factors to consider. Many young women described problems in their family lives that led them to spend time away from home, out on the streets, and with gang members. In addition, like their relationships with friends in the neighborhood, having gang-involved family members was significantly related to girls' gang involvement in both Columbus and St. Louis. In

the next section, I will discuss further the impact of family problems on girls' gang involvement; then I will return to the issue of gang-involved family members.

Family Problems as Precipitating Circumstances

The family has long been considered crucial for understanding delinquency and gang behavior among girls.¹² Problems such as weak supervision, lack of attachment to parents, family violence, and drug and alcohol abuse by family members all have been suggested as contributing to the likelihood that girls will join gangs.¹³ My study provides additional support for these conclusions, based on comparative findings from survey interviews, and from young women's accounts of why they joined gangs.

As Table 8.2 illustrates, gang members were significantly more likely to come from homes with numerous problems than were the young women who were not in gangs. Gang girls were significantly more likely to have witnessed physical violence between adults in their homes, and to describe having been abused by adult family members. In addition, gang members were much more likely to report that there was regular drug use in their homes. Most important, gang members were significantly more likely to describe experiencing *multiple* family problems—with 60 percent describing three or more of the five problems listed in Table 8.2, and 44 percent reporting that four or more of these problems existed in their families. In

fact, only *three* gang members—Angie, Brenda, and Chantell—said there were none of these problems in their families, compared to nine (20 percent) of the nongang girls.

In addition, a number of gang girls had been sexually abused or raped in the context of their families.¹⁴ In all, 25 (52 percent) of the gang members in my study reported having been sexually assaulted, and described a total of 35 instances of sexual assault. Of these 35 incidents, 23 of them (66 percent) were committed by family members or men whom young women were exposed to through their families. Eight of these assaults were committed by immediate family members (e.g., girls' fathers, brothers, and in one case her mother). Eight were committed by extended family (e.g., girls' cousins, grandfathers, uncles), and seven were committed by individuals that young women came into contact with through their families. For instance, Tamika was raped by her stepfather's brother, Vikkie by her mother's boyfriend's friend, Yolanda by her uncle's friend, and Brittany by her aunt's boyfriend. While fewer nongang girls had been sexually assaulted (10 of 46, or 22 percent), like the gang girls, two-thirds of these assaults (eight of twelve) occurred in the context of the family.

For many young women, home was not a particularly safe place. Turning to young women's descriptions of their decision to join a gang, it is not surprising that the majority (though by no means all) noted family problems as contributing factors. The ways in which family problems facilitated girls' gang involvement were varied, but they shared a common thread—young women began spending time away from home as a result of difficulties or dangers there, and consequently sought to get away, and to meet their social and emotional needs elsewhere. Often young women specifically said that their relationships with primary caregivers were problematic in some way. A number of researchers have suggested that "the gang can serve as a surrogate extended family for adolescents who do not see their own families as meeting their needs for belonging, nurturance, and acceptance."¹⁵ Regardless of whether gangs actually fulfill these roles in young women's lives, it is clear that many young women believe that the gang will do so when they become involved. . . .

Table 8.2 Problems within the Family

	Gang Members (N = 48)	Nongang (N = 46)
Witness to Physical Violence between Adults	27 (56%)	12 (26%)*
Abused by Family Member	22 (46%)	12 (26%)*
Regular Alcohol Use in Home	27 (56%)	17 (37%)
Regular Drug Use in Home	28 (58%)	8 (17%)*
Family Member in Prison/Jail	35 (73%)	31 (67%)
Three + Family Problems	29 (60%)	11 (24%)*
Four + Family Problems	21 (44%)	6 (13%)*
*p < .05		

The most common family-related themes described by young women as contributing to their gang involvement were drug addiction and abuse.¹⁶ While 58 percent of the gang members described regular drug use in their homes, ten girls (21 percent) explicitly discussed the impact of their mothers' crack or heroin addiction. Drug-addicted parents, while not necessarily described as abusive, often were quite neglectful, leaving girls feeling abandoned and unloved, but also not providing necessary supervision over their time and activities. Moreover, given the intense degradation of many drug-addicted women on the streets, these particular young women likely dealt with the trauma of having knowledge of or even witnessing their mother's involvement in such situations.¹⁷

Keisha was fourteen when we spoke, and had joined her gang the previous year. She described her neighborhood as "nothin' but Folks and Crips," and attributed her decision to become a gang member to her sense of abandonment resulting from her mother's drug addiction. She explained: "My family wasn't there for me. My mom smokin' crack and she act like she didn't wanna be part of my life, so I just chose the negative family, you know what I'm saying?" Likewise, Crystal described joining her gang at a time when she was "fighting with my mama 'cause she was on drugs."

Shandra got to know members of her gang "walking to school, back and forth to school and I would see them in the mornings and after school and after awhile I just [started] hanging around smoking weed and just kicking it with them." She elaborated:

Right around the time that I started hanging with them I had just got put out of school and had tried to kill myself not too long before that 'cause I was just, you know, I had run away from home and I was just dealing with a lot of stuff. 'Cause my mother is on drugs real bad, and her and her boyfriend used to be fighting all the time and I just, I don't know, I guess I just didn't want to be around that. So I chose to be around the gang.

Shandra said after she "just used to kick it with them [gang members] so much, one day I just woke up and I just say I wanna be one of them, and then I told them and then they jumped me in the 'hood." She was twelve when she joined her gang. Shandra's

mother knew she had become gang-involved, "because I started coming in late and I be high when I came in, I started dressing like a gang member, wearing all stars and khakis and stuff like that." But she explained, her mother "didn't really say nothing about it." At the time, Shandra said she "felt close to" the other gang members, and "bond[ed] with them like they [my] family." When she first joined, she continued, the gang was so "important for me that I did anything I could to get respect from the OGs and just, you know, be down for [the gang]. It was important because I wanted to feel, I guess accepted to the gang, accepted in the gang."

In addition to their belief that joining a gang would fill emotional voids, a number of these young women said that a lack of supervision attributable to their mothers' addiction also was a contributing factor. Veronica, for example, joined her gang when she was "gettin' ready to be twelve," after her older brothers had joined. She said the gang was "right there in my neighborhood . . . then I seen that my brothers, 'cause I seen my brothers get put in. So then I said I wanna be put in." At the time, she explained, "I was just doin' what I wanted to 'cause when I found out my mom was doin' drugs and stuff. So she wasn't never in the house, so she didn't know."

Likewise, Yvette explained, "My mama, she on drugs, [we] used to fight and stuff. Me and her don't get along . . . [and] my father, he just ain't been around." Yvette said because of her mother's drug habit, when she was growing up her mother often "made me stay out late and stuff like that." Eventually Yvette "just started hanging out with" gang members in her neighborhood, whom she described as also being unsupervised. "I just hung around with some people that can do what they want to do, stay out late, whatever, go home when they want to go home, I'm hanging out with them." She said "it was like, I wasn't going to school a lot so I got with them. We was having so much fun. Most of them didn't go to school so I felt like I didn't need to go to school. . . . I had fun with the gang so I became one of them." Though her mother was unhappy and threatened Yvette when she found out about her gang involvement, Yvette said, "it was like too late for her to try and change me."

Another theme that emerged in some girls' discussions of how they became gang involved was

the impact of being physically or sexually abused by family members. In most of these cases, violence and victimization in the family precipitated girls' decisions to avoid home, and several girls described running away from home and living for extended periods with friends—often exposing them to gangs. In a few cases, being placed outside the home as a consequence of abuse also had the unintended consequence of exposing girls to gangs and gang members. Erica's story is a case in point.

Erica was seventeen when we spoke, and had joined her gang when she was fifteen. She lived with her father and stepmother for most of her childhood, until her father and uncle raped her at the age of eleven, whereupon she was removed from the home. Since that time she had been shuffled back and forth between foster homes, group homes, and residential facilities, and had little contact with her family because they turned their backs on her. Erica explained, "I didn't have *no* family. Because of the incidents with my dad and my uncle. After that, they just deserted me and I didn't, I had nothin' else." Though she said her stepmother was the primary person who raised her, their relationship was severely damaged by the rape. "She doesn't, she doesn't believe it. I mean, even after he [dad] pleaded guilty she still doesn't believe it."

Erica's childhood up to that point had been filled with violence. Her father was physically abusive toward her stepmother, herself, and her siblings, and as a young child, Erica had witnessed her biological mother being raped. Both her father and stepmother had spent time in jail, and there was heavy alcohol and drug use in the home as she was growing up. As a result, she described herself as a physically aggressive child. She explained, "in elementary school before I even knew anything about gangs, I'd just get in a lot of fights." In fact, her nickname in elementary school was "Iron Mike," in recognition of her Tyson-like characteristics. Her initial contact with gangs came when she was fourteen and living in a foster home. During her stay there, she met a group of kids and began spending time with them:

I didn't know 'em, but I just started talkin' to 'em. And, they always wore them blue rags and black rags and all that. And, I asked them, I said, "well you part of a gang?" And they tell me what they're a part of. So,

it was like, everywhere I went, I was with them. I was never by myself. If they went out to [a] club I went with them. If they did anything, I was with them. And, um, we went down to some club one night and it was like a whole bunch of 'em got together and um, I asked to join.

Erica said she joined the gang "just to be in somethin'," and so that it could be "like a family to me since I don't really have one of my own." She felt that being in the gang allowed her to develop meaningful relationships. She explained, "people trust me and I trust them. It's like that bond that we have that some of us don't have outside of that. Or didn't have at all. That we have inside of that gang, or that set." Nonetheless, . . . Erica expressed some ambivalence about being in a gang, because it involved antisocial attitudes and behaviors that she didn't see as being part of who she really was, particularly as she neared adulthood. Her decision to join, though, was in part a search for belonging and attachment.

Likewise, Brittany described a terribly violent family life. She lived in a household with extended family—twelve people in all—including her mother, grandmother, stepfather, and an adolescent uncle who was physically abusive. Her aunt's boyfriend had sexually assaulted her at the age of five, but family members didn't believe her. Though she didn't know her father, who was in jail, she had early memories of him physically abusing her mother. Moreover, she felt very disconnected and unloved by her family, and also described being isolated at school: "I didn't have no friends, used to always get teased. . . . My grades started going down, I started getting real depressed, started skipping school, smoking weed after school and stuff." Brittany saw the gang as a means of finding love. She explained: "I felt that my family didn't care for me . . . that when I was on the streets I felt that I got more love than when I was in the house so I felt that that's where my love was, on the streets, so that's where I stayed." And though she did not admit to doing so herself, Brittany noted, "my best friend got initiated [into the gang] by having sex with twelve boys."

Other young women also focused on a myriad of family factors in explaining their gang involvement. Diane's experiences are exemplary of how family problems could compound in a way that ultimately

leads to gang involvement. When we spoke Diane was fifteen, and among the most deeply entrenched gang members in the sample. She had joined her gang at eleven, but was only ten when she began hanging out with members, including the seventeen-year-old young man who lived next door:

I think I was about ten and a half years old and we started hanging out over there, over at his house and all his friends would come over and I just got into, just hangin' out, just becomin' friends with everybody that was there. And then I started smokin' weed and doin' all that stuff and then when I turned eleven it was like, well, 'cause they seen me get in fights and they seen how my attitude was and they said, "Well I think that you would be, you would be a true, a very true Lady Crip."

The time she spent with the gang, and her decision to join, were predictable results of her life history up to that point. As a young child, the family moved around a lot because her father was on the run from the law. Her father dealt drugs out of their home, and had a steady stream of friends and clients moving in and out of the place. Exposed to crime and drugs at an early age, Diane tried marijuana for the first time at age nine. She noted, "I was just growin' up watchin' that stuff." Her life changed dramatically when she was ten and her father was sent to prison, leaving her care to her drug-addicted mother. Diane explained:

We didn't have very much money at all. Like, my mom was on welfare. My dad had just gone to jail. My dad had just gone to prison for four years. . . . My mom was on drugs. My, see my dad, always sellin' acid, quaaludes, cocaine and my mom was on, just smokin' marijuana and doin' crack. Back then she was just real drugged out, had a lot of problems and it was just me and my little brother and my little sister and that's all that was goin' on, besides me goin' to school and comin' home to seein' my mom do whatever, hit the pipe, and goin' next door and hangin' out.

Diane remained very dedicated to her gang and fellow members, noting passionately, "I love my cousins [fellow Crips]. I love 'em." This was in large part because of what they provided her when she felt she had little else. She elaborated, "that neighborhood's not a good neighborhood anyway, so, I had nothin' to look forward to, but these people

they helped me out, you know? I mean, I was a young kid on my own. . . . I was just a little girl, my dad's gone and my mom's on drugs." Diane's father had been released from prison when we spoke, but was locked up again—as was Diane—for an armed robbery they had committed together. Ironically, her close bond with her father, and the knowledge she'd gained from him about how to commit crime, had resulted in a great deal of status for her among her gang peers. She noted, "my dad is just so cool. Everybody, everybody in my little clique, even people that aren't in my set, just my regular friends, they all love my dad."

As these young women's stories illustrate, a multitude of problems within families can increase young women's risk for gang involvement. This occurs through girls' attempts to avoid home, to meet social and emotional needs, as a result of ineffective supervision over their activities and, in cases like Diane's, by showing young women through example that criminal lifestyles are appropriate. These problems are exacerbated when young women live in neighborhoods with gangs, which provide a readily available alternative to life at home. Moreover, older gang members appear "cool," and their seemingly carefree lifestyle and reputed familial-like bonds to one another are an appealing draw for young girls with so many troubles at home.

Gang Involvement among Family Members

Some girls who lack close relationships with their primary caregivers can turn to siblings or extended family members to maintain a sense of belonging and attachment. However, if these family members are gang-involved, it is likely that girls will choose to join gangs themselves. Moreover, even when relationships with parents or other adults are strong, having adolescent gang members in the family often heightens the appeal of gangs.¹⁸ As Table 8.3 illustrates, gang members were significantly more likely than nongang girls to report family members in gangs. Most importantly, gang members were much more likely to have siblings in gangs, and were more likely to have two or more gang-involved family members.

Table 8.3 Gang Membership among Family Members

	Gang Members (N = 48)	Nongang (N = 46)
Gang Member(s) in Family	38 (79%)	25 (54%)*
Sibling(s) in Gang	24 (50%)	8 (17%)*
Multiple Gang Members in Family	29 (60%)	13 (28%)*

* $p < .05$

These relationships were actually somewhat different in the two sites—with the relationship between girls' gang membership and that of her family being most marked in St. Louis. In Columbus, gang girls were not significantly more likely than nongang girls to have a family member in a gang—57 percent of gang members had family in gangs, versus 48 percent of nongang girls. By comparison, all but one of the gang members in St. Louis (96 percent) reported having at least one gang-involved family member. In fact, a greater percentage of nongang girls in St. Louis (62 percent) described having a family member in a gang than did gang members in Columbus (57 percent). Moreover, St. Louis gang members were the only group for whom a majority reported having more than one gang-involved family member. In all, 21 St. Louis gang members (78 percent) described having multiple gang members in the family, compared to 38 percent of Columbus gang members, 29 percent of nongang girls in St. Louis, and 28 percent of nongang girls in Columbus.

However, gang members in both cities were significantly more likely to report a gang-involved sibling than nongang girls. In all, 52 percent of St. Louis gang members and 48 percent of Columbus gang members had siblings in gangs, compared to 19 and 16 percent of the nongang girls in these cities, respectively. In St. Louis, nine gang girls reported brothers in gangs, and ten reported sisters; in Columbus, eight gang girls had brothers in gangs and three had gang-involved sisters. Overall, 35 percent of the gang members had brothers who were gang members, and 27 percent had sisters in gangs. In addition, four gang members—two in each city—described having parents who had been in gangs.

Turning to young women's accounts of how they became gang-involved and the role family members played, there also are notable differences between the two sites. In Columbus, all of the young women who described the influence of a family member mentioned a sibling or siblings. In St. Louis, on the other hand, eight girls pointed to siblings, while twelve identified a cousin and/or aunt who prompted their decision to join. Gang girls in St. Louis also were more likely to talk about the influence of *female* family members, be they sisters, aunts or cousins. Perhaps as a consequence . . . , gang girls in St. Louis were more likely to talk about the importance of their friendships with other girls in the gang, while most gang girls in Columbus identified more with young men.

In general, the greater influence of extended family members on girls' gang involvement in St. Louis was striking. The likely explanation lies in the socioeconomic differences between the two cities and their effects on the strength of extended family networks. As I noted above, the young women in Columbus tended to live in neighborhoods with higher than average rates of poverty and racial segregation than the city as a whole. However the neighborhoods of girls in Columbus were somewhat better on social and economic indicators than the neighborhoods of girls in St. Louis. Moreover, while there are pockets of concentrated poverty in Columbus, St. Louis exhibits much larger geographic areas blighted by intense poverty, racial isolation, and population loss, resulting in large numbers of vacant lots and abandoned buildings in many of the poorest neighborhoods.

So how might these differences relate to the tendency for St. Louis gang members to say that extended family networks, rather than immediate family, drew them into gangs, while this simply was not the case in Columbus? I would suggest that the answer may lie in families' responses to entrenched poverty conditions. Research has shown that African American families living in poverty often rely to a great degree on extended family for economic, social, and emotional support.¹⁹ Given the more detrimental economic conditions in St. Louis, it may be that extended family networks are stronger there than in Columbus. This would help explain why St. Louis gang members seemed

to spend more time with their relatives outside the immediate family, and consequently, why those relatives had a stronger influence on girls' decision-making with regard to gangs. Regardless of which family members have an impact, it is clear that having family members who are in gangs increases the likelihood that girls will perceive gangs as an appropriate option for themselves as well.

More often than not, young women who joined gangs to be with or like their older siblings did so in the context of the types of family problems noted earlier. Veronica, who I discussed above, was a case in point. Her mother's drug addiction left her and her siblings unsupervised; when her older brothers began hanging out with the neighborhood gang, she followed suit. In fact, she went on to tell me, "then my *little* brother wanted to get put in it. And he was like only about six [laughs]. They told him no."

Similarly, Lisa was thirteen when we spoke, and only recently had joined her gang. Her brother Mike had been a member of a Folks gang for several years, and when the family relocated to another area of Columbus, he decided to start his own set of the gang in their new neighborhood. Lisa was among its members. Prior to Mike starting his own set, Lisa hadn't considered joining, but nonetheless said she "claimed [Folks] because that's what my brother was so I wanted to be like that too." Their mother had died when Lisa was eleven, and she described their father as physically abusive and distant. She felt very close to her brother, and said her desire to be with him was her primary reason for joining his gang.

Several weeks before Lisa joined, her brother's girlfriend Trish—who was also Lisa's best friend—was initiated. Lisa explained, "One day Trish was like, 'Well you wanna be true?' And I was like, 'Yeah.' And they was like, 'All right.' And they took me behind the railroad tracks and kicked the shit outta me and I was in it [laughs]." Lisa was initiated into the gang on the same day as her boyfriend and another male friend of theirs. A primary concern for her was to make a good impression on her brother. She explained:

The boys was scared. They was like, "Man, I don't know, I don't know." And then I was like, I just looked at my brother. Then I looked at my friend and I

looked at them boys and I was like, "I'll go first." So I just did it, I think . . . why I did it then is just to be, I don't know. Just to show them, my brother, that I was stronger than them boys.

Although she enjoyed what she described as the "fun and games" that she had with her brother and the other gang members, Lisa was actually ambivalent about being in a gang. She told me, "Right now I wish, I kinda wish I never got into it but I'm already in it so, like, um, I just, I don't know. I don't think I'm gonna be that heavy as my brother is, like all the time, you know, yeah, yeah." Lisa was especially concerned for her brother, who took his gang involvement quite seriously, which she perceived as putting his physical safety at risk. She explained, "My brother, when he was little, he was a little geeky little kid that wore glasses. But now he's like, you know, and I don't understand it but uh, I wish he was still a little kid that wore glasses." Nonetheless, she felt being in the gang allowed her to spend time with him. She surmised, "We all just hang out all the time. We just are always together. If you see me you see my brother. If you see my brother you see his girlfriend. If you see me you see my boyfriend. I mean, it's just like that."

In fact, a number of young women described joining their gangs in order to be around and meet the approval of their older brothers regardless of whether—like Lisa and Veronica—they had family problems at home. When Tonya was younger, she said she noticed "my brother just started wearing red all the time, all the time." She continued, "then after school . . . he just kept going outside. All these dudes and girls used to have fun, selling drugs and having money and stuff. And then I just wanted to do it. I thought it would be fun so I joined. I tried to join and then my brother let me join." Tonya said her initiation into the gang involved "just a couple of my brother's friends, he didn't let nobody really [cause me] pain for real, like really beat me up. They was just beating me up so I would have to fight back. I had some bruises, busted lip, in another minute it was gone, it was cool." What wasn't gone was Tonya's belief that "I had gained my brother's respect and stuff." Only thirteen at the time, she said "in the beginning I was like a little shortie. I didn't sell drugs, I didn't run around shooting or none of that." Her involvement increased, though,

when she began "going out with one of my brother's friends," who provided her with drugs, which, she said, was "how I started selling dope."

Monica was also thirteen when she joined her brothers' gang. She had four older brothers, between the ages of 20 and 28 at the time she joined, all of whom were members of the same Crips set. Sixteen at the time we spoke, she remained the youngest member of her gang, and said she joined because she "wanted to be like" her older brothers. Monica described that she "always followed them around," and explained, "all four of my brothers were in so I was like, 'all right, I wanna be in a gang.' So I used to ride around with them all the time. And then my brother asked me, he said, 'Do you wanna be down or what?' . . . And I was like, 'Fine, I'll do it.' So I did." Perhaps because of the adult role models in her family, and because she "grew up around it," Monica, like Diane, was one of the most committed—and consequently delinquent—gang members. She told me, "I'm down for real, I'm down for life." Diane's strong gang commitment resulted from gang members filling a caregiving niche unavailable to her from her family while her father was in jail. In contrast, Monica's commitment was the result of her close bonds to her family.

A number of the young women in St. Louis, as I noted above, described the influence of extended family members—most often cousins, but sometimes also aunts. All of these young women talked about spending quite a bit of their time at their relatives' homes, sometimes but not always when they lived in the same neighborhoods. Trina joined her gang when she was eleven; both her cousins and aunts were members, and she described "just being around over there, being around all of them" growing up. Trina said her aunts and cousins had dressed her in gang colors from the time she was young, and she surmised, "I just grew up into it."

Likewise, Shiree described her gang as "a family thing," and Alecia also said her gang involvement was "like a family thing." Alecia explained, "my auntie first moved on [the street] where I live now . . . [and] I started visiting my cousin." The gang evolved from "everyone that was growing up in that 'hood. . . I seen all my relatives, not my father and mother, but you know, all my relatives in it and then I came over just like that." She said, "It ain't

like they talked me into it or nothing." But eventually she and her mother and siblings moved to the same block, further solidifying her gang affiliation.

Vashelle said she joined her gang "because my family, all of my cousins, my relatives, they was Bloods already and then I moved over there because my cousin was staying over there so I just started claiming [the gang]." While in general Vashelle believed that girls joined gangs for "little stuff, they want a family or something," she argued that these were not her own motives. She explained, "It's just something I wanted to do because my cousin was in it so I wanted to be hanging around. . . I ain't no follower. It's something I wanted to do and by them doing it was just more influence on me."

In some cases conflict in girls' immediate families increased the time they spent with relatives. Vickie began spending time with a gang-involved cousin when she became frustrated at home and "just wanted to get out of the house." She explained, "My mama always wanted me to baby-sit. I got tired of doing that. She always yell and stuff, she come home from work and start yelling. Like that kind of stuff and I got tired of hearing that. I need somebody to hang out with where I wouldn't be home half of the time." She turned to her cousin and "just started hanging out with him." The members of his gang, she said, "was like, 'you gonna do something [to join]?' I was like, I just gotta do what I gotta do," and so she joined.

As the preceding stories have illustrated, in some cases girls' trajectories into gangs are more heavily influenced by neighborhood dynamics, in others by severe family problems, and in still others by close ties to gang-involved family members. Dionne is perhaps the best illustration of how all of the factors I've described thus far—neighborhood context, family problems, and gang-involved family members—can come together to fuel girls' gang involvement. Dionne grew up in a housing project with gangs, where she had four male cousins who were members. She had been physically and sexually abused repeatedly by her mother's boyfriend, who was also her father's brother.²⁰ She explained:

When [I] was little my uncle tried to have sex with me and stuff. I was like eight or seven, you know, and I told my mama in her sleep. I told my mama what happened, I woke her up out of sleep. You know she

told me, she say, I'll get him when I wake up. For real, when she woke up, he ain't do nuttin' but tell her, "Aw, she lyin'. She just wants some attention." You know, and she hit me 'cause, you know, she thinkin' I'm just sayin' somethin'. I was mad though, and he thought he could take advantage by keep on doin' it.

There was also drug and alcohol abuse in the home, her mother had spent time in jail, and her mother and mother's boyfriend were violent toward one another. Dionne noted, "my mama, you know, me and my mama didn't get along. . . . My uncle [her mother's boyfriend], you know, we didn't get along. It was like, you know, he couldn't stand me, I don't know why. . . . He told me to my face, 'I hate you,' he say, 'I hope you die.'" Consequently, Dionne said, "I used to like goin' to school, 'cause to get away from home." Eventually she began running away and spending time on the streets around her housing project with her cousins and other gang members. "I just started hangin' with 'em and doin' what they did then, and they, it was like, they, you know, was used to me hangin' around." When she was eleven, one of her cousins tattooed the gang's name and her nickname on her forearm. Dionne was drunk when her cousin tattooed her, but she said that afterwards the tattoo "made me feel big and stuff, you know?" While she was abused and felt neglected and disparaged at home, Dionne said being with the gang "be kinda fun, you know, bein' around all your little friends, just chillin' or somethin'." . . .

Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated the range of circumstances that help pave girls' pathways into gangs. Notably, some of their discussions clearly parallel the discussions young men provide with regard to their decisions to join, particularly the strength of neighborhood peer networks. Young women join gangs because they perceive these groups as capable of meeting a variety of needs in their lives, both social and emotional, and sometimes economic as well. Previous research has suggested that a number of factors—among them socioeconomic context, family problems, and peer influences—contribute to girls' gang involvement. My research offers further support for these findings by comparing the

experiences of gang and nongang girls, and also details in concrete ways the various trajectories through which some young women join gangs while others are able to avoid gang involvement.

My work suggests the strong influence of three overlapping factors—exposure to neighborhood gangs, problems within the family, and having gang-involved family members. The vast majority of gang girls described their decision to get into a gang as involving interactions between two or more of these factors. So for instance, girls who grew up in close proximity to gangs, particularly those with serious family problems, became aware of gangs and often chose these groups as a means of meeting social needs and avoiding home. In addition, my study found that (mostly adolescent) kinship networks had a strong relationship to girls' gang involvement. Girls with older siblings or relatives in gangs often looked up to those family members and, particularly but not always when there were other problems at home, sought to spend time with them on the streets and around their gangs. Notably, gang members in Columbus who said family members had an impact on their decision to join named siblings; in St. Louis they were more likely to mention cousins or other extended family members.

Finally, my research offers further support for the importance of family problems in facilitating many girls' gang involvement. Joan Moore's work found strong evidence, comparing male and female gang members, that young women recounted more cases of childhood abuse and neglect, and more frequently came from homes where wife abuse and other family problems were present.²¹ My study fills in an additional piece of the puzzle by comparing female gang members with their nongang counterparts. Not only do female gang members come from more troubled families than their male counterparts, as Moore's work shows, but they also come from more troubled families than "at risk" girls who don't join gangs. Even among the handful of girls I interviewed who associated with gangs but didn't join, this appeared to be the case.

Moreover, my discussions with young women shed some light on how these family problems led to gang involvement. Often when relationships with primary caregivers were weak or ineffective,

girls began spending time with the older adolescents who were hanging out on the street or around the neighborhood. For instance, drug-addicted parents led young women to feel neglected and abandoned, and did not provide needed supervision over their time and activities. For other young women, physical or sexual abuse or other conflicts in the household precipitated their spending time away from home. Given their likelihood of living in neighborhoods where gangs were present, and having older siblings or relatives in gangs, these groups were readily available for girls to hang out with and eventually, over time, step into.

Notes

1. See Decker and Van Winkle, *Life in the Gang*, chapter three.
 2. See . . . Hagedorn, *People and Folks*; . . . Klein, *The American Street Gang*; Moore . . . *Going Down to the Barrio*; . . . Vigil, *Barrio Gangs*.
 3. See Campbell, *The Girls in the Gang* and "Female Participation in Gangs"; Fishman, "The Vice Queens"; Joe and Chesney-Lind, "Just Every Mother's Angel"; Quicker, *Homegirls*. . . Though not about young women in gangs, Baskin and Sommers also provide a useful account of how neighborhood and peer contexts facilitate women's involvement in violent crime. See their "Females' Initiation into Violent Street Crime."
 4. Joe and Chesney-Lind, "Just Every Mother's Angel," p. 411.
 5. See Bursik and Grasmick, *Neighborhoods and Crime*; Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged*.
 6. Significance levels are based on chi-square tests. It's important to note here that while I use statistics to make comparisons throughout the book, my sample is purposive in nature and thus violates key assumptions regarding random or representative sampling. While technically statistical methods are inappropriate for my sample, I use these methods not in an attempt to generalize to a larger population, but to highlight the strength of the patterns I uncovered.
 7. Quicker, *Homegirls*, p. 80. See also Joe and Chesney-Lind, "Just Every Mother's Angel."
 8. See Decker, "Collective and Normative Features of Gang Violence"; Joe and Chesney-Lind, "Just Every Mother's Angel"; Lauderback et al., "Sisters Are Doin' It for Themselves."
 9. Jennifer was the only member of an all-female gang that I was able to interview in Columbus. She described the OG, who was in her mid-twenties and had started the gang several years before Jennifer joined, as very careful about who she allowed to join. This was not in keeping with the overall pattern in Columbus, where gangs tended to be fluid and loosely defined groups.
 10. In their study of St. Louis gangs, Scott Decker and Barrik Van Winkle describe in similar ways the strength of neighborhood ties in the city, which they suggest have been quite longstanding—existing long before the recent re-emergence of gangs there. See their *Life in the Gang*.
 11. See Bjerregaard and Smith, "Gender Differences in Gang Participation, Delinquency and Substance Use"; Bowker and Klein, "The Etiology of Female Juvenile Delinquency and Gang Membership"; Campbell, "On the Invisibility of the Female Delinquent Peer Group" and "Female Participation in Gangs." . . .
 12. See Canter, "Family Correlates of Male and Female Delinquency"; Cernkovich and Giordano, "Family Relationships and Delinquency"; . . . Hagan et al., "Class in the Household"; Joe and Chesney-Lind, "Just Every Mother's Angel"; Moore, *Going Down to the Barrio*. . .
 13. Joan Moore documented a myriad of factors within families that contribute to the likelihood of gang involvement for young women. These include the following: childhood abuse and neglect, wife abuse, having alcohol or drug addicts in the family, witnessing the arrest of family members, having a family member who is chronically ill, and experiencing a death in the family during childhood. Her conclusion, based on comparisons of male and female gang members, is that young women in particular are likely to come from families that are troubled. See Moore, *Going Down to the Barrio*. . .
- Joe and Chesney-Lind observed that the young women they spoke with sometimes had parents who worked long hours, or parents who were unemployed or underemployed—circumstances which they suggest affected girls' supervision and the quality of their family relationships. See their "Just Every Mother's Angel." Esbensen and Deschenes, in a multi-site study of risk factors for delinquency and gang behavior, found that lack of parental supervision was associated with gang membership for male and female gang members, but that maternal attachment was more predictive of gang membership for males than females. See Esbensen and Deschenes, "A Multi-Site Examination of Gang Membership." . . .
14. These are included in my measure of abuse in Table 8.2 when a family member committed the assault, but not when it was someone else the girl was exposed to through her family.

15. Huff, "Gangs in the United States"; but see Decker and Van Winkle, *Life in the Gang*.
 16. There is a growing body of literature that supports the link between childhood maltreatment and youths' subsequent involvement in delinquency. See Smith and Thornberry, "The Relationship between Childhood Maltreatment and Adolescent Involvement in Delinquency"; Widom, "Child Abuse, Neglect, and Violent Criminal Behavior."
 17. See Bourgois and Dunlap, "Exorcising Sex-for-Crack"; Maher, *Sexed Work*.
 18. Other research offers support for the relationship between girls' gang involvement and that of their family members. . . . See Moore, *Going Down to the Barrio*; Joe and Chesney-Lind, "'Just Every Mother's Angel'"; Lauderback et al., "'Sisters Are Doin' It for Themselves.'" Geoffrey Hunt made an important observation about gangs and "family" during my presentation of a paper based on this study at the 1998 meetings of the American Sociological Association. While scholars typically talk about the gang as a "surrogate" family for young people, in fact there are many cases in which both "real" and "fictive" kin are members of girls' gangs. Thus, when young women speak of the familial nature of their gang relationships, they sometimes are literally speaking about their blood relatives.
 19. See Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*. . . .
 20. Fortunately, when Dionne was interviewed for this project she was no longer living in her mother and uncle's home. She was living with her father, whom she described as "always giving me attention," and was in counseling to cope with what had happened to her.
 21. Moore, *Going Down to the Barrio*. See note 13 above for more details.
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