THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF VIOLENCE: THE PSYCHOLOGICAL ROLE OF GANG LIFE IN RELATION TO CHRONIC TRAUMATIC CHILDHOOD STRESS IN THE LIVES OF URBAN ADOLESCENT MALES

A project based upon an independent investigation, submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Jennifer Anne Tolleson

Smith College School for Social Work
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063

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This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of Hulbert Gordon Tolleson, my grandfather.

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Because the subjects for this project were males, the researcher elected to use masculine gender pronouns throughout the dissertation.

I hope you get your Ph.D., you know what I'm saying, and, uh, I hope, if the book do get on the shelf and everything, I hope somebody use it and read it and understand what we saying about how we was living, how we was coming up, and what we went through, you know. . . . Psychologists are gonna be reading this. All I want them to do is understand young people like me. And if they ever sit down there and talk to a person who's in a gang and want to know how they life is, listen to them. 'Cause whatever they telling you, it's true. 'Cause they'll never get a chance to tell how they really feel, you know, and how they live they life, what they been through. 'Cause there ain't nobody out there to listen to them. . . . They got so much stuff built up inside them - they either go out there and try to shoot and get killed. And they'll never get a chance to talk to nobody, you know what I'm saying. So all I'm saying, all I want you to do is this: At the bottom of the chapter or in the middle, wherever you want to put it at, you know, tell psychiatrists if they ever get a chance to talk to a young person like me, listen to them. . . . People need help, you know what I'm saying. People like me need help. See, if I didn't never know how to take care of myself, I probably be somewhere, you know what I'm saying, dead somewhere.

Kujo, Disciple, age 17

I grew up with violence, so that's why I'm gonna be violent. I used to look out the window and see people being shot. Pop, pop, pop. Watching people die. So I grew up with violence all my life and I'm gonna stay with that.

Li'l Mook, Vice Lord, age 15

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of Study Issue

This study examined the psychic role of violent gang life in relation to chronic childhood trauma in the lives of urban adolescent males. By using intensive, unstructured interviews with a small sample (n=5) of incarcerated subjects, this study attempted to address the following question: What are the psychological links between chronic traumatic experience in childhood and later gang membership and violence? In other words, what is the meaning of gang life in relation to the subject's early experiences of violent trauma and the anxieties generated by them? While it was assumed by the researcher that there exists a connection between trauma and violence generally--see "Assumptions" below--the focus here was on the more precise and detailed nature of this link. It was not being suggested that gang life itself is traumatic, although it may be (Hoffer, 1992), but rather that gang affiliation is a specific form of

traumatic sequela and that its various components are meaningful to the subject in relation to his traumatization. By relying primarily on narrative accounts of subjective experience, the researcher aimed to learn about the phenomenological worlds and motivations of her subjects. Insofar as there existed no prior studies which emphasized the deep and complex levels of psychological experience of this population, this study was considered exploratory. Substantial effort, however, was also made to generate explanatory hypotheses and theory based on the integration of actual data, interpretive formulations which arose from the data, existing theory, and the researcher's own reconfigurations of existing theory.

Violent crime committed by youth gangs, although classified legally as juvenile crime, has long been understood by criminologists and sociologists to be phenomenally different from other forms of youth violence (Maxson & Klein, 1990) and thereby worthy of its own set of theory and scholarship. It is more deadly, seemingly more dispassionate, and is regulated and sanctioned by internal constitutions comprised of by-laws, ethics, and rationales. Tightly organized and insular, the urban gang is functionally a society, endowed by its members with a clarity, nobility, and independence of purpose which liberates it from the tentacles of ordinary social and moral restraint. The dismissal of conventional social limitations and the collective refusal to "accommodate to the modern moral injunction to adjust the public self sensitively to situationally contingent expectations" (Katz, 1988, p. 81) places the youth gang in a kind of emancipated state, out of which arises a set of norms and behavioral sanctions which operate relatively independently of mainstream culture. Gangs, in other words, infuse violent action with their own unique set of rationalizations (the color of clothing, for instance) and an emotional logic which, to those outside, appears incomprehensible. It is the complex structure that underlies the urban gang, the collective and ritual nature of its activities, as

well as the calm, unambivalent execution of violence by individual members (Anderson, 1994) that largely differentiates it from other types of youth crime.

The violence of gang life appears neither random nor chaotic, but rather to contain intense purpose and meaning to those involved. The superficial motivations for gang affiliation attributed by modern sociology and criminology (e.g., monetary gain, physical protection) seem to flagrantly miss the intensity with which gang life captures the heart, souls, and minds of those in its lair. The passion with which core gang members are attached to their gangs has been likened to religious zealotry (Scott, 1993) and political fascism (Katz, 1988). The seductions of gang life, therefore, are profound and transcend the obvious benefits of affiliation which have driven research foci for the past 100 years.

The violent youth gang experience appears to offer up to its constituents a compelling solution to an otherwise insoluble problem. It seems to provide some kind of psychological opportunity for the urban adolescent boy that extends beyond economic benefit, comradeship, or even physical survival. In fact, theories which emphasize "survival" as the primary motivation for gang membership (Krisberg, 1974) are often vague about what is being survived or limit the notion of the subject's hardship to his immediate and concrete surround. This view tautologically presumes that gang violence arises purely in defensive response to preexisting gang violence and overlooks the degree to which gangs intentionally create and sustain their own existence (Katz, 1988). It overlooks the deeply subjective and sensual attractions that violent gang life holds for its individual members. If one, however, extends the concept of survival to include the withstanding of certain internal states and traumatic remembrances which persist in the contemporary life of the gang member, one might be infinitely closer to understanding the complexity of the youth gang experience and its perpetual appeal to the urban adolescent boy.

What, then, is the meaning of the tenacity with which the gang adolescent adheres to and represents his gang, its codes and rituals, and its violence? Motivations for gang-related violent crime often seem petty by mainstream standards and bizarrely unconstrained by either practical or personal considerations, even those related to self-preservation. The appeal of the gang and the importance of its agenda seem to literally consume the subjective life of the adolescent and to push to the periphery ordinary utilitarian and narcissistic preoccupations. Los Angeles gang leader, Kody Scott (1993), wrote:

> I had no adequate answer for Mom about what was happening to me. Actually, I wasn't fully aware of the gang's strong gravitational pull. I knew, for instance, that the total lawlessness was alluring, and that the sense of importance, self-worth, and raw power was exciting, stimulating, and intoxicating beyond any other high on this planet. But still I could not explain what had happened to pull me in so far that *nothing* outside my set mattered. (p.70)

The persistent exposure to violence that urban gang life requires and the raw enthusiasm with which young gang members voluntarily comply with this requirement is profoundly compelling and cannot, as stated previously, be understood with simplistic and concrete formulations. What is it, then, about this experience that so hypnotically captures the attention of the youthful gang member? What does he pursue, what does he find, and what does he create for himself with what he finds there? Given the prevalence of pervasive violent experience in the early lives of adolescent delinquents generally (Lewis, Shanok, Pincus, & Glaser, 1979, Lewis & Pincus, et al., 1988, Shanok & Lewis, 1981) and gang members specifically (Hoffer, 1992), it is reasonable to suppose that gang life arises in response to the traumatic life course and that it provides something

psychologically, in a deep and essential way, that makes the gangster feel as though his actual survival depended upon the experience of it. It was the goal of this project, then, to more fully explicate the meaning of violent gang life in relation to chronically stressful childhood experiences and to learn about the processes by which subjective traumatic states are transformed over time into supremely violent identifications.

Assumptions

This entire project was predicated on three major assumptions, all of which formed the context for the research question itself. In the following section, each assumption is addressed separately and in some detail in order to provide credence to its status as an assumption.

Assumption 1: Violent Inner City Juvenile Gang Members Have Been Subjected to Ongoing and Persistent Violent Trauma as Children

When death occurs by the tens and thousands, when its quantitative aspect is its dominant qualitative aspect, it imprints itself as familiar, banal, anonymous, senseless.

Hillel Klein (1974)

For children residing in U.S. urban centers, the stresses of life are multiple, extreme, and unavoidable. Homicide is the leading cause of death among children living in these areas, and in over half of these cases, the perpetrators are other children (Zinmeister, 1990). The total number of children who have died by handguns now far exceeds the death toll of the polio crisis of the 1950's (Dohrn, 1994) and in Chicago specifically, the annual numbers of children being murdered in its housing projects exceed the number of casualties which define war, justifying the recent adoption of the

term "war zone" to describe the massive violence which pervades life there (Dubrow & Garbarino, 1989, Garbarino, Kostelny, & Dubrow, 1991). Given the experience of housing development residents as imprisoned and violently terrorized by gang forces, as well as their literal colonization by society generally, it is not a stretch to qualify their neighborhoods as combat zones. Illustrating the degree to which gang fighting, in its intent and impact, resembles actual guerrilla warfare, Kody Scott (1993) described his native South Central Los Angeles:

> Helicopters hover heavily above, often no higher than the treetops that dot the battlefield. Staccato vibrations of automatic gunfire crack throughout the night, drowned out only by explosions and sirens. . . . There is troop movement throughout the city, and in some areas the fighting is intense. The soldiers are engaged in a "civil war". A war without terms. A war fought by any means necessary, with anything at their disposal. This conflict has lasted nine years longer than Vietnam. . . . Each army has a distinct territory-the boundaries of some very large areas are broken by enemy cluster camps. Each army has a flag, to which total allegiance is pledged. Each army has its own language, customs, and philosophy, and each has its own GNP. The war has been raging on for twenty-two years. The death toll is in the thousands. (pp. xi-xii)

Safety, primarily from gunfire and gangs, is a continual preoccupation among inner city mothers, despite their felt and real lack of control over the violence affecting their children (Dubrow, et al., 1989). Violence, and the death-feeling which emanates from it, literally controls the activities of life in many urban neighborhoods. Most schools have been rendered unsafe by the numbers of violent crimes committed on or near their grounds, and an increasing number of children, especially males, carry knives and guns

to class (Jenkins, 1994, Zinmeister, 1990). Even if one discounts the impact of community violence, multiple risks still abound for these children in the forms of extreme poverty, malnutrition, inadequate medical care, unsafe housing, poor prenatal care, a high incidence of head injury, single parent stresses, and a higher incidence of child abuse than occurs in the general population (Garbarino, et al., 1991).

Violent victimization in the inner city occurs at a 50% higher rate than in the urban community generally, meaning that the children who live there are exposed to 50% more violent crime than their non-public housing urban counterparts (Garbarino, et al., 1991). In a 1989 study of young inner city children and their mothers, a full 100% of the child subjects had experienced gunfire firsthand by the time they were five years old, and had become well acquainted with the regular warnings and directives issued by their mothers--"If you hear shots, hit the floor", "Stay away from the windows", and "Pray" (Dubrow, et al., 1989, p. 11). Poor urban children are simply at far greater risk of loss due to violence than children in less deprived neighborhoods. In Chicago, a high proportion of its homicides occurs within a few concentrated areas, primarily public housing developments (Garbarino, Dubrow, Kostelny, & Pardo, 1992). Homicide vulnerability is, in fact, more significantly tied to poverty than to any other isolated demographic variable (Holinger, Offer, Barter, & Bell, 1994). The degree to which violence and loss constitute indelible aspects of the ongoing experience of these children is reflected in their play of games such as "funeral" and "gangbanger" and in their artwork (Garbarino, et al., 1991), in their frequent absences from school due to fear (Zinmeister, 1990), and perhaps most startlingly, in their seeming imperviousness to the violence over time (Garbarino, et al., 1992).

Urban adolescents are especially vulnerable to homicidal victimization, due partly to their own participation in gangs, as well as the developmental propensity for action and social visibility among this age group generally. In a recent study of 1000 high

school students in the Chicago inner city (Jenkins, 1994), 25% of the subjects reported having been violently victimized. Out of those, 50% overall and 65% of the boys had been the victims of a shooting (this is an especially notable finding given the fact that the subjects for this study were all school attendees and therefore did not include youths who had either dropped out or been expelled from school. Many of the most violent and/or at-risk youths, in other words, never made it into the subject pool). For the male subjects, there was an extremely significant correlation found between personal violent victimization and weapon carrying, whereas the female subjects were far more likely to react to victimization with inner distress. Violence and weaponry have clearly become integral aspects of youth culture in the inner city, both reflecting and contributing to the extreme traumatic vulnerability of this age group.

Children and adolescents are very frequently witnesses to extreme violence, both at home and in the urban community. Jenkins (1994) found that 60% of her adolescent subjects had witnessed a shooting and that 47% had witnessed a stabbing. Reese (1994) suggested that urban adolescent males are acutely vulnerable to the impact of witnessing violence due to their gender identification with the victim, who, in urban communities, is far more likely to be male than female. This identification, he asserts, corresponds with a subsequent tendency among boys to pursue active forms of self-defense, like gun toting or gang affiliation, for instance. Witnessing violence, especially that which is gang-related and leaves the witness in fear of retaliation, has been demonstrated to result in severe traumatic symptomatology and to markedly interfere with the developmental tasks of childhood and adolescence (Eth, 1989, Pynoos & Eth, 1985). Even in the general adult population, the most commonly reported precipitant of traumatic stress, other than actual combat, is the act of witnessing someone else be hurt and/or killed (Collins & Bailey, 1990). Children, insofar as they are more developmentally vulnerable than adults, are especially prone to the deleterious effects of violent witnessing.

Racism makes an undeniable contribution to the prevalence of urban violence and has wide-sweeping ripple effects on all aspects of inner city life. Race has long been known to be a variable in the vulnerability to violent traumatization, in terms of both quantitative prevalence and individual psychological response. In Vietnam, American black and Hispanic soldiers were far more likely to emerge from combat with diagnosable posttraumatic stress sequelae. Parson (1985) partly attributed this phenomenon to the "stress-primed orientation" (p. 318) of the veterans, meaning that these men were particularly vulnerable to combat stress by virtue of having endured years of prior cumulative hardship, e.g., poverty, racism, and societal exclusion, as a function of their minority status. Massive exposure to and victimization by violence, then, exacerbates the social and institutional traumas which preexist in the lives of ethnic minority people.

Across ages, African American males are far more likely to be murdered than those in other ethnic groups (Holinger, et al., 1994). The kind of chronic and hostile endangerment faced by the black male has profound ramifications for his psychological development (Chestang, 1972) and is often internalized, at a very young age, in the form of a fatalistic world view in which he completely believes in the imminence of his own violent death (Bell, 1991). The highest rate of homicidal victimization of all occurs among African American adolescent males. In fact, young black males are 700% more likely to be murdered than their white counterparts and 1100% more likely to die by firearm (Holinger, et al., 1994). According to Dohrn (1994), one out of 45 African American adolescent males becomes a victim of homicide. Most astounding is that, despite contemporary medical technology and the general increases in human longevity, the black life span has actually decreased in the past several years, a phenomenon completely unheard of in the postwar era (Zinmeister, 1990).

Indeed, life in American inner cities has multiple faces, the most profound of which is the continual and pervasive exposure to violent death. Throughout history, death has, in its unique tie to poverty, been decidedly classist (Goldscheider, 1971), though never before has this tie been so unremittingly represented in the form of fatal human violence. When death literally tyrannizes, as it does in the violence-saturated environs of the urban ghetto, it wreaks a qualitatively unique impact upon those residing within its wake, an impact which must be distinguished from that of singular, one-time traumatic events. Remarkably, despite the voluminous research and theorizing about trauma, very rarely and only anecdotally does inner city life appear as a potentially traumatogenic agent. "[H]idden like an ugly scar across the belly of an otherwise beautiful woman" (Scott, 1993, p. xii), American urban violence has been relatively contained within certain class and racial boundaries and thereby separated from the preoccupations of mainstream culture and the intellectual curiosities of psychological theorists. Quite simply, the academic world, and certainly the psychoanalytic world, has shown scant interest.

What does it mean for the human psyche to be immersed in an environment in which the imminence of violent trauma and death is its most salient psychological feature? Bettleheim (1943) remarked on the constancy of death that characterizes "extreme situations" and suggested that its most profound psychic consequences lie, not in the formation of discrete symptoms, but rather in the intense alterations of character over time, and specifically, in the subject's psychological relationship to the idea of his own mortality. In ordinary situations, anxieties related to dying are psychologically separated from consciousness, allowing for the necessary and quieting illusion that the subject is safe from danger and able to transcend his basic frailty and vulnerability in the world (Becker, 1973). The denial of death, which Becker (1973) considered essential for unterrorized and heroic living, simply cannot be sustained within danger-dominated environments without resorting to psychologically extraordinary means. The death-

feeling that accompanies repeated violent threat renders the normal supplanting of death anxiety by protective omnipotence and narcissism irrelevant and impossible.

To live within a perpetual state of death anxiety is, for children, obviously preemptive of normal development. Klein (1974), based upon his observations of childhood victims of the Holocaust, noted a dual phenomenon among such children: 1) an intense awareness of and active pursuit of death in order to escape its tyranny; and 2) a vehement denial of mortality despite the permeation of death everywhere. When death is relentless in its presence in childhood, Klein suggested, the ability to master normal anxieties related to it, through fantasy and play, for example, is severely compromised. The reality of death in the lives of such children, its personal relevance intensified by its frequency and proximity, demands a different kind of psychological adaptation than does the ordinary simple and gradual introduction to death as a phenomenon existing "out there", remote and irrelevant, in the world.

In sum, the persistent looming of death in the lives of inner city children imposes psychological trauma in a unique and pervasive way. Unlike the distinctive, one-shot traumatic events out of which much of the existing knowledge of trauma has been generated, daily confrontations with violence and death affect the personality at core levels of experience and development. If it is true, as Becker (1973) suggested, that a central unconscious objective within every life is to transcend the awareness of one's mortality or the limitations of one's physicality, then certainly this must be consumingly at issue for those for whom reaching adulthood is not a question of *when*, but *if* (Kotlowitz, 1991).

While it would, at this point, seem clear that young urban gang members have been ongoingly exposed to trauma, it is felt to be necessary to also delineate some of the evidence which demonstrates that violent trauma is routinely a part of the early lives of violent delinquents specifically.

A series of studies conducted by Lewis and her colleagues uncovered extreme forms of physical and psychological trauma in the medical, neurological, psychological, and family histories of violent delinquents (Lewis, Shanok, & Pincus, 1979, Lewis, Shanok, & Balla, 1979, Lewis & Pincus, et al., 1988, Shanok & Lewis, 1981). The results of these studies readily reflect the regularity of violence in the early lives of violent adolescents. The more violent the subject, in fact, the more violent his personal history of victimization was discovered to be ($r=.373$, $p<.001$), suggesting a possible continuum of physical trauma correlating with violent sequelae (Lewis, Shanok, & Pincus, et al., 1979). The histories of the most violent juveniles revealed significantly regular head and face trauma, perinatal difficulty, neurological impairment, including grand mal epilepsy, and profound physical and sexual abuse. In a recent study of 14 juveniles living on death row, 8 had suffered severe enough early injury to result in hospitalization and/or cranial indentation, nine were diagnosed with severe neurological dysfunction, 12 had been severely physically brutalized, and 5 sodomized by relatives (Lewis & Pincus, et al., 1988). Gang-affiliated adolescents, though rarely studied separately in terms of exposure to early traumatic violence, have reported extreme amounts of violent victimization (Savitz, Rosen, & Lalli, 1980) and their level of gang involvement has been directly linked to the quantity of their violent experiences (Hoffer, 1992).

Based on the idea that pathogenicity increases multiplicatively, rather than additively, each time a new risk factor is introduced into an individual life (Garbarino, et al., 1992), the psychological maneuvering and adaptations required by children living amongst a literal bombardment of developmental risk is overwhelming to consider. As shown in this section, the histories of inner city and delinquent youths are multiply and severely traumatic, comprised of repeating violent traumas which compound and complicate already existing symptomatology and ongoing efforts at trauma resolution.

Although the dynamics and vicissitudes of chronic, cumulative forms of trauma will be addressed much later, it is important to emphasize, in summary, that it is as much due to the sheer *quantity* as it is to the actual *content* of the violence in the lives of these children that qualifies the experiences of their young lives as traumatic.

Assumption 2: Violent Trauma Begets Violence, or, in Other Words, Violence is a Common Form of Traumatic Sequela

Anna Freud (1943), when observing English children in wartime nurseries during the air raids and evacuations in London during World War II, was struck by the "primitive excitement" with which these young children responded to the war aggression going on around them. It was as though the violence of the war resonated powerfully with and aroused the children's' own natural aggressive propensities. Although Freud came to the conclusion that war was not inherently distressing for children, she did believe that its most developmentally dangerous potential was that children's aggressive interests, normally inhibited by defensive processes, would become such vivid, sanctioned, and active parts of their conscious lives as to not undergo adequate sublimation. She worried, in other words, about the degree to which environmental aggression could result in the unbridling of raw personal aggression.

That there exists a relationship between violent experience and subsequent violent behavior appears incontrovertible. Although formulations about *how* this process works are varied and have been through massive conceptual elaborations and revisions since Anna Freud's view from drive and ego psychology, the relationship itself between the two variables has achieved broad acceptance across professional disciplines and has been the focus of intense study and interest. Psychobiographical accounts of the lives of Charles Manson (Wooden, 1976), Adolf Hitler (Erikson, 1950, Miller, 1982), and

Nicolae Ceausescu (Miller, 1991), as well as intensive analyses of the motivations of Nazi labor and death camp physicians (Lifton, 1986), have all identified extreme forms of environmental torture and cruelty in the earlier lives of their subjects.

In his treatise on behalf of the rebels of colonized Algeria, Fanon (1963) argued passionately that individual "mental disorder," even of the violently murderous kind, arises expectedly when a nation or group of people are subjected to ongoing oppression and massive, collective humiliation. Large-scale political events trickle down, so to speak, into the psychic lives of individuals and wreak a certain pathogenic havoc there. According to Erikson (1942, 1950), the uprising of the Third Reich represented a national German backlash against the defeats and humiliations endured during and following World War I. In other words, postwar Germany, having been militarily annihilated, culturally compromised, and nationally factionalized and "encircled" by potentially invading enemies, was particularly vulnerable and receptive to Hitler's emancipatory and fascistic propaganda. Miller (1982, 1991) postulated that the Nazis' genocidal solution was rooted, not so much in political trauma, but in the family-based traumas inflicted by the brutal, authoritarian child-rearing practices prevalent in Germany at the time, and the projection of these traumas onto their holocaustal targets. Perhaps it is only by understanding the nature and vicissitudes of trauma, both personal and collective, that such events as war, mass slaughter, and genocide can be even partially comprehended.

Although chronic environmental violence is intensely variable in its sequelae, unmodulated violent aggression appears as a repeated correlate to childhood experiences of war (Arroyo & Eth, 1985), combat soldiering (Kardiner, 1941, Ulman & Brothers, 1988), and traumatic child abuse (Goodwin, 1988). Adolescents living in chronic war conditions have been found to be morally and interpersonally confused and to regularly engage in antisocial, destructive behaviors (Arroyo, et al., 1985). They often, in fact,

seek out actual opportunity to participate, actively and violently, as soldiers in the war itself (Stanley, 1990).

Ever since Kardiner (1941) documented aggressive outbursts as one of the central characteristics of the "traumatic neuroses of war," combat trauma has been inextricably linked to later violence and explosive rage (de Zulueta, 1993, Ulman, et al., 1988). Combat soldiers in Vietnam who were adolescent at the time of their duty were especially likely to emerge from battle flagrantly traumatized and steeped in powerfully violent retaliatory fantasies (van der Kolk, 1985). Their postwar adjustment was very often poor, riddled with criminal activity and prison time (Harmless, 1990).

Violent child abuse has been strongly linked to subsequent aggression modulation problems in children and impairments in their abilities to empathize with others (Fish-Murray, Koby, & van der Kolk, 1987, Goodwin, 1988, Green, 1983, van der Kolk, 1987a). More specifically, it has been associated with delinquency and criminality in adolescence (Burgess, Hartman, & McCormack, 1987, Green, 1978). Burgess, et al. (1987) made the startling discovery that 100% of their sexually abused adolescent subjects had trouble with the law subsequent to their abuse. Out of these, 76% engaged in unprovoked violent assaults and carried weapons, while 82% participated in general acts of violence.

Again, that violent trauma is an etiologic factor in most forms of violence seems so undeniable as to require little further explication. The specific link between traumatic experience and criminality has been repeatedly established in both research and personality theory (for example, Greenacre, 1967). When people diagnosed with non-combat Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) were compared in a recent study with people not so diagnosed, the PTSD subjects were 6.75 times more likely to have been arrested for a violent offense (Collins & Bailey, 1990). Upon examining the temporal ordering of the phenomenon, they found that the PTSD preceded or arose concurrently to

the violent behavior, pointing to its significance as an etiologic variable in criminal violence.

Despite the clear association between violent experience and later violent behavior, this relationship is neither linear nor predictable. Certainly, most people exposed to violence do not emerge from these experiences with violent trends in their personalities. The transformation of traumatic experience into violent action (which was the central focus of this project) is enormously complex and cannot be simply understood as an expectable response to external events. Rather, the notion of trauma needs to include the subject's construction of meaning, or, in other words, his idiomatic way of organizing, cohering, making sense of raw experience. This idea will be taken up in considerable detail later, but suffice to say for now that the presentation of evidence for the relationship between trauma and violence is in no way intended to imply that there is a simple, one-to-one correspondence between the two variables.

Assumption 3: Action can be Communicative, Psychologically Meaningful, and a Unique Form of Memory

A problem with cumulative and repeated psychological trauma is that it stimulates defensive operations and characterological adaptations in the individual which profoundly compromise basic memory functions. As a result, the original trauma undergoes massive psychic transformations that spawn behavioral and personality constellations which bear little outward resemblance to their traumatic origins and which are extremely difficult to later decode. Singular, brief traumas are far more likely to be recorded in ordinary verbal memory than are repetitive, ongoing traumatically stressful experiences (Terr, 1990) and are therefore, ironically, easier to later consciously and linguistically access. Obviously this presents profound challenges to the researcher

and/or clinician who is attempting to reconstruct the chronic traumatic antecedents to contemporary behavior and experience. Very often, the subject literally has no conscious, narrative memory of his experience, or, at best, has partial remembrances (which, according to Freud [in van der Kolk, 1988], are insufficient for the resolution of trauma and which may, in fact, actually heighten anxiety and its concomitant defenses). Although an event must psychologically register if it is to traumatize (Terr, 1988), the question becomes, if a traumatic experience cannot be consciously retrieved or verbally recalled, how was the event originally encoded and in what form does it currently persist within the subject? In other words, if one cannot rely solely on narrative discourse to learn something about the subject's traumatic past, what are the pathways by which such experience can be accessed?

Blos (1979) described an adolescent boy who was completely indifferent, both in court and in his clinical assessment, to charges of auto theft. The boy insisted that the theft could hardly be considered harmful insofar as the car owner was insured and could therefore cash in on his policy. The boy was convinced that the officials in the case, by castigating him as a criminal, were supporting the greedy behavior of the car owner. In the end, he told them all to "go to hell." Blos was struck by this boy's seeming refusal to discuss the car theft in any way beyond his brief admonishments of the court. He wrote:

> I realized that his obstinacy was not due to his unwillingness to say anything but to the fact that he had nothing more to say. *He had said it all in his action* [italics added] and in his commentary that followed. The *idee fixe* with reference to the car owner convinced me of the concretizing nature of the theft [which] proved to be a condensation of perceptual, cognitive, and affective determinants. The transposition of the manifest into the latent action theme reads as follows: "When I was a little boy of six, my father died; all my mother cared about was the

> insurance money. She did not mind that he was dead, as long as she got paid for the loss. My mother never loved my father. I hate her for that. . . . She is selfish. She should go to jail. She is a criminal." (p. 283)

The kind of unrelenting traumatic experience which has so far been the focus of this discussion imposes profound neurological and psychological sequelae for the individual, affecting the ways in which events are psychologically registered, categorized, and stored. Since trauma, by its very nature, overwhelms basic information processing modes, the subject's ability to later retrieve and give linguistic expression to his experience is particularly compromised (van der Kolk, 1988, van der Kolk & van der Hart, 1989). In Blos' (1979) view, action is a powerful communicative medium by which historical experiences that cannot be verbally recalled are represented and memorialized. Action, then, is a crystallization, a "concretization" (Atwood & Stolorow, 1984, Blos, 1979) of otherwise unassimilable and overwhelming psychological experience. Like a "private dialect" (Blos, 1979, p. 283), idiomatic and without shared referents, the manifest content of a singular piece of action narrativizes and gives voice to an unsymbolized historical subjective truth. Embedded within his concrete action is the subject's mute, unconscious, traumatic past.

Freud (1914) himself understood the role of action as a unique and viable memory form, a literal substitute for conscious verbal recall--"The patient *remembers* nothing of what is forgotten and repressed, but that he expresses it in *action*. He reproduces it not in his memory but in his behavior. . . . [H]e never escapes from this compulsion to repeat; at last one understands that it is his way of remembering" (pp. 160-161). Freud was deeply impressed with the degree to which his hysterical patients failed to think consciously about their past experiences, despite the profound fixation on the traumatic events evidenced in their dreams. Forgotten memories of distressing experience, he decided,

would have to be deciphered in their repetition and symbolization within the contemporary behavior of the patient (Freud, 1920). According to Freud, then, the overwhelming nature of trauma severely affects the ability to process experience in normal ways, leading to massive primal repression, the separation of experience from linguistic representation and memory, and the manifestation of repressed contents in repetition and behavior.

Action, therefore, appears to have a natural, though elusive, relationship to traumatic memory. Memory, generally speaking, is comprised of sensory, perceptual (iconic), and symbolic/linguistic forms which develop respectively in parallel with Piaget's sensorimotor, preoperational, and operational stages of cognitive development and with central nervous system development. Trauma, by its very nature, overwhelms symbolic/linguistic memory functions, leaving the experience to be encoded in sensory and iconic forms. Similar to the preverbal memory forms of very young children, traumas often remain as somatosensory and perceptual events, residing in the realm of archaic, horrific imagery and finding expression in behavioral representation (Herman, 1992). Children are especially likely to encode events in primitive memory forms when traumatized (van der Kolk, 1988) and even extremely young children who have yet to develop verbal memory will later vividly represent early trauma in their behaviors (Terr, 1990).

In relation to this project, then, while it was expected that the subjects would have difficulty relating their experiences in linear, narrative form, it was assumed, based on theories of concretization and repetition as well as on modern research on trauma and behavioral memory, that within the action lives of the subjects would be located unassimilated, unschematized memories of trauma. Gang behavior, in this sense, was viewed as representational rather than impulsive, psychotic, or simply fortuitous, meaning that it would contain elaborate latent content, deep subjective meaning, and

unbound personal imagery. It would have its own narrative potential and a rich phenomenology, so to speak, which could be discerned and penetrated, if not through the subjects' actual verbalization of experience, then through the careful analysis of alternative forms of representation (e.g., behavior, projective mechanisms, relational enactments).

Theoretical and Conceptual Context

Insofar as this study was very decidedly informed by the researcher's own theoretical interests and suppositions, it is felt to be necessary to openly delineate some of the conceptual and philosophical underpinnings which drove the choice of method as well as influenced the interpretation of data.

Psychic Reality

While gang research has a long and industrious history among scholars representing a broad diversity of academic disciplines, the vast majority of systematic inquiries have been of a positivist nature, emphasizing the so-called "background forces" (Katz, 1988) of gang life, rather than its subjective and experience-near aspects. The "etic perspective" (Vigil & Long, 1990), or the search for invariant social and environmental properties which are hypothesized to stand in causal relationship to the behavioral activity of subjects, has long dominated social science research into juvenile delinquency and gangs. In fact, traditional criminology and sociology, under whose purview gang research has largely fallen, have generally treated their criminal subjects as

objects, rather than as subjects who are deeply engaged in the production of their own lived experiences.

Although the knowledge of background factors is critical for understanding the context out of which gang culture arises and for delineating its broad, external trends, it has minimal value in terms of speculating pure causality and offers little, if any, insight into the existential or depth-psychological motivations underlying the youth gang experience. Specifically, this perspective alone fails to address the ways in which internal and external factors work *in combination*, resulting in a unique psychological experience which is infinitely more complex than the mere sum of its parts. One simply cannot isolate the more concrete, manifest elements of a phenomenon from the subject's own idiomatic experience of and contribution to those elements and hope to understand it. To do so implies that there exists some discrete, knowable "reality" that lurks outside one's subjectivity and which wreaks predictable psychological outcomes on all who come into contact with its more pathogenic aspects. It also implies that the individual is merely a "passive receptor of discrete, atomic impressions from the outer world" (Atwood, et al., 1984, p.8), implying a phenomenal linearity which the extreme diversity of human experience would seem to refute. To focus simply on the environmental, or experience-distant, properties of a phenomenon would suggest a homogeneity within a group subjected to those properties which simply does not exist.

The preoccupation with the requirements of logical empiricism has, until very recently, pervaded efforts to understand gang phenomena and has, in consequence, reduced what is considered worthy of study to those aspects of gang culture which can be operationally quantified. The research focus here, by contrast, had as its starting point the subject at the level of his lived experience, or, in other words, the realm of individual psychic reality (Schwaber, 1983). It was the subject's *experience* of his life, his gang involvement, his violence, and, specifically, the fantasy and meaning with which these

experiences are invested that was the object of interest here. This is not to imply that the eventual interpretive formulations were not informed by the researcher's own theoretical biases, but simply that the raw data itself were largely comprised of the subjects' own voices and subjective versions of their experiences. In short, it was the subjective foreground rather than the deterministic background that drove this project.

This orientation assumes that there is something supremely authentic, subjectively speaking, about the experience of gang life and that the subject is not simply reacting compulsively and defensively to a set of external variables. It presumes a certain dialectical tension between the imposition of the subject's external surround and his sense of deep, purposeful creation of what he does.

Multideterminism

Complexity is not confusion. When analysis results in destroying complexity in the name of clearing up confusion, to that extent it destroys the concept in question.

Norwood Hanson (in Heineman, 1981)

Certainly, reductionism of any kind corrodes the imagination, obscures the idiosyncratic, and undermines the complexity of a phenomenon. Too often, theoretical knowledge is encapsulated, frozen in time and space, and invested with staunch absolutism, as if any singular explanatory focus could fully, on its own, account for a given set of phenomena. It can be said that the minute a theoretical system is elevated to the status of truth, it risks becoming codified, formulaic, and overly simplistic, thereby abandoning the very phenomenology is was intended to enlighten. Furthermore, the quest for this kind of certainty fails to account for the fluidity and unpredictability of phenomena, even those which are found in the physical sciences (Hanson, in Heineman, 1981). The creation of knowledge is certainly a precarious thing, beset by the limitations of tools and method, and perpetually vulnerable to the constraints of interpretive bias, a bias driven, in part, by the researcher's need to be either truly inventive or truly clear. Perhaps the best that any researcher can do is to remain open to the multiplicity of ways in which events contain meaning and not to foreclose on interpretations simply because they do not support her *a priori* convictions or her pursuit of simplistically coherent formulations. The pursuit of clarity and absolute coherence, after all, while seemingly noble, risks creating a system of thought in which "eventually everything is explained in terms of essentially nothing" (Sperry, in Heineman, 1981, p. 385).

The purpose of this treatise is to argue for the opening up of perspectives on the motivations of violent inner city gang youth, perspectives which have been beset by profound theoretical dichotimization and reductionism (Horowitz, 1990). Attempts to

categorize violent juvenile action solely in terms of either internal or external variables, attempts which are often undertaken in order to promote the theoretical or political agenda of the observer, have led to understandings which are barren, simplistic, and therefore limited in their descriptive and explanatory powers. Positivist research inquiry into youth gangs, attending as it has to superficial descriptors, has repeatedly failed to appreciate the subject's active interaction with his experience. Similarly, psychoanalytic accounts of violent delinquency have seriously failed to consider the subject's residence within a cultural, historical, and political matrix, a matrix which has profound and undeniable consequences for the creation of personal meaning. The tendency of psychological theories to interpretively polarize around the meaning of juvenile gang violence on the basis of ideological positioning, i.e., individual pathology versus "functional adaptation to an uncompromising social environment" (Krisberg, 1974, p. 116), has indeed failed to do justice to the complexity of the dynamics involved (Huff, 1990).

Because of their relevance to this project, the reductive bifurcation in thinking around the concepts of both aggression and trauma is considered worthy of special attention here. While the following brief detours are not attempts to operationally define these concepts, they are efforts to bring into view the so-called institutionalized "splitting" (Mitchell, 1993, p. 152) and defensive simplification which have traditionally marked both, and to offer up contrasting views which are more integrative and complex.

On Aggression

Etiologically speaking, the concept of aggression has been long beset by intense polarization within political, philosophical, and psychoanalytic circles. The disagreement essentially seems to revolve around the degree to which aggression is

viewed as primary, phylogenetically programmed, or otherwise irreducible versus secondary, defensive, or reactive to experiences of frustration and deprivation. In all fields, the way in which aggression is conceptualized has profound ramifications for theory-making, clinical understanding, and social and legal intervention.

In psychoanalytic theory specifically, the concept of aggression has radically evolved from its original, irreducible location within the "death instinct" (Freud, 1920) to a concept which, despite considerable theoretical controversy, is increasingly linked to the impact of external traumatic events, deprivation, and empathic failure. There has been a focal shift, in other words, in the locus of causality, a shift which is still passionately debated in theoretical and clinical arenas. Mitchell (1993) has interrupted this debate by positing that aggression is neither purely endogenous nor purely reactive, but is rather both of these, i.e., a biologically mediated psychological response to subjective endangerment which contains elements of the subject's internalized relational past as well as the immediate interpersonal situation before him. Aggression is, according to Mitchell, "always both justified and unjustified" (p. 166), referring to its combination of real and transferential, reactive and prewired, outer and inner referents. This integrative view suggests that to ignore either the idiomatic, physiological, and otherwise internally determined aspects of aggression *or* the degree to which it arises as a justifiable response to a real external threat does injustice to its complexity as a genuine, primary psychological experience.

On Trauma

From the time that Freud revised his original theoretical link between psychic trauma and childhood sexual seduction, trauma as a psychological concept has been fraught with confusion and controversy (A. Freud, 1967, Kahn, 1963, Sandler, 1967).

While it is not the intent here to present a detailed survey of trauma and its convoluted definitional history, it is important to clarify trauma, like aggression, as a complex subjective experience which cannot be explained on the basis of either external or internal factors taken in isolation.

Most theories of trauma agree that there are both inner and outer determinants of traumatic phenomenology. The dichotomy which characterizes the definition of the concept appears, therefore, not to reflect an absolute dichotomy as such, but rather to be a function of whether the external event or the internal response is the object of theoretical *emphasis*. Positivist social science has been particularly concerned with understanding the nature of trauma from the outside in, or, by beginning with the identification of an external event and presuming a corresponding inner response. Hanna (1994) strongly indicted the classic social work view of trauma based on his observation that by emphasizing environmental factors, social workers often presume a specific and immediately knowable inner experience, as though there existed a straight line between the two. In consequence, they often miss the actual subjective complexity of the trauma response.

By contrast, some theories of trauma have focused so heavily on the inner *experience* of traumatization that the link to the external world has been obscured, if not flagrantly disregarded. The notion that trauma is a pure phenomenological construction, that it is a necessary and ongoing part of child development, and that its linkage to actual, outer danger is irrelevant (Krystal, 1978) has resulted in the broadening of the term within certain theoretical circles to accommodate most forms of pathogenic or painful inner experience, rendering the concept blurry, and, at worst, meaningless (A. Freud, 1967, Furst, 1967).

Clearly, trauma is multiply determined. Insofar as people generally do not reside within autistically contrived psychological universes, there must exist a corresponding

event or series of events in the external world in order for traumatization to occur. It could be hypothesized, in fact, that it is largely their externality, their separateness from the subject's own sense of omnipotent creation, the degree to which they emerge from "out of the blue" (Greenacre, 1967) that causes certain events, and not others, to be registered as traumatic.

Trauma theory has, from its beginnings in classical drive psychology, regarded the role of the external world as essential for understanding the causes, nature, and vicissitudes of trauma, despite theoretical emphases to the contrary. Although he revised his original hypothesis that all traumatic etiology could be located in experiences of childhood seduction, Freud always, even in his final statements on the subject, linked trauma directly to dangers which exist in the real and external world, dangers including loss, injury, and the witnessing of violence (Khan, 1963). In Beyond the Pleasure Principle (Freud, 1920), he wrote, "We describe as 'traumatic' any excitations from *outside* [italics added] which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield" (p. 33), making externality an actual requirement in his own developing conception of trauma.

Psychoanalytically, trauma has been routinely differentiated from other forms of pathogenic process due to its undeniable link to actual, rather than purely fantasied, experience. Ferenczi (in Furst, 1967), for example, made an early clear distinction between trauma induced by fantasy and that which corresponds to outer, "real" events, the latter, he posited, presenting a much greater challenge to the psyche. Kardiner (1941), too, differentiated between the "traumatic neuroses" and other forms of neurotic symptomatology on the basis that, in the case of the former, there could be found little evidence of displacement phenomena or psychic elaboration. The content of trauma-induced neuroses was seen by Kardiner, in other words, as repetitive, concrete, and as having a one-to-one correspondence with the traumatic event itself. The psychoanalytic

interest in the impact of exogenous factors on psychic life, especially those of egregious intensity, is further evidenced by Freud's (1919) early essay on the pathogenicity of war, the psychoanalytic symposia on combat trauma following World War I (see, for example, Ferenczi, Abraham, Simmel, & Jones, 1921), and, more recently, the intensive inquiries into the traumatic sequelae of the Holocaust (Bettleheim, 1943, Klein, 1974, Krystal, 1968, Niederland, 1968), Hiroshima (Lifton, 1967), and Vietnam (Lifton, 1973). War violence, it seems, has had a special predominance in the formulation of psychoanalytic trauma theory.

Although there are certain experiences which are so outside the range of ordinary human experience that their traumatogenic potentials are irrefutable, the meaning and psychological result of trauma, including the aggravation or mitigation of its sequelae, is always determined by factors unique to the subject in question and which operate dialectically with the traumatic event itself. Personal factors which have been noted to be particularly relevant to the differential effects of traumatic experience include developmental age (Eth & Pynoos, 1985a, Fish-Murray, et al., 1987, A. Freud, 1967), innate constitution (Furst, 1967), prior strain (Sandler, 1967), and correspondence of the event with preexisting fantasy (A. Freud, 1967, Greenacre, 1967).

Based on his observation that events which are traumatic for one person are not necessarily traumatic for another, Freud (1939) himself conceived of trauma as the result of inner and outer factors working as a "complemental series" (p. 92). This is an important conceptual view because it speaks to the complexity and subjective variability of traumatic experience without undoing its tie to discrete external events, similar to Mitchell's (1993) integrative view of aggression as outlined above.

Clearly then, as with aggression, trauma is neither reducible nor simply traceable to external or internal origins alone, but represents the coming together of a specific outer stimulus with an inner set of psychological structures, propensities, and vulnerabilities.

Simply put, an external event is traumatic in the way that it is because of the unique way that it resonates with the subject's inner life. This is not meant to imply that traumatization is purely reflective of preexisting psychological vulnerability (certainly it is well documented that many forms of traumatic stress are so catastrophic as to undermine even the most stable of adaptations), but rather that its quality and nature is infinitely variable and dependent on its human subject.

Theoretical Pluralism

Although this project was informed generally by psychoanalytic theory, it was the goal of the researcher to remain as unconstrained as possible by theoretical conviction which might be tied more specifically to a discrete psychoanalytic model. That is to say, this researcher refused to claim firm and specific theoretical allegiances beyond that which is broadly and eclectically psychodynamic.

Contemporary psychoanalytic theory, with all of its contradictions and diversity around what is thought to be pathogenic and supraordinate in terms of motivation, affords the contemporary researcher a stunning array of paradigmatic options from which to choose. It was the presumption of this researcher that a rigid adherence to a singular theoretical paradigm would be inherently reductionistic and would sorely obstruct her efforts to listen openmindedly to the multiplicity of ways in which experiences and behaviors might contain meaning. It was presumed that the willingness to be informed by multiple theoretical perspectives, and to draw upon these perspectives "from the data up," so to speak, would lead to an understanding of the individual subject which would be deeper, more richly elaborated, and ultimately, more subjectively true.

Each psychodynamic model, by placing an overarching emphasis on particular facets of human experience and not others, is inherently and necessarily limited in its

own descriptive and explanatory potential. In fact, the greatest driving force behind the evolution and construction of new theory lies in the failure of existing theories to account for the vast phenomenology of subjective experience. A researcher's adherence to a particular psychodynamic model increases the risk that she will selectively attend to those aspects of the phenomenon she is studying which are central to that model at the expense of those aspects which are not granted supraordinate theoretical status. When this happens, the researcher's understanding of the subject has been overridden by her attachment to her working theory, which is often, in the research context, functioning as an unclaimed hypothesis for which she is seeking confirmation.

The dogmatic use of theory exists when a researcher imposes her own theoretical agenda in a way that strips the subject of his uniqueness and complexity. Although it is indeed an aspect of the human condition to seek order within and connection between seemingly disparate pieces of data, and certainly this was the central task of this project, the squeezing of data through a singular theory, as through a sieve, can only result in a view of the subject which is static, one-dimensional, and, at worst, a flagrant mischaracterization. Insofar as good research requires that all possible meanings be considered viable, even those that refute the most tenaciously held theoretical assumptions, the researcher must work within an intellectual frame of reference which is not dominated by specific and narrow commitments, but which contains a multiplicity of vantage points and thereby opens up her eyes, her ears, and ultimately, her interpretive repertoire.

Central to this project, then, was the researcher's conviction that theoretical absolutism, reductionism, and dichotimization, as well as the preoccupation with experience-distant properties of experience, would severely compromise efforts to learn about this, as well as any, population of subjects. It was the further, related contention

that the internal and external worlds of subjects would operate integratively and dialectically, not linearly or in isolation of each other. With an aim towards transcending the superficial, dichotomized, absolutized formulations which have largely characterized prior research efforts in the area of gang violence, this study contained as its driving conceptual foci the notions of *psychic reality*, *theoretical pluralism,* and *multideterminism*. By doing so, the study aimed to offer insights into the motivational and phenomenological worlds of violent juvenile gang members which would not be purely rhetorical in content, sentimental in motive, or otherwise tied to a discrete philosophical or sociopolitical agenda.

Rationale

What do we know about modern gangs? I don't think we know that much. We simply haven't done the research.

John M. Hagedorn

Increasing numbers of inner city juveniles, many of whom are gang-affiliated, are being processed through the juvenile court system in this country for increasingly violent crimes. They are demonized in the public mind, creating an ever-growing tide of moral indignation and outcry for revenge. Due to mounting pressures on the legislature and an increasing conservatism within the juvenile justice system, there is a diminishing rehabilitative interest in these kids, resulting in fewer and fewer creative alternatives to simple and rote incarceration and an increasing likelihood that these violent youth will be waived into the adult criminal court, the adult correctional system, and death row. Clearly, the need for psychologically informed, phenomenologically relevant,

"retroductive" (Short and Strodtbeck, in Hagedorn, 1990) research which is not bound by the attempt to simply reiterate prevailing hypotheses is paramount.

In Chicago, it is rare that a day passes without a major, violent gang-related incident inside the inner city. Illinois has, in fact, more traditional street gangs than any other state (Babicky, 1994), the most threatening of these being headquartered in the Chicago urban center and its housing developments. While there is a current proliferation of gang research in the Chicago area, the vast majority of it focuses, as described earlier, on isolating environmental correlates to gang membership and delineating the rational, i.e., economic and cultural, motivations of gang activity. Much of the current research arises out of the law enforcement and criminology fields which view gang activity primarily as a crime problem and thus bring to the field a specific and limited agenda. This type of research relies predominantly upon crime statistics and demographics, rather than on actual interviews with gang subjects, a trend which Hagedorn (1990) referred to as "courthouse criminology" (p. 244) and which he criticized on the basis that its findings offer little more than "a tabulation of *perceptions* by public officials [rather] than an accurate description of gangs" (p. 245). Overall, there has been an increasing call for gang research which emphasizes its symbolic, experience-near aspects and which purposely incorporates the voices of the delinquents themselves (Horowitz, 1990, Katz, 1988).

The lack of depth psychological research in this area necessarily impedes the development of innovative, relevant intervention programming for this population. Despite the regularity with which trauma and criminality appear together in the same life course, there appears to be a widespread and institutionalized denial of this correlation, of which a glaring example is the enormous quantity of violent men, women, and juveniles in the prison system who are failing to receive any psychological treatment. Traumatized males, especially, are likely to wind up in penal rather than clinical settings due to their

propensity to express their traumatization in concretely violent ways. They are therefore unlikely to receive the psychological attention warranted by their underlying conditions (Herman, in van der Kolk, 1987a). In his autobiography, Scott (1993) referred to his gang activity as traumatic and made special reference to the broad societal failure to recognize and actively contend with the traumatic roots and effects of gang violence:

> Where do we go when we've been wounded bad, or when our minds have been reduced to mincemeat by years, not months of constant combat? If Vietnam vets suffer from post-traumatic stress syndrome, then I contend that gang members who are combat soldiers are subject to the same mind-bend as are veterans of foreign wars. For us there is no retreat. . . where one can receive psychiatric attention with full benefits from the Veterans Administration. No, our problems are left to compound, and our traumatic stress thickens, as does our abnormal behavior caused by the original malady gone unchecked. Is there any wonder our condition continues to worsen? (p.104)

Indeed, too frequently delinquent urban adolescent males are diverted into penal, rather than clinical systems, and, in consequence, fail to extract the care necessary to deal with the traumatic roots of their behavior. This is not intended as a sentimental view on the part of the researcher, but rather a pragmatic one, i.e., if a problem is to be responded to effectively, the problem itself must be correctly identified and targeted for intervention. Gang violence in this country is largely viewed as a legal, rather than a psychosocial problem and is responded to, often solely, with judicial sanctions. Mental health systems themselves often turn over to the juvenile justice system those youth they elect not to handle, usually the older, more violent adolescents (Krisberg, 1992). The degree to which delinquency is viewed primarily as a psychological problem appears to

be inversely dependent on the severity and chronicity of the behavior, a function of the orientation of those making the determination, and, sadly, the age, race, and gender of the youth in question.

Race, in fact, is the greatest singular determinant of legal disposition among seriously delinquent youth, with African American adolescents much more likely to be incarcerated and white adolescents more likely to be hospitalized, even when there are no differences in levels of violence (Lewis & Shanok, 1981). Historically, the psychiatric profession has minimized neurological and psychological impairment in black children, interpreting their symptoms as appropriate in relation to their harsh social environments (Lewis, et al., 1981). As a result, the black adolescent is required to evidence more flagrantly bizarre symptomatology in order to receive the same clinical care as his white counterpart. Very simply, behaviors which would be considered pathognomic for a white child are regularly interpreted as adaptive, even normal, for a black child (White, in Lewis, et al., 1981).

Inner city African American children simply have not been afforded the same complexity of understanding as children living in less deleterious surroundings. Repeatedly, their motivations, behaviors, and feelings have been attributed solely to their residence within poor, urban environments with little further exploration into the deep, personal *meanings* with which they invest their experiences with the outer world. Consequently, these kids are left grossly unattended to in essential psychological ways, even by the systems mandated to care for them.

It was the overarching goal of this project to make a sorely needed contribution to the current thinking about urban gang violence from the viewpoint of the perpetrator's psychological and developmental experience. This study sought to render comprehensible the actions of a small sample of these youths, kids who have long been the object of widespread contempt, trepidation, and simplistic understanding. It was an

attempt to psychoanalytically illuminate the subjective world of the violent perpetrator, whose traumatic experience is indeed forgotten, not only to the world around him, but to himself as well.

The researcher's eventual hope was that such illumination might help to stimulate a general dialogue in which urban childhood trauma and subsequent gang violence are understood as inextricably bound to each other in a profound and complex way. It is essential that gang phenomena be demystified, deconstructed, removed from the realm of the simply aberrant, if there is to be any hope of its eventual diminution. After all, it is its seeming isolation from anything that might evoke widespread identification, the way that it appears to dangle there randomly and angrily without clear psychological context, which makes the violence of urban youth gangs both so puzzling and so seemingly insoluble.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Due to the paucity of psychological literature which specifically addresses the linkage between chronic childhood exposure to traumatic violence and gang delinquency, the following review of prior work represents the researcher's own selection and integration of distinct *sets* of theoretical and research literature which were all felt to be relevant to and potentially illuminating of the inquiry at hand. Specifically, this section was structured in such a way as to provide, in as much depth as possible, a view of what the literature suggests, even indirectly, about the research question. Beginning with an overview of trauma theory, the following review guides the reader through material which includes childhood trauma, chronic trauma, violence, traumatic repetition, trauma and totalist ideology, and group life and its relation to traumatic experience.

Trauma

The Acute Trauma Process

What is trauma? While its colloquialization, clinical overuse, and delineation into "types" have muddied the conceptual waters somewhat (A. Freud, 1967, Furst, 1967, Krystal, 1978), from a purely phenomenological standpoint the defining features of trauma have undergone little descriptive revision in the past century. In other words, the "traumatic moment" (Freud & Breuer, 1895) itself, which must be kept conceptually distinct from traumatic *results*, has been, in terms of raw phenomenology, defined extremely consistently (A. Freud, 1967, Freud, 1920, Furst, 1967, Herman, 1992, Kardiner, 1941, Krystal, 1978). According to many theorists, the only way of discerning pure traumatization is by the presence of distinct and strictly defined psychological states, namely, the immediate and sudden overwhelming, paralyzing, and immobilizing of ego functions, subjectively experienced as a massive state of helplessness and psychic disequilibrium. Trauma, psychoanalytically speaking, is an essentially binary phenomenon, qualified and measured by its sheer quantitative intensity.. Furst (1967) wrote, "Phenomenologically, trauma is specific and unique; it is sudden and totally disruptive. Viewed strictly, trauma proper is not subject to quantitative gradation-that is, the stimulus barrier either is or is not overwhelmed" (pp. 37-38). Alternative uses and definitions of the concept, while helpful in terms of describing ongoingly stressful and developmentally impactful psychic states, do not fall under the rubric of acute trauma as defined phenomenologically. As such, theoretically delineated processes such as retrospective (Sandler, 1967), screen (Glover, in Furst, 1967), cumulative (Khan, 1963), and strain (Kris, 1956, Sandler, 1967) traumas, which do not definitionally require the

immediate breakdown of ego processes, refer more to specific traumatic contexts and preconditions than to actual traumatization as strictly conceived.

Since the beginning of the development of trauma theory, there has existed a purposeful distinction between the traumatic event itself and its pathological sequelae. Freud was extremely interested in both and set out to account for trauma in both clinical and metapsychological terms. His conception of traumatic phenomenology was completely tied to his concept of the stimulus barrier (Freud, 1917, 1920), a concept which has since lost its biological and economic ties but which has retained a certain metaphorical and descriptive status within the contemporary trauma literature. According to this model, trauma is a consequence of "an experience which within a short period of time presents the mind with an increase of stimulus too powerful to be dealt with or worked off in the usual way" (Freud, 1917, p. 275) and "an extensive breach being made in the protective shield against stimuli" (Freud, 1920, p. 35), resulting in the actual flooding and incapacitation of the ego.

Later, in Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety, Freud (1926) added the idea that trauma is phenomenologically comprised of the experience of helplessness in reaction to actual danger for which the subject is psychically unprepared. In this model, Freud made the important distinction between automatic anxiety, or the reaction to unanticipated danger, and signal anxiety, or the reaction to the anticipation of danger which arouses self-preservative, defensive functions and thereby protects the ego from trauma. Signal anxiety, by reproducing past dangers in lesser form, has the function of promoting mastery, increasing preparedness, and thereby thwarting traumatization. In this light, then, trauma is viewed as the failure of signal anxiety to perform its protective warning function, resulting in the overwhelming of basic ego mechanisms by the traumatic event and rendering the subject helpless.

Most later definitions of traumatic phenomenology have resembled Freud's in their essential aspects. Kardiner (1941), in his study of war trauma, came to the same descriptive conclusion, namely, that trauma is evidenced by the overwhelming and disorganizing of the ego in the face of a specific and noxious outer stimulus. For Anna Freud (1967), too, trauma is due to a sudden, unexpected event which severely and visibly compromises the equilibrium of the ego, the evidence of which lies in the ego's immediate regression to primitive modes of functioning. Krystal (1978) qualified traumatization on the basis of its sheer phenomenology, namely, the subjective and acute experience of helplessness, paralysis, and withdrawal, regardless of the quality of the stimulus involved. For Herman (1992) as well, the basic experience of trauma at the time of its occurrence is that of helplessness and powerlessness. Therefore, while there is infinite variability in terms of individual trauma *response* and *effects* --see below--the nature of the acute traumatic moment itself has been the subject of vast and continuous theoretical agreement.

Classic trauma theory posits two phases of traumatization: 1) the traumatic event itself; and 2) the attempts of the psyche to contend with, process, assimilate, or otherwise recover from the traumatic event. Trauma, in other words, sets into motion defensive operations which are unique to the subject in question and which are aimed at terminating the unbearable psychic state created by the traumatic stimulus. According to the most traditional and widespread model of trauma, the ideational and/or affective components of the traumatic event are immediately repressed, or, more technically, encoded in primitive, nonverbal memory forms, giving rise to a specific set of symptomatology referred to originally as the "traumatic neuroses" and more recently as Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (hereafter referred to as PTSD).

The traumatic neuroses, or PTSD, however, is but one of an infinite number of potential trauma outcomes (Furst, 1967, Krystal, 1978, van der Kolk, 1988, van der Kolk

& van der Hart, 1989). As described earlier in this paper, the results of trauma are intricately tied to a multiplicity of personal and situational variables working as a "complemental series" (Freud, 1939). As such, traumatic sequelae, or adaptations, are intensely varied and idiosyncratic, their ties to a specific, historical experience often obscured by their complexity.

As stated previously, the effects of trauma represent the psyche's efforts to contend somehow with the state of acute traumatization. Freud (1939) was struck by the degree to which these attempts appear to reflect fixation on the trauma and yet clearly represent different, even opposing, aims with regard to the fixation. He labeled "positive" those unconscious efforts "to revive the trauma, to remember the forgotten experience, or, better still, to make it real-to live through once more a repetition of it" (p. 95) and "negative" those efforts to conceal from oneself the fact of one's traumatization, to avoid stimuli reminiscent of the event. In the former, he was referring to the tendency of traumatized persons to actively, though unconsciously, repeat, enact, or otherwise concretize the contents of their trauma in their ongoing and contemporary lives. In the latter, he was referring to the wish to deny, inhibit, or otherwise obliterate the traumatic content from consciousness. The idea that traumatic effects form a dialectic between opposing psychological agendas is clearly borne out in the precarious and biphasic nature of traumatic symptomatology, particularly as is found in the alternate hyperarousal and numbing experiences of PTSD.

Traumatic neurosis/PTSD is primarily characterized by massive inhibition and withdrawal interrupted by periods of extreme arousal and overstimulation, referred to in modern trauma jargon as the "biphasic tendency" (van der Kolk & Ducey, 1989) and generally understood as the subject's attempts to contend, through fight or flight, with stimuli reminiscent of the original trauma. The symptoms of PTSD, therefore, reflect permanent changes in adaptation in reaction to the experience of overwhelming trauma

(Kardiner, 1941, Wilson & Zigelbaum, 1985) and can be viewed as aimed at preventing further traumatization (Krystal, 1988). However, because the original trauma and its attending affective and ideational components have been repressed or otherwise encoded in archaic, nonlinguistic form, e.g., biologically or imagistically, these biphasic posttraumatic responses are experienced as automatic, intrusive, and/or disconnected from any identifiable historical event, leaving the subject feeling "at the mercy," so to speak, of their own emergency response systems (van der Kolk & Ducey, 1989, van der Kolk & van der Hart, 1989).

Pierre Janet, a French psychiatrist whose early work on traumatic memory anticipated that of Freud, Charcot, Piaget, and modern trauma researchers, was extremely interested in the ways in which traumatic experience overrides linguistic representation, resulting in its dissociation from consciousness and its intrusion into the life of the subject in the form of perseverative dreams, somatic automatisms, and anxiety (van der Kolk and van der Hart, 1989). According to Janet, it is the "vehemence of emotion" attached to the trauma which immobilizes the integration and conceptual processing of traumatic experiences and which results in dissociation, or the splitting off of memory contents which do not fit into existing mental schemas.

As stated, one of the central characteristics of the acute trauma response is that of intense withdrawal, dissociation, and affective numbing, which, according to Janet (in van der Kolk and van der Hart, 1989) and Kardiner (1941), is due to the walling off of intense traumatic affect and which results in the gradual inhibition of meaningful emotional contact with the outer world. Krystal (1978, 1988) has termed the most extreme version of this phenomenon the "catatonoid reaction" and has cited it as a frequent response to the experience of catastrophic trauma. According to him, the catatonoid reaction reflects a state of helpless surrender to the experience of danger,

similar to Lifton's (1982) concept of "walking death," and results in the reduction of traumatic affect to a manageable intensity.

Krystal (1988) provided conceptual form to the surrender pattern, the "robotization" (p. 214), which is characteristic of severely traumatized subjects by redefining the classic view of the stimulus barrier. According to his view, the stimulus barrier is not a passive threshold structure, but rather is comprised of the individual's active, defensive repertoire and is altered towards physical self-preservation by the experience of trauma. In cases where the traumatization is arrested at the point of sensory shutdown, this reorganization takes place at the level of perceptual registration, resulting in the constricting and dulling of perceptual freedom in order to block the registration of painful and dangerous experience and affect. The numbing response, therefore, as seen through this lens, is the subject's defensive efforts to ward off traumatic anxiety.

The arousal components of the trauma response, which are analogous to Freud's (1939) "positive" effects of trauma, are comprised essentially of the subject's repetitions and reliving of the traumatic experience in contemporary form. Obviously the aggressive sequelae of trauma fall largely, though not fully, under this rubric, and insofar as this form of trauma response was of primary interest to this researcher, it is given separate and intensive attention later. But first, because of its relevance to this study and because it imposes effects in a substantially unique way, it is essential to review the research and theory related to chronic forms of trauma.

Chronic Trauma

Chronic trauma, as occurs in situations of repeated and ongoing exposure to life-threatening danger, as exemplified by war, captivity, and prolonged abuse, results in

massive, defensive adaptations at the level of the personality which have as their primary aim the survival of the subject within the traumatic environment (Bettleheim, 1943, Herman, 1992, Klein, 1974, Lifton, 1986). Since there is felt to be no potential for escape, and consequently no *post*-trauma period, the subject focuses his efforts on his *accommodation to*, rather than his *assimilation of*, the horrors with which he is relentlessly faced. As such, the entire character of the subject is enlisted towards the goal of survival, resulting in more pervasive and less circumscribed alterations in defense, memory, behavior, and identity than occurs following singular traumatic disruptions. In fact, what appears remarkable from the outside looking in is the degree to which many people exposed to chronic trauma do not appear traumatized in the classic sense. They appear neither immobilized nor helpless, but rather to have developed a certain imperviousness to their situation, an adaptation which strikes outsiders as peculiar, if not downright eerie.

Bettleheim (1943) described his own observations of long-term prisoners inside a Nazi concentration camp. Specifically, he noticed that these prisoners had made some form of adaptation to their surroundings which, in turn, was reflected in basic changes in their personalities. In contrast to the newly arriving prisoners, they seemed not to resist their captivity and to have developed an actual interest in the daily goings-on of the camp. The outer world--friends, family, even the possibility of their own liberation--seemed peripheral, irrelevant and secondary to their goals of power within the camp. Towards that end, many of these prisoners developed a strong identification with Gestapo values and ideology, often initiating the elimination of other prisoners who were felt to be "unfit."

Lifton (1986), too, detailed the massive transformations of character engendered by living within death-dominated environments. He described a form of sociopathy which develops in response to ongoing threats of personal annihilation and which aims at

promoting the survival of the subject. Via a psychological process he referred to as "doubling," the individual neither denies nor inhibits his relationship to the outer world, but rather grants its crucial aspects a new, often morally perverse, set of meanings, a re-semiosis, so to speak, which serves to quiet his anxieties related to death and disintegration.

Klein (1974) differentiated between acute forms of traumatization, which occur following sudden and singular traumas and which find representation in the traumatic neuroses, and traumatization which is due to repetitive and prolonged exposure to danger. The essential difference, he stated, is due to permanent alterations and increases in the stimulus barrier (defined as the subject's cadre of defenses) in reaction to chronic stress which, over time, are actually integrated into the personality of the subject in the form of fixed character traits. Anna Freud (1967) shared this view and added the obvious point that permanent change in the stimulus barrier, while ordinarily pathogenic, is a necessary adaptation for people living in chronically adverse situations insofar as it prevents daily traumatization. Characterological accommodation to chronic stress, in other words, represents the subject's efforts to familiarize himself with the traumatic stimuli of his environment and to thereby lessen the potential for ongoing traumatic assault for which he is unprepared. Human beings, as Freud (1967) pointed out, are traumatized only by the unfamiliar.

Due to their ongoing nature, repeated traumas stimulate defensive operations and characterological adaptations which severely compromise the ways in which experience is registered, stored, and retrieved from memory. Repeated traumas are far more likely to be encoded in somatic and behavioral memory forms than are one-time traumatic episodes (Terr, 1990), rendering them more difficult to access linguistically and to recall consciously. As such, chronic traumatic experience is likely to be enacted behaviorally, in contrast to singular episodes of trauma, which can more readily find representation in

word form. The behavioral reenactments which occur in response to ongoing trauma often become, due to their monotony, repetitiveness, and compulsivity, integrated over time into the overall personality of the subject (Freud, 1939, Gislason & Call, 1982, Terr, 1990) and lose their obvious links to historical experiences.

Although this idea is taken up in detail later on, it is important to mention here that chronic traumatic exposure imposes a specific neurological sequela not found in instances of singular trauma. Briefly, ongoing experiences of traumatic overstimulation have been found to elicit internal opioid responses in the brain (van der Kolk & Greenberg, 1987). Similar in its effects to the application of external opioids (e.g., morphine), the release of endogenous opioids inhibits pain, reduces rage, decreases depression and paranoia, and tranquilizes extreme hyperarousal. The body, in other words, makes its own permanent psychobiological adaptation to prolonged, repetitive traumatic experience, the addictive aspects of which have profound ramifications for the subject's ongoing handling of his own psychic states. As stated, given its relevance to the understanding of violence and traumatic repetition, this issue is the subject of more detailed review later on.

In sum, chronic traumatic experience must be distinguished from singular trauma by its impact on the total personality organization of the victim. Because this effect is so global, so insidious, and in some ways, so ego-syntonic to the subject, its ties to outer stimuli are often difficult for the outsider, as well as for the traumatized subject, to discern. Furthermore, due to the difficulty in locating the source of traumatization in conscious, verbal memory and the resulting enactment of trauma in crude, grandiose, often alienating behavior forms, the victim of persistent trauma is frequently the object of contempt or confusion, rather than empathic understanding. The characterological pathogenicity of chronic traumatic stress is profound, and its pathological manifestations, as is discussed in the following section, must be understood as reflecting the trauma

survivor's efforts to ward off traumatic helplessness by any means necessary. As Faigen (1987) asserted:

> . . . a long-lasting traumatic situation or series of events in childhood . . . may have the ultimate effect of a pathological organizer of character. It is pathological in the sense of prematurely forcing massive adaptations to out-of-phase and overwhelming stimuli. It is also pathological in the sense that it gathers a wide range of personality variables more or less permanently under the umbrella of the traumatic situation-integrating these variables of character with each other in a certain fixed way, or in a certain direction, which dominates future development. . . . *[G]enerally the component of organization which affects character is related to the person's recuperative efforts.* [italics added] These are called into play following the experience of helplessness and constitute the person's effort to adapt to the real childhood danger and to master the psychic dangers of overwhelming anxiety and helplessness. (pp. 18-19)

Trauma and Recuperation

Freud (in Krystal, 1978), in reference to the experience of overwhelming, catastrophic life events and the psychological transformations which ensue, wrote:

> No matter how much we may shrink with horror from certain situations . . . it is nevertheless impossible for us to feel our way into such people - to divine the changes which original obtuseness of mind, a gradual stupefying process, the cessation of expectations, and cruder or more refined methods of narcotization have produced upon their receptivity to sensations of pleasure and unpleasure.

> Moreover, in the case of the most extreme possibility of suffering, special mental protective devices are brought into operation. (p. 103)

Krystal (1988) argued that true catastrophic trauma involves the passive surrender to danger which leads ultimately, if undisrupted by defensive efforts, to psychogenic death or to arrest at the point of the catatonoid state. The catatonoid state, he explained, is reflected in the gradual numbing and "psychic closing off" (Lifton, 1982) of cognition and affect and is functionally analogous to the infant's prototypic termination of unbearable psychic states by going off to sleep. It is what occurs to those who surrender to trauma and do not die (Krystal, 1978). Although this process is subjectively experienced with relief, it is also immensely life-threatening insofar as the subject has effectively shut off his attempts to overcome, or somehow master, his traumatic ordeal. As Krystal (1978) warned, "It is the process of psychological surrender which is the lethal one" (p. 104).

Full-blown trauma, Krystal (1978) insisted, leading as it does to either psychogenic death or the catatonoid state, rarely occurs. Most trauma-related effects and clinical syndromes are the consequence, not of actual trauma per se, but of "autoplastic changes in the process of trauma *prevention*" (Krystal, 1988, p. 214). What this refers to, structurally speaking, is the process by which trauma imposes alterations in the stimulus barrier, changes which aim posttraumatically towards the thwarting of full-scale traumatization and the prevention of retraumatization. In this sense, traumatic sequelae, including characterological accommodations and the various posttraumatic arousal syndromes, can be considered necessities of trauma prevention, restitution, and recuperation. Krystal (1978) exemplified this idea by describing how suicidal action can represent the patient's attempt to interrupt the trauma process by asserting mastery over the state of passive surrender. In this light, the suicidal behavior can be viewed as having

taken on the function of defense in the face of traumatic annihilation and serving, oddly enough, a recuperative role in the immediate psychic life of the patient.

The notion that traumatic effects are aimed at recuperation from and defense against trauma is invaluable for understanding the frantic, even bizarre, behaviors observed in people exposed to massive danger. Even when such effects are delayed in their appearance and therefore no longer fit the immediate environmental context, they can be grasped as meaningfully and adaptively linked to lived historical experience, rather than simply as random eruptions of affect and behavior. Freud (1939) wrote,

> The [posttraumatic] illness may . . . be regarded as an attempt at cure, an endeavor to reconcile the divided Ego - divided by the trauma - with the rest and to unite it into a strong whole that will be fit to cope with the outer world. (p. 97)

Kardiner (1941) concurred with this view, suggesting that the attitudes with which the traumatized person emerges from his ordeal (for example, masochistic and/or sadistic attitudes) and which he experiences in parallel with periods of inhibition and withdrawal, represent unconsciously deliberate efforts to establish "meaningful contact with the world" (p. 187). These attitudes and their attending behavioral representations are not regressive, in Kardiner's view, but rather disorganized attempts at trauma restitution.

If passive psychic surrender, as Krystal (1978, 1988) posited, constitutes the more dangerous, potentially lethal, form of trauma response, then action must be viewed as adaptive, even self-preservative, insofar as it has the effect of staving off traumatic collapse as observed in the catatonoid response. As described in general psychoanalytic theory, action mediates and transforms lived traumatic experience by capturing it in symbolic form, concretizing it, lifting it out of the realm of the uncanny (Atwood, et al., 1984). It serves a variety of restitutive functions for the individual, including warding off

dangerous experience from consciousness and aiding mastery through repetition. Action, in other words, by altering subjective experience, works in the service of preserving the organization and psychic survival of the traumatized subject.

The defensive role of action vis a vis traumatic anxiety was taken up by Wilson, et al. (1985) in their study on compulsive criminality in relation to PTSD. According to their formulations, the trauma survivor, when aroused by a stimulus reminiscent of the original trauma, moves immediately into a "survivor mode of psychological functioning" (p. 307), one major form of which they termed the "action addict" syndrome. The consuming motivation of the "action addict" is the pursuit of sensation in order to guarantee his aliveness in the world and to thereby counteract the ever-looming fantasy that he is dead, or that if he were to stop his frenetic activity, he would quickly descend into a state of symbolic death (as described by Lifton, 1980). Action, according to these authors, works defensively *against* the experience of traumatic stress, and in fact, appears to supplant it. This idea is evidenced by their observation that when many of their research subjects relinquished their active behavior, they soon became symptomatic for PTSD. Here again, then, is the idea that traumatic aftereffects and psychopathology are recuperative in terms of the subject's own sense of safety and intactness. Unfortunately, in the case of criminal activity, the personal solution to traumatic impotence occurs at the expense of societal order, and as Becker (1973) so aptly stated, "Society wants to be the one to decide how people are to transcend death; it will tolerate the *causa-sui* project only if it fits into the standard social project. Otherwise there is the alarm of 'Anarchy!'" (p. 46). Obviously the use of socially deviant action forms to master trauma will be very much at the heart of this discussion later on.

Traumatic experience, if not fatal or met with robotizing surrender, leads to new forms of adaptation, defensively constructed, which represent the survivor's attempts to recuperate. These new defensive patterns are motivated by the need to stave off the

intense terror, vulnerability, and helplessness experienced in the throes of the original trauma, and, especially in the case of chronic trauma, become meshed with the total character structure of the victim over time. The new adaptation, insofar as it is directed towards eliminating vulnerability or otherwise transcending the awareness of one's physical mortality, often comes in the form of omnipotent character traits which support the calming illusion that the subject has absolute control over his universe. While it is a fairly standard project of living for all people to seek escape from the determinism of death and physical limitation (Becker, 1973), in the case of severely and chronically traumatized persons, this agenda takes on an immediately urgent and personally relevant meaning.

Children and Trauma

The pathogenicity of pervasive violence is compounded for children, as compared to adults, by their developmental immaturity and vulnerability. Anna Freud (1967) suggested that the level of psychological development reached by a given child has direct impact on the way in which trauma is both experienced and processed, a concept she referred to as "phase specificity." Based on recent research of childhood trauma, discrete, age-based phases of trauma response, each comprised of unique interpersonal, cognitive, behavioral, and emotional constellations, have been documented, strongly suggesting that developmental issues have immediate ramifications for trauma mastery, and in turn, for the child's subsequent development (Eth & Pynoos, 1985a). The death of significant figures in a child's life, especially death imposed by human violence (Garbarino, et al., 1992), constitutes a profound and indelible interference in normative development (Nagera, 1970), its traumatic aspects severely compromising, if not completely impeding, the normal grief process (Eth & Pynoos, 1985b). Even in instances

of singular traumatic events, moderate to severe posttraumatic sequelae have been consistent outcome findings, regardless of the age of the child (Terr, 1979). It is hardly surprising, therefore, that chronic violence is deeply psychologically traumatic for children, especially when it occurs within close spatial proximity (Arroyo et al., 1985, Pynoos & Nader, 1989), as it does in the inner city.

Childhood traumatic vulnerability is due, in part, to the relatively lesser ability of children to cognitively convert their fearful experiences into symbolic form, leaving them more likely to be "held captive" by the visual, concrete, and imagistic versions of what they experience (Fish-Murray et al., 1987). Children who experience trauma before the age of five are especially dependent on sensorimotor-dominated modes of cognitive processing and memory, meaning that their experiences are likely to be registered and processed at the level of sensation and visual perception and to be remembered at the level of physiology and behavior (Terr, 1990). Especially because the hippocampus of the brain, which functions to contextualize memory in terms of time and space, does not develop until ages three to four, earlier experiences are registered in the form of crude, free-floating imagery, bodily sensation, and feeling states which are not grounded in a spatial and temporal orientation (van der Kolk, 1988).

The consequence of the cognitive limitations of children in regard to trauma is that their experiences cannot be as readily liquified in linear, narrative form and remain as fixed psychological imprints which are often distilled into one particularly horrific memory (Kris, 1956). Herman (1992) quoted Janet on the dilemma of traumatic memory:

> [Normal memory], like all psychological phenomena, is an action; essentially it is the action of telling a story. . . . A situation has not been satisfactorily liquidated . . . until we have achieved, not merely an outward reaction through our movements,

> but also an inward reaction through the words we address to ourselves, through the organization of the recital of the event to others and to ourselves, and through the putting of this recital in its place as one of the chapters in our personal history. . . . Strictly speaking, then, one who retains a fixed idea of a happening cannot be said to have a "memory." . . . [I]t is only for convenience that we speak of it as a "traumatic memory". (p. 37)

Therefore, while children register trauma in the central nervous system, they cannot assimilate it into cognitive structures that would allow for the working through of their experience, leaving the trauma encapsulated in crude form and the child rigid, hypervigilant, and fixated on its presence within him (Fish-Murray, et al, 1987). Insofar as the trauma cannot be satisfactorily liquified by the child and he is preoccupied with holding off the registration of anxiety-producing trauma signals (Kris, 1956), the psychological world of the traumatized child is profoundly constricted (Green, 1985). The most visible effects of this constriction are reflected in the child's compromised ability to play and to learn.

Play is, in ordinary life, a child's primary mode for dealing with distressing experience. For the deeply traumatized child, although he expects that his play will bring relief, it does not, due to impediments in his ability to psychologically elaborate and transform his experience through the application of fantasy and imagination. The play becomes an eerie, concrete, one-to-one replication of the trauma itself, aimed at, though rarely achieving, mastery (Terr, 1981). The attempt at mastery through play is futile, according to both Klein (1974) and Terr (1981), because of the *realness* of the trauma. When the actuality of an event, or series of events, is inescapable, when its features are literally branded into memory, the attempt to play out new, more victorious endings simply cannot hold up against what the child knows himself to have experienced.

Chronic environmental aggression results in psychological states which are dominated by unremitting anxiety and which severely jeopardize efforts to learn. Gardner (1971) referred to the aggressive "thrusts of one man against another" (p. 78) as "death equivalents" (p. 78) and noted that violent assaults of this kind occur too frequently within economically deprived social environments and are at the root of certain types of learning impediments in children. The child in these conditions, he suggested, lives with a perpetual fear of aggressive attack, experienced as a fear of annihilation, and an attending sense of overstimulating anxiety which sorely disrupts the development of normal curiosity. Curiosity, Gardner described, is comprised phenomenologically of controlled fear plus controlled aggression. In cases where children have been subjected to inordinate amounts of external traumatic stimulation, there often results an "anxiety overload" (p. 80) and a resultant inability to experience anxiety as constructive and aggression as impersonal, a phenomenon most frequently observed in boys. Active learning and curious exploration, in consequence, shut down.

As with adults, prolonged exposure to traumatic danger results in defensive adaptations which become part of the child's developing personality over time (Green, 1985). Children in the inner city have been observed to become strangely desensitized to the violence around them and to even develop a sense of thrill in response to such exposure (Garbarino, et al., 1992). Often the child develops a certain fatalistic outlook regarding his own immediate mortality (Bell, 1991) and thereafter, due to the ways in which ideas of death and vulnerability are altered in their psychological meaning, approaches danger with a seemingly calm and resigned demeanor.

Despite the descriptive parallels between inner city life and actual zones of war, there exist important differences between them which have impact on the child's attempts to make sense of, and to thereby master, his experiences with environmental aggression. One complication for children in American urban settings is the difficulty distinguishing

between ally and foe (Garbarino, et al., 1991,1992). The perpetrators of urban community violence are very frequently family members and friends, making the identification of "the bad guys" confusing, if not impossible. In fact, violent gang members are often extremely protective of the young children residing within their turf. (Fear is therefore not the only motivation for these children to identify with the older, violent members of their communities; they are also very often the most admirable and positive roles models that such children have in their lives.)

The transformation and mastery of trauma is aided, as is discussed later, by the ability to provide cognitive structure and meaning to, or to otherwise make sense of, overwhelming life experience, an ability Garbarino, et al. (1992) referred to as "representational competence." In instances of conventional war, the chaos and violence which saturate daily life are given representational meaning by a collectively embraced, politically structured set of rationales and ideologies. For children, ideology performs the function of narrativizing and cohering raw experience, even when these narratives are based on the perpetuation of hatred and do not, therefore, lessen the intensity of the actual conflict (Garbarino, et al., 1992). In this sense, then, it is less the quality of the experience than it is its lack of representation that results in ongoing feelings of traumatic chaos for children.

Coles (1986) reiterated this idea in his discussion about how a culture's prevailing nationalist and linguistic traditions perform important restitutive functions for children in wartime. He described the "persisting integrative function of a political ego" (p. 65) which aids in the ordering of experience and in the demarcation and structuring of the self. He wrote of children living in the impoverished, embattled countries of, among others, Nicaragua and South Africa:

> Because a child's mind, like that of a grown-up, seizes symbols, craves a general explanation for a particular set of experiences, a nation's name, its flag, its music, its currency, its slogans, its history, its political life all give boys and girls everywhere a handle as they shape and assert their personalities. (p. 61)

Unlike children living in war environments in which the battle lines are clear, the enemy unmistakable, and the explanation for the violence institutionalized in the form of communally adopted ideological maps, children of the American inner cities have, by contrast, no such ideological scaffolding upon which to hang their traumatic experiences (Jenkins, 1994), a dilemma given seeming solution by the participation in the richly symbolic and ideology-bound world of urban gang culture.

Gangs and Trauma

Up to now, this review of the literature has targeted those aspects of trauma which were considered the most germane to this project. Now this presentation takes a swing over to the other side of the study issue and focuses specifically on the three components of gang life which were deemed by the investigator the most essential for understanding its overall relationship to childhood violent trauma: 1) violent action, 2) ideological totalism, and 3) group life. These are the elements of gang life which differentiate it from other forms of homicidal violence and which, when analyzed separately, have been each theoretically linked to trauma. They are, in other words, trauma-borne. It was the goal of the researcher in the following sections to clarify the nature of these links as seen through the lens of theory, and more specifically, to provide a conceptually contrived structure by which the eventual data might be partially organized.

Violent Action

The recuperative power of violence

Theories which view the causes of human aggression as solely and deterministically linked to homeostatic breakdown in the face of environmental deprivation and empathic failure fail to appreciate how it transforms and elaborates lived experience as well as promotes and maintains relational bonds (Mitchell, 1993). To suggest that one is simply and impulsively impelled towards violence by malignant outer forces strips from the subject the degree to which he is sensually, pleasurably engaged in the creation of his own action.

In order to really understand violent motivation, it must be understood, as argued by Katz (1988), that violence is frequently both profoundly authentic (i.e., irreducible) and transformative in its effects on the perpetrator. To view it simply as a reaction to an externally imposed set of contingencies, he added, relegates the violent criminal to the role of object and negates the extent to which he actively designs his action towards the goal of altering his own subjectivity. Violence is an internal dialectic, according to Katz (1988), comprised of feeling both controlled by outer forces and omnipotently beyond the grasp of ordinary rationality. He wrote:

> [T}he participants are playing with the line between the sense of themselves as subject and object, between being in and out of control, between directing and being directed by the dynamics of the situation. To complete successfully the transition from subject to object . . . a person may have to arrange the environment

> to "pacify" his subjectivity. He may then submit to forces that transcend his subjectivity even while he tacitly controls the transition. (p. 8)

According to this view, then, violence is essentially a project of omnipotence (Katz, 1988), reflective of a purposeful building up, rather than a regressive breaking down, of the self. It removes the perpetrator from the realm of practical interests and the confines of the prevailing societal moral code. It is an act of sheer transcendence which lifts the subject out of his own psychic world, and in fact, offers the promise of expanding it with a "magic so powerful that it can change his ontology" (Katz, 1988, p. 8). That, in any case, is the subject's fantasy.

Katz' conception is limited by the degree to which it is a purely phenomenological one and does not therefore account for the ways in which violent pursuits of omnipotence are *defensively* significant in terms of the handling of traumatic internal states. Clearly, violent omnipotence is, first and foremost, an attempt to alter a subjective world dominated by continual threat of collapse, feelings of smallness and vulnerability, and imminent psychic danger (de Zulueta, 1994). Galatzer-Levy (1993), in his remarkable paper on adolescent violence, described the enlivening, narcissistically restitutive, even joyful functions of violence in relation to chronic feelings of emotional nihilism and psychological deadness. Through violence, he suggested, the internal world is granted both meaningful representation and identity in the form of heroic selfhood. Violence, in this sense, gives psychological aliveness, omnipotently constructed, to a personal subjectivity felt to be hovering at the edge of "symbolic death" (Lifton, 1980).

The looming of death anxiety for persons surrounded by pervasive violence is transcended, according to Lifton (1986), by the perpetration of slaughter. The act of killing, he stated, reflects the projection outward of one's own inner trauma and results in the sense of oneself as cleansed, as morally righteous, and as beyond personal

annihilation. Sartre (1963), in his essay on the colonized revolutionaries of French-controlled Algeria, referred to the process of self-purification which comes from radical violence. By killing off the enemy, these rebels were, in Sartre's view, "recreating" themselves, and in so doing, actually ridding themselves of their history of collective degradation and thereby curing themselves of the neuroses brought about by their colonization.

What is important to consider here is not whether a particular act of violence is justified, adaptive in context, or morally good from the point of view of some external set of criteria, but rather its meaning and impact from the experiential viewpoint of the actor. The literature presented thus far has given credence to the idea that violence is frequently recuperative in its intent and possibly in its impact. Certainly the violent agenda is often observed to be passionately embraced, even adopted as a mode of living, a fact which cannot be understood on the mere basis of phylogeny, impulsive rage, or the pursuit of instrumental (i.e., concrete) goals. While the presentation of psychological theories which account for such a phenomenon forms the content of the following sections, as well as the heart of this discussion, it is preliminary to that discussion to simply consider the alterations in self-feeling which accompany the perpetration of violent action.

One question here is whether violence can be understood to contain symbolic significance or whether it is merely the outward manifestation of a state of internal disequilibrium. Marohn (1974) contended that violent forms of adolescent delinquency are more often due to the overtaxing of the ego by internal overstimulation, resulting in a tension-releasing and symbolically contentless frenzy. In his view, violence reflects an actual state of traumatic helplessness rather than an attempt to assert mastery *over* the state of traumatic helplessness. This is a key distinction and one which has been the object of some theoretical controversy. While it has largely been the view in this discussion that violence constitutes a behaviorally symbolic representation of trauma

which is recuperative in aim (a view which has been supported by research on trauma and behavioral memory), the possibility of alternative meanings must be kept in mind. It was certainly one goal of this project to ascertain the dynamic underpinnings of the violent actions of the subjects, specifically in regard to whether violent delinquent action is due to regressive impulse and tension or to active efforts to counteract traumatization. According to Krystal (1978, 1988), the surrender to internally traumatic states can only result in robotic shutdown or death, and action is always reflective of recuperative and preventive efforts. However, the determination of the actual meaning of the subject's violence probably rests on the extent to which it appears or does not appear to tell a story, or in other words, to contain structure and content in the form of repetition. Again, making this determination was a major pursuit of this study.

Adolescent violence

As suggested by the concept of "phase specificity" (Freud, 1967), the way in which a person responds to traumatic experience is partially determined by the tasks and defensive modes unique to his level of physical, psychological, cognitive, and interpersonal development. In adolescence, Blos (1979) maintained, the use of action to contend with both normative developmental challenges as well as traumatic helplessness and dependency is ubiquitous. Action, he said, powerfully enables the adolescent to resist developmentally imposed wishes for passive surrender to parental figures, and as such, is experienced as a "magical gesture" (p. 263) which "affirms a delusional control over reality" (p. 263). The adolescent thus alloplastically engages with the external world in a way which helps him to deny his own dependency and to thereby sustain a sense of omnipotence and power.

As a universal mode for handling the developmental realities of adolescence, action must be kept conceptually distinct from trauma-induced forms of acting out. Action in relation to traumatic processes is of a different sort and is comprised of different aims. Blos (1979) cited early trauma as a typical precondition for acting out, citing as well problems in symbol formation which result in the failure of language to communicate past experience (more on this later). Paradoxically, acting out aids the adolescent in the process of both remembering his trauma in vivid, behavioral form (Freud, in Blos, 1979) and forgetting the helplessness created by it (Jacobson, in Blos, 1979). Its primary function, according to Blos (1979), lies in the affirmation it brings to a repressed, historical reality which has been denied linguistic expression. In other words, acting out serves as a communicative link between current and past experience and must be distinguished from impulsive action on the basis of its narratively symbolic content. Blos (1979) wrote, "Acting out, then, is the establishment of that particular experiential congruence by which present reality provides a link to a traumatic past; in this sense, acting out is an alloplastic, maladaptive, restitutive process" (p. 273). It is restitutive, he clarified, in terms of its synthesizing effect on the impoverished adolescent ego.

Normatively, adolescence heralds the capacity for the true mourning of loss, which requires the ability to differentiate, desomatize, and symbolize affect states (Krystal, 1988). Massive childhood trauma severely disrupts normal affect development and impedes the ability to process loss in symbolic form. Inasmuch as separation and loss are central features of ordinary, Western adolescence, the complications imposed by early trauma for the negotiation of these processes and the affects aroused by them necessarily jeopardize adolescent development, especially in regards to intimacy, identity, and the mastery of psychic states (Reese, 1994).

For the adolescent exposed to early and massive trauma, affects are experienced as profoundly perilous and as tantamount to retraumatization. In other words, for these

adolescents, affects are used as signals which are traumatic in themselves and warn the subject of the imminent return of repressed traumatic states. In response, it is common for the adolescent to frantically and defensively avoid the experience of any strong feelings, positive or negative, frequently resorting to action defenses, specifically acting out, in order to stave off any sense of his own vulnerability.

The warding off of traumatic anxiety has regularly been linked to the adolescent proclivity for aggressive acting out. Berkovitz (1981) posited that violence on the part of certain adolescents helps to counter prolonged and pervasive feelings of intense powerlessness and helplessness by disrupting the sense of immobilization. He wrote that violent acts, whether of a suicidal or homicidal nature, "may . . . set into motion corrective changes in the unsatisfactory life equilibria. These changes may lead to a relief of stagnation and impasse, often restoring a sense of power" (p. 478). He was referring here to the emancipatory potential of violence which also was reflected in Fanon's (1963) idea of violence as a viable and transformative form of personal protest.

Emancipation and transformation occur, through whatever means, at the level of identity. Through violence, the self is altered, at least temporarily. Rothstein (1983) likened the adolescent's use of violent militarism to the younger child's efforts to work out issues of identity through games and play. Erikson (1942), too, saw the adolescent's ready identification with militaristic ideals and violent ideology as being a direct result of extreme and deeply-felt humiliation and to represent the forging of an identity which might help him to transcend his smallness in the world and the conflicts engendered by his own conscience.

War provides an ideal landscape upon which adolescents can recreate themselves and live out archaic and inflated grandiosity. Studies on the traumatic aftereffects of Vietnam for soldiers who were adolescent at the time of their duty have revealed that the greatest singular trauma imposed by relentless combat danger came in the form of the

literal shattering of the adolescent warrior's image of himself as invulnerable, brave, and heroic (Jackson, 1982, Ulman, et al.,1988). In response to this shattering of identity and the loss of personal meaning, or nihilism, created by it (Jackson, 1982), the Vietnam combat soldier was likely to erect "omnipotent aggressive defenses" (Brende, in Ulman, et al., 1988) in order to gain a renewed vision of himself as powerful and invincible. In this sense, the rage of combat was not simply reflective of a state of internal fragmentation, but rather an active attempt to reinstate psychic equilibrium.

The question at this point is: Does the violence of the inner city gang combatant function to counter his traumatic anxieties by affording him a simultaneous sense of heroic identity, omnipotent power, and symbolic representation of his childhood experience? In other words, is his violence felt to offer him a certain subjective transformation and to thereby rescue him from his trauma?

From the view of the outside observer, perhaps the most striking characteristic of the hard-core gang member is his sheer omnipotence, the most immediately obvious manifestation of which is the fearlessness which pervades his mannerisms, his actions, and his interpersonal conduct. According to Anderson (1994), this fearlessness is the reflection of the internalization of a street code which defines "manhood" on the basis of one's ruthlessness and physicality, and is, he added, demonstrated by one's willingness to risk death and a lack of ambivalence about the perpetration of violence. Katz (1988) also referred to the fearlessness of the gang member as evidenced by his absolute refusal to accommodate to the interests of others or otherwise make his motivations coherent for public consumption. Such fearlessness, Anderson (1994) contended, is defensively acquired and serves as an adaptation in core identity which has as its primary purpose both the deterrence of aggressive intent in others and the preservation of the subject's own self-esteem. As can be observed in the willingness of the gang member to place

himself at mortal risk, the maintaining of this adaptation overrides any concern he might have regarding his own physical safety.

Katz (1988) viewed the consuming motivation of the violent gang member to be transcendence. This, he said, is achieved through the violent and widespread "construction of dread" (p. 135). He wrote:

> In the hands of adolescent street elites, violence has a constructive power sufficient (1) to transform the significance of their principles of association from demeaning indications of childhood to the social requirements for glorious combat, (2) to establish a metaphor of sovereignty respected by peers, observed by the police, and duly reported by the mass media, and (3) most essentially, to sustain the claim of elite status in an aura of dread. (p. 135)

The sought-after sovereignty to which Katz referred is most frequently enacted in the form of turf ownership by a gang principality, or Nation, and is the most common concrete cause of lethal dispute between rival gangs (Block and Block, 1993). Insofar as the greatest proof of gang sovereignty lies in the fact that official police territories are demarcated on the basis of individual gang habitat (Katz, 1988), the pursuit of turf through violence can be seen to be, first and foremost, a project of extreme omnipotence.

Through the steady enactment of gang violence, the subject overtakes his own identity and transforms it into a version of himself which is beyond the grasp of the threats which lie internally, dormantly in wait. Yet, paradoxically, through his efforts he also keeps alive his ordeal and relives it, in disguised and reversed form, as a way of life. He is both fixated on his trauma and in flight from it; he both repeats it and obliterates it; he both remembers and forgets, all in a singular piece of action.

Behavioral repetition

The intensity with which many traumatized subjects repetitively expose themselves to contemporary versions of their traumatic ordeals is beyond the grasp of ordinary rationality. Why would a person actively pursue traumatic stimuli, placing himself at substantial, even mortal, risk in the process? Although the role of action, including violence, for trauma recuperation has been given significant attention in this review, the following question still remains: What is the meaning of the subject's use of stereotypic action forms which, despite some alterations in role, seem to literally mimic, recapitulate, or otherwise resurrect the original trauma in its most flagrant contents? If recuperation is his aim, why does he not simply avoid all traumatic reminders as completely as possible, or at least resort to new action forms, rather than repeatedly walking headlong into literal encores of the drama which was the source of his suffering in the first place?

What is most manifestly striking about this phenomenon is the degree to which the subject's appearance as a regular actor in these revolving scenarios seems hardly incidental, but rather contrived, purposeful, initiated by him as part of some elaborate unconscious plan. There is an urgency, a desperation, a consuming psychological investment in the perpetuation of the personal trauma that seems beyond the clutches of conscious control. It is as though the repetition of the trauma has taken on the status of essentiality in the life of the subject, namely, that it has a structural life of its own which, over time, becomes inseparable from the subject's overall identity, and in fact, may become its most central feature. Faigen (1987), discussing the implications of childhood trauma for adult character, stated that the active repetition of passively endured trauma becomes, in time, an indelible, core aspect of the subject's ongoing sense of who he is. Rangell (1967), too, suggested that "traumatophilia", or the passionate, repetitive pursuit of traumatic re-experiencing, can be so organizing to the personality structure of the

subject that relinquishing it is felt to be tantamount to the actual disintegration of the self. He wrote:

> [T]he disabling and ego-alien symptom becomes incorporated and integrated into the self and the body image and is tenaciously guarded with narcissistic libido and interest. The disease itself comes to serve multiple psychic functions and becomes a needed element in the total life situation. (p. 71)

How is the phenomenon of trauma repetition to be understood? Furthermore, what is its meaning beyond its role in organizing the subject's adult personality (a function which could be arguably relegated to the status of a secondary gain which has been elaborated over the course of posttraumatic development)? In short, what is the *primary* psychological motivation which underlies the chronic, impassioned pursuit of traumatic stimulation? Considering that urban gang members have been exposed to inordinate amounts of violent trauma as young children and that they have subsequently developed into adolescents who are both violently dangerous and endangered, the relevance of the concept of repetition to this project is at once both obvious and profound.

Freud, in Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920), was much confused by and interested in the extent to which certain patients would appear to voluntarily indulge themselves in potentially distressing behavior, the contents of which seemed to markedly resemble earlier traumatic experiences which had been repressed. Such behavior bewildered him insofar as it did not seem congruent with his metapsychological premise that humans are motivated essentially by the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of painful tension. Self-imposed psychic danger could not be viewed, in other words, as a "wish fulfillment," but rather seemed to reflect a separate, yet equally primary aim and motivational compulsion. He observed, "The impression [these patients] give is of being

pursued by a malignant fate or possessed by some 'daemonic' power'" (p. 23), a clinical impression which he clearly could not theoretically explain on the basis of the pleasure principle alone. He resolved his dilemma by elaborating the concept of the repetition compulsion, the aims of which he distinguished from pleasure-seeking aims by positing a new motivational construct: the death instinct (Freud, 1920).

The death instinct concept as postulated by Freud has, in the intervening years, come to be almost obsolete in its theoretical usage and clinical application. The idea that humans are phylogenically programmed to pursue their own death is untenable to most contemporary psychological theorists and practitioners. Even from a purely metaphorical and descriptive perspective, the concept is simply not congruous with the subjective experiences reported by patients. However, Freud's formulation of the repetition compulsion as a psychic response to traumatic experience has retained its metapsychological and clinical status and is now understood to represent a undeniable and central link between trauma and its behavioral sequelae, of which violence is a major form. The compulsive repeating of traumatic contents in the contemporary life of the trauma survivor is, according to researchers from a range of theoretical orientations, indeed a regular and predictable feature of the human trauma response (Horowitz, 1985). Behavioral repetition, specifically, may be the single greatest indicator of chronic childhood traumatization (Terr, 1990).

According to Freud (1939), the repetition compulsion falls under the rubric of the "positive" effects of trauma, having as its most fervent aim the revival of the original trauma in order that the subject might retrospectively master it. Repetition is the psychological attempt to keep ever-present the fact of one's traumatization in order that the assaults and psychic gaps engendered by it might belatedly be reconciled. It is essentially an enterprise of hope. In other words, by keeping his trauma perpetually and flagrantly alive, the subject ardently hopes to render it real and assimilable, to "rescue

[the trauma] from the uncanny . . . and really absorb it" (Greenacre, 1967, p. 122). Trauma repetition is, first and foremost, an effort at self-cure.

Freud's (1920) observation of the "*fort"-"da*" ("there"-"gone") game of a young child in response to the temporary departure of his mother continues to be the classic illustration of the concept of repetition in the service of mastery. In this game, the youngster repeatedly tossed a wooden reel over the edge of his bed so that it was concealed from his view. Following this motion, he would then yank on the string which was attached to the reel and thereby bring it back into view. It was essentially a game of losing and finding, of disappearance and return. The tirelessness with which the child engaged in this game exemplified, to Freud, a fixation on the experience of his mother's absence. Freud's interpretation of this game was that the child, by repeating his distressing experience in displaced and symbolic form, was attempting to achieve some kind of psychological mastery over his separation anxiety. In short, the child was converting into active mode an overwhelming psychic experience which had originally been passively endured in order to reduce his sense of vulnerability and helplessness.

Repetition, for Freud (1920), insofar as repressed traumatic contents are revived and captured within the current behavior of the subject, is a unique and vital form of memory, functioning as an actual substitute for words which are psychologically inaccessible. The subject, Freud wrote, "is obliged to *repeat* the repressed material as a contemporary experience instead of . . . *remembering* it as something belonging to the past" (p. 19). Repetition, then, is an attempt to symbolize the unsymbolized, to give voice to a mute, psychically encapsulated, consciously banished personal horror.

Freud's notion that repetition memorializes the repressed past is further fleshed out by Blos (1979) with the concept of concretization. Action, he explained, is essentially expressive and narrative; it assumes ego functions ordinarily relegated to symbolic speech, and, as such, functions as a personal language, idiomatic in form and yet intended

as a purposeful communicative interaction with the outer world. It is essentially a statement of memory, a crystallization of lived historical experience which finds representation in concrete, contemporary form. Repetitive action, in other words, is the narrativizing of a personal history.

Through concretization (Blos, 1979), the subject actively memorializes his repressed traumatic past, and in so doing, achieves a certain testament to its reality. Through his dramatic, insistent, assaultive play on the environment, he assures himself of the realness of his childhood experience and thereby reclaims those aspects of it which have been denied expression. It is a project of affirmation and integration, alloplastically achieved. Due to the traumatized subject's weakened ability to represent his experience in symbolic speech--see below--he remains woefully dependent on his environmental surround in order to convince himself of the reality of his traumatic history.

The idea that the compulsion to repeat is essentially a representation of repressed historical material has been given additional support by contemporary memory research. As stated earlier, traumatic memories, especially those arising from chronic traumas, are not encoded in linear, narrative form, but rather imagistically, sensorimotorically, and even physiologically (Terr, 1990). Consequently, the recalling, or retrieval, of traumatic experience occurs at the level of crude image, behavior, and/or the physical body. Repetition, then, represents the remembering of trauma in the modes in which it was originally registered.

Behavioral memory generally arises from a traumatic visual experience which was not originally attached to word symbols, i.e., verbal memory, due to the traumatic breakdown of the subject's information processing capacities. Behavioral memories are enacted most frequently in the form of posttraumatic play, which is characterized by the grim, monotonous recitation of the traumatic scenario, and chronic behavioral reenactment of the trauma (Herman, 1992, Terr, 1979, 1988). Children, given their more

concrete modes of memory storage as well as their developmental propensity for action, are especially likely to repeat traumas behaviorally, which often results in profound, even dangerous, personality transformations. Terr (1990) wrote, "[T]he reenactments of long-standing or repeated traumas pour out of the child so thickly, so frequently, that they amount to massive distortions of character. . . . These problems affect not only the child himself, but often the community as well" (p. 268).

A likely manifestation of the behavioral repetition of trauma in children is the identification with the aggressor which reflects a fixation to the trauma and defensively supplants the child's helplessness with omnipotence and control (Green, 1978, 1983, van der Kolk, 1987a). This effort, according to Green (1983), is a personality adaptation to chronic violent trauma and is undertaken by the child in order to promote retrospective mastery of the ordeal.

Traumatic anxiety can conceivably be differentiated from ordinary anxiety on the basis of the subject's lack of preparedness for the precipitating event and the literal shock which ensues. It is the sheer newness of the event, its incompatibility with prior experience, that renders it traumatic. Certainly Freud (1926) distinguished between automatic anxiety and signal anxiety precisely on that basis. Signal anxiety, he explained, refers to the subject's active, defensive position vis a vis the danger situation, whereas automatic anxiety refers to the fright engendered by the lack of ready defense. Signal anxiety, then, insofar as it represents a state of psychic readiness, develops as a result of prior experience, in contrast to automatic anxiety, which represents the raw, unmitigated response to new, unfamiliar stimuli.

According to Stern (1988), the repetition of trauma reflects the failure of the psyche to readily invoke signal anxiety and the subject's compulsive attempts to create it. By repeatedly turning passive traumatic experience into active "doing," the subject is essentially trying to evoke inner tension states that contain signal functions which will, in

turn, transform his state of unpreparedness into one of preparedness. He is, in other words, trying to attribute meaning to his self-contrived inner tension in such a way that it can be used by him to prevent further traumatization as well as be brought to bear retrospectively on the traumatic memory. For Stern (1988), then, trauma repetition is due to the subject's frantic efforts to self-correct, to insert, via his own submission to new, lesser versions of his trauma, that which was critically absent the first time around, namely, his own state of readiness.

One of the primary defining characteristics of repetition is that the subject appears endlessly trapped within a limited, self-defeating circle which seems to lead neither to mastery, even if that is the aim, nor to an awareness, gradually achieved, that his efforts are not the most economical. In short, he appears unable to contemplate his dilemma more fully in a way which might lead to the consideration of new, more successful alternatives. In cases where laboratory mammals were faced with an original period of inescapable shock, they were later severely constricted in their abilities to conceive of novel solutions for contending with adversity, even when such solutions were clearly visible and would lead to a rewarding outcome (van der Kolk, 1989). Consequently, insofar as they had diminished abilities to conceive of new self-preservative options for themselves, these traumatized animals perseverated in the familiar, remaining enslaved to limited, self-destructive, non-pain reducing cycles of alternatives from which there could be no extrication. They repeated, in other words, the same solution again and again.

Horowitz (1985) provided, from a cognitive orientation, a way of thinking about the traumatized person's self-imposed confinement within his trauma. The newness of the traumatic event, he explained, renders it unassimilable into existing mental schemas, leaving it frozen, encapsulated, and without meaning. Repetition, then, is the process by which the subject desperately attempts to forge a working cognitive schema within which the traumatic memory might come to reside, an endeavor Horowitz (1985) referred to as

the "completion tendency." Traumatic material which is not in consonance with pre-existing cognitive models remains locked within an "active memory," the contents of which are repeated again and again until a schematic match occurs. What is most significant about Horowitz' idea, in addition to its conceptualization of trauma perseveration, is that repetition appears to reflect, at least in part, the attempt to attribute *meaning* to the traumatic experience by linking it up, rendering it compatible, with the gestalt of prior experience.

The repetitive pursuit of sensation, of thrill, markedly characterizes the activity of the violent gang member. He not only traumatically tortures those in his wake, but also repeatedly submits himself to the possibility of his own violent death. Through his gang involvement, he literally hovers on the edge of personal destruction, seeming hardly to register the precariousness of his situation other than the pure thrill that it offers him. According to Balint (1959), thrills, insofar as the risks they entail are directly reminiscent of earlier trauma, offer up a unique opportunity for traumatic mastery. The phenomenology of the thrill, i.e., the "giddiness and vertigo . . . [the] loss of balance, of stability, of the firm contact with the safe earth" (Balint, 1959, p. 23) affords the subject the chance to reassure himself of his own skill, his capacity for traumatic survival and self-repair, and most significantly, that the world around him can be confidently mastered.

The repetitive, trauma-reminiscent, sensation-seeking behavior of many traumatized persons, however, is not wholly attributable to psychologically symbolic processes. Rather, there is strong evidence gleaned from the fields of neuropsychology and endocrinology pointing to the existence of physiological components of trauma reenactment (de Zulueta, 1994, van der Kolk, 1988, 1989). In normative physiology, the body responds to intense stress-induced tension states by producing endogenous opioids, an analgesic response which functions to tranquilize acute states of autonomic

hyperarousal. Chronically traumatized people, by contrast, have a markedly impaired ability to manufacture endogenous opioids, and consequently, have much greater difficulty modulating arousal and stimulation. In response to this difficulty, they frequently resort to the intense external stimulation of their analgesic system, or, in other words, repeatedly expose themselves to traumatic stimuli as a way of mediating profoundly stressful internal states. Trauma repetition, then, is equivalent to the ingestion of external opioids which over time results in the actual physiological addiction to the trauma, the withdrawal sequelae of which become motivational in their own right (van der Kolk, 1988).

The necessity of ongoing traumatic stimulation for the soothing of traumatic anxiety is a phenomenon which offers a compelling, adjunctive way of understanding the link between traumatic states and trauma-reminiscent repetitions. Vietnam veterans diagnosed with PTSD, when exposed to a series of films depicting Vietnam combat, evinced a 30% reduction in pain perception, an analgesic equivalent to 8 mg. of morphine (van der Kolk, 1989). Similar to the calming effects reported in response to self-mutilative cutting and abusive relational interchanges, violence directed against others is currently speculated to produce a somatic tranquilizing effect. For instance, Bach-y-Rita (in van der Kolk, 1989) observed that homicidal male prison inmates, when deprived of an external object on which to enact their violence, subsequently began to inflict wounds on their own bodies.

Children have been especially noted as vulnerable to the dependence-withdrawal dialectic of trauma re-exposure and keenly sensitive to the pleasurable physiological states which appear to accompany such exposure (Goodwin, 1988, van der Kolk, 1989). Certainly one can speculate that violently traumatized children, insofar as their internal calming capacities are compromised by the experience of unremitting anxiety states (Gardner 1971), would eagerly embrace extreme, even noxious, opportunities to promote

self-soothing, similar to the very young child's use of transitional phenomena (Winnicott, 1971).

In sum, repetitive violence can be seen to be a purposeful contemporary representation, or reenactment, of an earlier violent trauma, the primary unconscious goal of which is retrospective mastery. Furthermore, insofar as it represents efforts to master intolerable internal states, it can be viewed as reparative, restitutive and adaptive in aim (Herman, 1992), partially enacted in order to preserve a certain psychic equilibrium (Greenacre, 1967) and to cohere the personality in the face of potential disorganization (Stern, 1988). As a phenomenon, perhaps its most compelling attribute is its symbolic potential, or the degree to which the repetitive content conveys a personal narrative, a behavioral representation, of otherwise unspeakable past experience.

Based on the literature presented, repetition can be interpreted in a myriad of ways and filtered through a range of conceptual lenses, all useful and yet all limited in their generalizability. It was the overriding goal of this project to discern the idiomatic meaning of the violent motives of the subjects without the undue imposition of theory. However, because the link between childhood trauma and adolescent violence, the predominant focus of this project, is so largely and clearly embedded within the repetitive matrix, (Burgess, et al., 1987, de Zulueta, 1994, Miller, 1982, 1991), its theoretical explication, however limited, was deemed essential.

To view violence as a recuperative effort aimed at both omnipotence over and mastery of trauma, while useful for understanding the relation of violence to trauma generally, is not sufficient for understanding the traumatized adolescent's attraction to gang life specifically. In order to more fully explicate the unique role of gang life in regard to traumatization, it is necessary now to discuss the additional two components which distinguish the gang experience from other forms of violent experience, namely, the centrality of gang-specific ideology and group life.

Totalist Ideology

In addition to the perpetration of violent action, inner city gang life is also characterized by the intense adherence to a strict set of codes, rituals, and organizational structure, manuscripted in the form of constitutional by-laws which define and sanction all behavior, including violence, on the part of individual members. In fact, given these strict internal regulations, most gang violence is neither random nor impulsive, contrary to popular perception, but rather is tightly controlled and planfully executed (Babicky, 1994). As part of a gang, one is expected to internalize and enact, not only the concrete rules and structure, but also the value system, the rationalizations, and the moral code unique to the gang in question. The individual gang member is expected to act as a literal ambassador, a representative, of the gang when on the street, meaning that he has little personal flexibility in matters of appearance, conduct, and interpersonal communication (Katz, 1988). He is literally indoctrinated into the belief set of the gang, his success within the ranks being fundamentally tied to his demonstration, over time, that he has incorporated the gang's ideology into his own belief system. Given the extent to which gang life centrally involves the transformation and transfiguration of the thought system, and consequently, the identity, of the member, the similarities to military life need little elaboration.

The insularity of the gang, especially among the "hard core" levels of the organization, make it an essentially closed system, a "pseudo-society" (Rothstein, 1983), as it were, the loyalty to which is operative and enforced, again through formal sanctions, as a fundamental value of belonging (Copeland, 1974). Through gang life, and the attending fidelity by the gang member to the group, its codes, and insignias, identity is given new form, or, in some cases, literally born. The ontogeny of personal identity is

supplanted by the unique history of the gang, what Erikson (1968) referred to as "the denial of the irreversibility of historical time . . . [which is] expressed in a . . . gang's self-appointment as a 'people' or a 'class' with a tradition and an ethics all its own" (p. 253). In this way, the youth gang is as though emancipated from the relevance of societal order, more concerned with the transcendence of outer authority than with the rebellion against it (Katz, 1988). Little outside the perpetuation and glorification of the gang is felt to really matter (Scott, 1993).

Although the stated rationalizations for gang violence appear, from the outside, spurious and superficial (for example, the killing of rival gang members on the basis of the color of their clothing), such rationales are part of a much larger, very deeply embraced "outlaw code," the overriding ethos of which is the maintenance of group identity and respect (Anderson, 1994, Stanley, 1990). The centrality of this code, the seemingly blind adherence to its ideological components, and the harsh penalties incurred by the show of opposition, reflect an essentially conservative, fanatical philosophical orientation (Krisberg, 1974, Scott, 1993), or what Katz (1988) refers to as a right-wing, fascist identification.

What is the meaning of the gang member's wholesale, zealous adoption of his gang's codes and ideologies in relation to his childhood experiences of violent trauma? The literature surveyed indicates that ideological fanaticism indeed plays a role in the mitigation of trauma, and in fact, is trauma-borne (de Zulueta, 1994). Gang imagery, insofar as it is comprised of visions of domination, invulnerability, and protection, is a powerful seduction to traumatized youth.

Ideology is powerfully appealing to the adolescent (Erikson, 1950). His defensively contrived identification with a cause, a set of principles, a doctrine, offers a welcome relief from the challenge of integrating an increasing array of diverse and complex life experiences into a still precarious identity. By funneling the complexity of

his experiences through an ideological sieve, he lifts himself out of the realm of the ambiguous, the morally relative, which his development has imposed upon him, and he emerges with a transcendent sense of righteous clarity about the larger world, his relationships, and above all, himself. The adolescent's passionate attachment to an ideology, while basically normative during this time of life (Blos, 1979), provides the double illusion that he has discovered who he uniquely is in the world and also that he has risen above his own sense of essential banality. The grasping at ideological doctrine is, then, an attempt to omnipotently repair and transcend an identity which feels unstable, unintegrated, and impelled towards anxiety and regression. Clearly, given the adolescent propensity for grandiosity and the developmentally encroaching, confusing awareness of the complexity of existence, the potential for ideological fanaticism within youth culture is higher than perhaps at any other time of life.

The most fundamental normative task for the Western adolescent is the consolidation of identity, a task which is almost universally perilous. As Erikson (1968) stated, "In no other stage in the life cycle . . . are the promise of finding oneself and the threat of losing oneself so closely allied" (p. 244). For the adolescent exposed to chronic endangerment and cultural marginalization, the task of identity formation is especially compromised (Reese, 1994), leaving him vulnerable to the seductions of black-white ideologies which promise to eliminate his confusion as well as offer him a certain salvation from his traumatic ordeals. Through his indoctrination, he is liberated from his own subjectivity and provided an identity which is absolute and immutable.

Perhaps the most large-scale example of this phenomenon is to be found in the massive receptivity among German youth to Hitler's propaganda before and during World War II. According to Erikson (1942), Hitler's imagery resonated with a potentiality deep within the German adolescent mind. Due to the defeats, humiliations, and geographical fragmentations incurred at the end of World War I, Germany descended into a deep crisis

of national identity. This crisis trickled down into the psyche of the German citizenry, resulting in the perceived diminishment of the German father as well as a profound form of collective masochism and disunity. Hitler, by supplying an imagery of national unity, invulnerability, and power in the form of world domination, served as a compelling object of identification for the German adolescent as well as rescued him from the pull to ordinary citizenship. Furthermore, the totalism, the sheer mysticism, of the Aryan ideology enabled the adolescent to stave off, through "hypnotic action and freedom from thought" (Erikson, 1942, p. 491), conflicts created by the burdens of conscience and intellectual relativism.

Ideology, broadly speaking, is inextricably bound to one's sense of national, socioeconomic, and cultural belonging, reflected in one's identification with the symbols, rituals, history, and language which comprise the identity of the group of which he is a part. These identifications are inseparable from the individual's sense of who he is, and in fact, serve as vital organizers of personal identity (Coles, 1986, Erikson, 1965). The aspects of identity which arise from cultural identification, however, are neither static or absolute, but rather are linked to the discrete "historical moment" (Erikson, 1968) within which the individual finds himself at the time. That is to say, the affinity of the subject for a particular explanatory structure, or ideology, however baffling, cannot be understood without a consideration of actual outer context. This affinity is never wholly reducible to intrapsychic pathology, but rather is decidedly linked to larger environmental processes. In fact, it has been stated that personalities considered "pathological" due to their deviance from consensually-held social norms may actually be giving representation to the larger society's suppressed, underlying ideological preferences (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson, & Sanford, 1982)

One's ideological commitment, in addition to representing the identification with prevailing cultural traditions, is also very much a manifestation and embodiment of one's

unique experience in the world, and in this sense, can be viewed as multiply determined. In other words, ideological fervor is not simply reducible to elements located in the subject's external, concrete world. After all, people exposed to the same environmental ordeals often have very different ways of construing the world. There can be said to exist a certain readiness, a prior receptivity to dogma, among those who embrace it to the point of action (Lifton, 1986), a receptivity which is critically linked to personality variables that transcend and predate the current experience of outer hardship (Adorno, et al., 1982). (It is possible that such a premorbid vulnerability to the persuasions of demagogy, however that is to be conceptualized, represents a compelling distinction between traumatized children who join gangs and those who do not.)

The role of ideology for contending with traumatic states lies primarily in the degree to which it simplifies the complex, clarifies that which is chaotic and ambiguous, and enables one to feel integrated, powerful, and fearless. Although the potential for totalist thought is universal in a transitory way (Bollas, 1992, Erikson, 1968), the defensive reliance upon it is especially pronounced among people living amidst chronic violence and can therefore be speculated to play a significant role in trauma recuperation (Coles, 1986, de Zulueta, 1994, Garbarino, et al., 1991). Ideological fanaticism, in fact, has been observed to powerfully mitigate the effects of violence among persons, including children, living in war-ravaged environments (Garbarino, et al., 1991).

Totalitarianism in ideology, which is often used to provide credibility to violent action and is manifested in a single-mindedness of purpose, refers to the process of ordering all informational data according to a specific set of ideological premises which are considered unquestionably true (Arendt, 1948). Doubt and ambivalence are expelled from the mind in order to maintain its purity, resulting in a personal subjectivity which is simplistic and ideologically-binded (Bollas, 1992). Affects are fanatically and reverently attached to a particular object (a person, group, or idea) with the anticipation that one will

be personally transformed (Bollas, 1987) and made whole (Erikson, 1968) as a result of the attachment. It is essentially a process of surrender to an object which is experienced as larger than oneself and which is endowed with the power of magic.

According to Erikson (1968), the roots of totalitarianism are located in the subject's shattered relationship to the world, forcing him to create or adopt an explanatory system by which his malevolent experiences can be totally explained. Ideology coalesces chaotic experience, renders it meaningful, and helps to reinstate the individual's relationship to external objects. In short, fanatic, ritualized belief systems can be viewed as organizers which cohere raw experience. The propensity for the totalist ordering of experience, then, arises from the subject's trauma and the subjective void and chaos engendered by it.

Gang violence is rationalized by its members on the basis of an imagery in which the "enemy" is collectively and pervasively viewed as vile, evil, and deserving of extinction. The gang's ideology, as such, provides a simplified way for understanding otherwise complex social processes by imposing categorical distinctions for assessing the human "other" which are not based on individual traits, but rather on social group membership. Group relations, therefore, are quite similar to those which arise from nationalist and patriotic identifications in wartime insofar as "outgroups" are instantaneously viewed with suspicion and rejection, while the "ingroup" is unquestionably idealized and endowed with majesty and righteousness (Adorno, et al., 1982). Through his uncritical acceptance of stereotyped imagery, therefore, the gang subject is both rescued from the task of having to integrate a multiplicity of variables into his evaluation of certain interpersonal situations as well as provided with the opportunity to justifiably project outwards aspects of his own "negative identity" (Erikson, 1965). Ambivalence, moral uncertainty, and one's own sense of traumatic contamination can all

be captured and transformed, even transcended, by one's ready identification with the group's collective embrace of irreducible and socially defining ideological axioms.

Bollas (1992) referred to the fascistic, violent projection of negative imagery onto an outside human entity as "committive genocide" (p. 207) and linked it to the wish to become purified in mind, to expel confusion, doubt, and inner turmoil by limiting the degree to which personal meaning has freedom of movement. Through the attribution of altered, fixed meaning to social processes, one's own destructive motives and actions can be justified and denied, and in fact, come to be associated with inner cleansing, honor, and nobility (Galatzer-Levy, 1993, Lifton, 1986).

The violence of the inner city, in contrast to the violence within conventional war zones, lacks a communally embraced, binding set of rationales which gives order, clarity, and explanatory structure to the traumas endured (Jenkins, 1994). (One localized exception is the fundamentalist, political rhetoric of the Black Muslim movement which, interestingly, finds enormous support among imprisoned gang members [Scott, 1993]). Trauma clutters the mind and disrupts the subject's sense of his own ongoingness, making the pursuit of a world view by which personal subjectivity can be made orderly, and above all, quiet, a universal, if not desperate, agenda. Certainly, as has been observed in nations at war, the role of ideological commitment for contending with traumatic stress is profound. Bettleheim (1943) noted that, among those living inside Nazi concentration camps, those who functioned the best psychologically were the prisoners with intense, often fanatic, ideological views. However, as discussed, the imposition of black-white ideology, or the reduction of complex processes to simple formulation, can readily result in the profound demonization and dehumanization of those granted "enemy" status. In fact, as Garbarino, et al. (1991) asserted, the greater and longer one's defensive reliance on ideologies which depict the "other" as evil and worthy of relentless brutality, the greater likelihood that one's moral development will be severely truncated.

Gangs provide more than the opportunity to enact violence. They are also richly and colorfully symbolic cultures, replete with their own defining philosophies, sanctions, and ways of construing experience. Similar to military training programs which aim at the literal transfiguration of the soldier (Rothstein, 1983, Shatan, 1977), gang life provides, through the strict defining of identity, behavior, values, and the nature of social processes, an illusory structure within which the subject might mediate, if not transcend, his own inner demons. Gang ideology, in this sense, can readily be viewed as a recuperative opportunity for the traumatized adolescent, providing him, at the very least, a sanction for the violent repetition of his trauma.

Group Life

In Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego (1921), Freud asked, "How does [the group] acquire the capacity for exercising such a decisive influence over the mental life of the individual?" (p. 6). Indeed, certain group experiences seem to literally hypnotize the individual, resulting in the seeming obliteration of his own sense of initiative and independence in favor of the agenda of the group. Within such groups, there is a collective, contagious pursuit of uniformity, of homogeneity, which seems to demand both the surrender of personal will and an absolute incorporation of and obedience to the group's binding ideology, a frequent feature of which is the utter rejection and aggression against those residing outside the group tie (Freud, 1921). This type of group attachment is exemplified by extremist religious and military factions as well as by the most radical forms of nationalist patriotism, a phenomenon Adorno, et al. (1982) defined as the "blind attachment to certain national values, uncritical conformity with the prevailing group ways, and rejection of other [collectives] as outgroups" (p. 107).

According to Erikson (1950, 1968), adolescents, especially those whose identities are precarious, are extremely vulnerable to the persuasive and hypnotic power of groups. He cited "fidelity," or the massive identification with, and loyalty to, a tribe, class, clan, or gang as a central adolescent pursuit, the devotion to which is often absolutized at the exclusion of those who are perceived as dissimilar, revealing again, the strong adolescent propensity for cruel, totalist thinking. As discussed earlier, among exceptionally endangered youth, the search for avenues to omnipotence and power is a central, organizing imperative. Through his surrender to a peer group and its attending omnipotent imagery, such youth are granted a profound source of narcissistic identification and power (van der Kolk, 1987b).

Much youth violence is committed on behalf of the passionate ferocity with which the adolescent adheres to his peer group, even if his own personal well-being is jeopardized in the process. The preservation of the group and its binding, omnipotent illusions is a supraordinate aim of many adolescents (Kernberg, 1984) and regularly underlies the personal heroics and self-sacrifices committed by youth in war and urban street violence (Galatzer-Levy, 1992, Scott, 1993). For instance, van der Kolk (1985) discovered that the adolescent soldier's loss of a peer to combat in Vietnam was experienced, first and foremost, as a narcissistic trauma demanding immediate retribution and counter-aggression, rather than as an object loss requiring only grief (a response which more regularly characterized the experience of the adult soldier). Galatzer-Levy (1992), too, described the willingness of youthful Japanese kamikaze pilots to martyr themselves violently on behalf of the overall group effort.

Within the culture of urban youth gangs, individual identity is often more dramatically linked to the subject's gang identification than to his position within a family or particular ethnic group (Stanley, 1990), reflecting the enormous attachment that the adolescent feels to the "homies" who comprise his gang. As evidenced by the typical

denigration of individual member names (e.g., "Fat Boy") in contrast to the majesty of the group name (e.g., "Black Knights"), even his own personal identity is subsumed, or at best, diminished by the larger collective to which he fervently belongs (Katz, 1988). Both in his own mind and that of the group, the individual's existence is embedded within the overall life of the gang, personal issues being progressively transformed into matters of collective concern. Gang homicides are, first and foremost, acts of group retribution, prompted by the show of disrespect by a rival gang or by the actual murder of a gang member (Babicky, 1994). These acts of revenge, despite their instrumental and ideological aspects, are performed, in large measure, as concrete demonstrations of love for the gang, a love which transcends all else. Scott (1993) wrote, "My clothes, walk, talk, and attitude all reflected my love for and allegiance to my set. Nobody was more important than my homeboys--nobody" (p. 69).

How is the role of group membership to be understood in relation to traumatic stress? Research has indicated that group belonging is indeed a powerful mediator of trauma, and in fact, appears to effectively diminish traumatic hyperarousal. In fact, the intensity of group cohesion appears directly proportional to the perception of external threat (van der Kolk, 1987b) and has been observed not only to lessen the effects of traumatic stress, but also, in some cases, to completely preclude their emergence:

> [I]nterpersonal support, by buffering and protecting the psyche in the face of even catastrophic stress situations, can mitigate the traumatic process, and the progression to the final state of apathetic resignation and surrender may be prevented and even averted. In this way social bonding [can] mitigate the destructive process that [leads] to the overwhelming and paralysis of the coping and recuperative resources of the psyche. (Davidson, in van der Kolk, 1987b, p. 156)

Insofar as group ties actually bind traumatic anxiety (Freud, 1921), it is understandable the degree to which these ties have been regularly observed to protect soldiers from traumatically disintegrating during actual combat (Boulanger & Kadushin, 1986, Kardiner & Spiegel, 1947). In fact, symptoms of PTSD regularly do not appear until the soldier has lost his connection with his combat unit, which is usually after the war effort has ended (Boulanger, et al., 1986). (This observation has compelling implications for the meaning of incarceration for gang members. In other words, is the perpetuation of gang activity inside prisons partially due to attempts to maintain relational ties?)

Perhaps the greatest recuperative power of group life lies in its transcendent potential. Within the group, the individual mind is transformed into a "group mind," the imagery of which is simplistic, hyperbolized, and omnipotent (Freud, 1921). The subject's ordinary conflicts and inhibitions are relegated to the unconscious background, his fantasies of invulnerability given collective sanction and representation in the form of a shared agenda. According to Becker (1973), there exists a natural human propensity towards slavishness, a readiness, even a longing, to be hypnotized by the powerful "other." Enslavement, he says, invokes the fantasy of safety and omnipotence and finds its most perpetual manifestation in the phenomenon of transference, embedded within which is the subject's ongoing search for immortality and fearlessness. By refuting one's essential aloneness and fragility in the world, group relations tame both the terrors of living and of dying.

Summation

Based on this survey of the literature, the immersion in gang life appears to reflect the subject's efforts to mitigate the psychic fractures caused by chronic violent trauma in childhood. The psychological links between traumatic childhood experience and later gang membership and violence would seem to reside, generally speaking, within the matrices of traumatic repetition and omnipotent denial, as Freud (1939) originally hypothesized. Insofar as the essential components of gang life, i.e., violent action, totalist ideology, and group life, are all suggested in the literature to aid in the psychic adaptation to chronically imposed traumatic states, it is conceivable that gang life might appear, at least to the traumatized child, to offer a unique, multipurpose opportunity for self-cure.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

Design

It was the supraordinate aim of this project to illuminate, through the intensive inquiry of subjects, the psychological processes which account for the "victim-to-perpetrator" transformation among violent, urban, gang-affiliated juvenile males. The study relied primarily on narrative data which emerged in response to both semi-structured and flexible, i.e., non-structured, interviews with a very small sample (n=5) of incarcerated subjects over the course of approximately six weeks (9 interviews per subject). Because there existed no prior work which specifically addressed the links between childhood trauma and subsequent gang identification, this study was clearly exploratory. However, because the project strove to clarify connections between two temporally distant variables, it did not aim at simple description alone, but at the generation of various explanatory hypotheses as gleaned from the researcher's

interpretations of themes which arose both within and across subject data. In short, this project was a qualitative, theory-formulative, ethnographic inquiry into the subjective worlds of violent adolescent gang members.

Research Site

Due to issues regarding the researcher's safety, as well as the need to procure subjects who could be reliably available for an extended period of time, this project took place within a confined, i.e., institutional, setting, specifically Illinois Youth Center (IYC) at St. Charles, a medium security correctional facility for juvenile males located outside Chicago. IYC-St. Charles houses the most violent juvenile offenders in the state of Illinois, with the exception of IYC-Joliet which houses those youth waived into the adult criminal system who cannot be effectively detained at St. Charles.

Subjects

Sample Size

The sample size for this study was restricted to five subjects on the basis of the researcher's contention that depth of analysis, rather than breadth, would generate the most compelling and valid resulting formulations. Although this restriction obviously limits the degree to which the resulting hypotheses can be generalized, it did allow for a construction of interpretations truly grounded in subjective experience. In this way, the

researcher hoped to avoid some of the earlier-mentioned pitfalls which have historically beset gang research.

Screening Procedures

Prior to her first day at the facility, the researcher asked the clinical staff of IYC-St. Charles to select a handful of incarcerated youths who met the following requirements:

- Age 15-18
- Raised within an urban inner city, preferably inside a housing project
- African American ethnicity
- Current hard-core gang identification
- History of repeated violent crime on behalf of gang membership
- Available for bi-weekly interviews at the facility through January 1996
- Not diagnosably psychotic, suicidal, or otherwise symptomatic for any major form of mental illness
- Not known to be mentally retarded (I.Q. below 70) or in any other way profoundly developmentally delayed
- Not addicted to any mind-altering substance
- No history of any extended psychological treatment or psychiatric medication

The staff compiled a list of approximately 12 juveniles who fit the above criteria, five of whom were then semi-randomly selected (i.e., based on a cursory overview of prison files) by the researcher for a personal screening interview. The screening interview itself was semi-structured and was intended to elicit information about each potential subject's level of gang involvement only. By employing a Gang Affiliation

Interview (Appendix A), the researcher's primary aim was to discern each potential subject's commitment to and overall identification with his street gang as evidenced by, for instance, his knowledge of gang policy, rank within the organization, willingness to commit violence on the gang's behalf, and personal assaults endured as a result of membership.

Since the presence of massive exposure to violence in childhood was an *a priori* assumption on the part of the researcher, potential subjects were neither selected for nor screened on that dimension. Therefore, the presence of violence in the early lives of subjects can be viewed as correlative and meaningful, rather than as a function of sampling.

Based upon their responses to the Gang Affiliation Interview, as well as their stated willingness to participate, all five subjects screened were found suitable for the study. (Following the initial screening, one subject changed his mind about participating and was immediately replaced by another willing and suitable subject.) All subjects were assessed to be active, hard-core members of large urban street gangs.

Other than the opportunity to have their individual stories narrated in the researcher's "book," none of the subjects were offered any material incentive for participating in the study. (Three subjects, at the point of screening, requested and were promised copies of the written material following its completion). The researcher presented each subject with a small personal gift during the final interview. She also provided them each with her professional office voice mail number in case questions or concerns should arise, or in case any subject should wish to talk further.

Subject Consent and Confidentiality

During the initial screening interview, all subjects were informed of the researcher's expectations, agenda, and intentions regarding the use of data, confidentiality, and so forth. Following the preliminary screening and prior to the first research interview, each subject was required to sign a Statement of Informed Consent (Appendix B), indicating his understanding of the project and his willingness to participate. All subjects were also required to sign a consent form for the Illinois Department of Corrections.

At the time of the screening interview, the researcher assigned each subject an identification number by which he was subsequently referred on all interview forms and audio tapes, a measure taken solely to uphold his privacy. Given the anticipated suspiciousness of the subjects as well as the very real threat of legal and personal danger to them should certain disclosures be publicly revealed, it was felt necessary to spend a good deal of time with each of them discussing issues of privacy and overall comfort with the interview process. Each subject was encouraged by the researcher to raise any concerns about the project in an ongoing way and to freely withhold any information he did not wish to divulge.

The names assigned to subjects in Chapters IV and V of this report were chosen by the subjects themselves (with one exception). The gang affiliations reported in the manuscript reflect the subjects' gang Nations, of which there are only two in the midwest United States--each containing thousands of members worldwide--rather than the specific individual gang or set. All subjects, therefore, are denoted as either Disciples or Vice Lords, designations which do not betray the subjects' more specific gang allegiances or turf locations.

Data Collection

As stated, the data for this project was comprised primarily of narrative material derived from bi-weekly, one-hour interviews with subjects spanning approximately a six week time period (nine interviews per subject). Two of the subjects, belonging to separate gangs within the same Nation, requested and were granted two conjoint interviews as well One subject withdrew from the study during the fifth interview due to his concerns about the trustworthiness of the researcher (to be detailed later). Each of the nonstructured interviews was audiotaped and subsequently professionally transcribed.

The rationale for such an intensive interviewing schedule was based on several factors: 1) it was expected that subjects would have difficulty talking openly about their experiences and that the extended time period would enhance familiarity and comfort with the investigator; 2) the researcher hoped to glean a view of her subjects which would be neither reductionistic nor simply bound by verbal discourse, but which would incorporate the complexity of their psychological experience as manifested in an array of communicative modalities, e.g., language, nonverbal behavior, and interactions with the examiner; and lastly, 3) it was believed that multiple interviews would enhance the strength and validity of the researcher's resulting interpretations.

This intensive, narrative-based approach to data collection contains obvious parallels to clinical interviewing methods, and that was very much the researcher's intent. Although the interviews contained clear and circumscribed parameters around what was to be discussed, within those boundaries the subject was free to elaborate on whatever aspects of his experience were the most salient for him. It remained the investigator's task to follow his discourse, to clarify its significance, and to pursue exploration of the larger, more latent meanings embedded within it.

Towards the goal of allowing each subject's narrative material to assume primary status over the researcher's constructions of method, a very loosely structured interview

format was used. In the first two sessions, the interview format was more tightly structured as a way of eliciting standardized and basic demographic information (see the Demographic Interview, Appendix C) and material related to the subject's direct experience of and exposure to violence during childhood (see the Childhood Traumatic Violence Checklist, Appendix D). However, this material was not used by the researcher in order to make inferences about overall meaning, but rather served the joint purposes of opening up a dialogue with the subject and providing the researcher with a general, beginning context for understanding what she heard next.

The parameters of the remaining seven interviews, though flexible, were obviously defined by the study issue itself. In other words, it was the intent of the investigator to focus on the meanings (thoughts, feelings, associations) the subject attributed to his gang participation, with special emphasis on its relationship to his childhood (i.e., prior to gang membership) experiences with violence.

Data Analysis

Following the actual collection of data, the researcher attempted to locate patterns or themes of experience, both within and across subjects, which emerged and which were relevant to the study issue. By moving progressively from the idiosyncratic to the more general, and from the concrete to the abstract, the investigator aimed to develop a conceptualization of the links between childhood trauma and the youth gang experience which would be experience-near, coherent, comprehensive, and aesthetically compelling. Although the researcher's interpretations of data were subject to her own theoretical biases, it was very much her intent that these biases be not unduly imposed on the raw

data and that the resulting formulations remain as inductively informed by the narrative discourse as possible.

Within-Case Analysis

Insofar as the depth-psychological worlds of this population have been so rarely studied in a systematic, psychoanalytically-informed way, the analysis of the data first occurred at the level of the individual case. In this way, the richness and detail of each subject's psychological experience could be preserved, illuminated, and not overridden by an analytic preoccupation with generalities. The material derived from each subject, in other words, was initially examined as an entity in and of itself: idiomatic, distinctive, and informative in its own right.

The data collected for each subject was analyzed in a case study fashion (Runyon, 1984), with the aim of formulating idiographic generalizations based upon the thematic patterns which emerged from the subject's material. Specifically, the researcher analyzed the raw data for various categories of meaning, based on the words and behaviors of subjects, which appeared to offer compelling insights into the role of gang life in relation to childhood trauma. These meaning categories were comprised of both the subject's stated, or manifest, psychological experiences as well as the researcher's own inferences of latent meaning as derived from her overall experience of the subject and her own clinical and theoretical knowledge.

Cross-Case Analysis

Following the detailed analyses of individual subject data, the researcher examined the meaning categories generated by those analyses in totality, i.e., across subjects, in

order to discern features of experience which were more or less general to the collective sample. (Due to the summary nature of this analysis, it is presented in the Discussion section of this report.)

Validity and Reliability

Due to the regular presence of researcher interpretation and inference in the analysis of the raw data, this study was obviously fraught with threats to reliability. In order to reduce the degree to which the categories of meaning derived from the data would simply reflect the idiosyncratic view of the investigator, two major strategies were employed: 1) following the researcher's original analysis of individual data, a second reviewer examined select transcripts of interviews; researcher interpretations with which the second reviewer did not agree were re-examined; 2) the researcher kept her inferences about meaning as closely tied to the data as possible.

Validity for this project was defined as the accuracy and defensibility of the relationships between the constructs, or meaning categories, and the data to which they were assigned by the researcher. Because, as stated, the meaning categories arrived at by the researcher were data-informed, their validity was expected to be strong. However, because of the reliance on inference for interpreting the meaning of the data, the researcher inserted the following validity checks into the data collection and analysis processes: 1) each subject, except one, was interviewed at least nine times, an intensity that allowed for an inductive-deductive cycle of ascertaining and clarifying meanings; 2) the researcher kept a journal of her own ongoing reactions to the subjects and to the data in order that her own biases could be monitored; 3) interpretations of underlying meaning were discussed with an independent "consultant" in order to check their seeming veracity

(because the task of inferring latent meaning requires some ability to discern subtleties in psychological narratives, the researcher used someone with clinical training).

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Sample Profile

Demographic Profile

In accordance with sampling requirements, all five subjects were in their mid- to late-adolescence, of African American ethnicity, and were raised in large, urban ghettos. Three out of five subjects grew up in public housing developments and all but one were raised primarily by single mothers. The medical and psychological treatment histories of all the subjects were unremarkable, as was their past and present use of alcohol and drugs. They were all literate and only one of them had ever been diagnosed with any form of learning disability. All subjects had been arrested multiple times prior to their current incarceration, for a range of violent and drug-related offenses, and all but one were in IYC-St. Charles on a

conviction of a violent crime. (For a general demographic composite of the subject sample, see Table 1.)

Gang Affiliation Profile

As reflected by their responses at the point of original screening to the Gang Affiliation Interview (Appendix A), all five subjects indicated intense, ongoing, hard-core identifications with large, urban street gang organizations. All were remarkably fluent in the laws,
history, and structure of their organizations, as well as demonstratively loyal to them. As detailed in Table 2, the subjects
had all been gang-affiliated for several years, several had gang tattoos, all were familiar with and admitted ready facility with a range of firearms (ranging from handguns to assault rifles), and all had experienced personal violent injury as a result of their gang membership (all had been shot at by rival gangs, three of them hit). All indicated a willingness to perpetrate violence on behalf of their organizations, invoking militaristic credos (e.g., "Death before Dishonor") and the omnipresent belief in the necessity of defense and retaliation.

Despite their incarceration, all five subjects attested to the continuation of their gang activity within IYC-St. Charles. Intra-facility subject conflicts, both with staff and peers, were largely attributed to gang membership and several subjects had earned both additional correctional time as well as stints in solitary confinement

Table 1

Subject Identifying Data*

	Identifying variable				
Subject no.	Age	Ethnicity	Home Residence	Parental Constellation	Crime of Current Conviction
1	15	African American	Inner city	Mother & father in home	1st degree murder
2	16	African American	Inner city	Single-parent mother; father in prison	1st degree murder
3	17	African American	Inner city housing project	Single-parent mother; father unknown	Felony armed robbery
4	17	African American	Inner city housing project	Single-parent mother; father deceased	Attempted murder/ felony armed robbery
5	16	African American	Inner city housing project	DCFS ward; single-parent mother, rights revoked; father, rights revoked	Burglary

*Material based on responses to Demographic Interview (Appendix C)

Table 2

Gang Affiliation Profiles*

Gang affiliation variable	Subject (by identification number) 1	2	3	4	5
Gang Nation	Vice Lord	Vice Lord	Disciple	Disciple	Disciple
Years affiliated	3	7	6	6	4
Gang tattoo	no	yes	yes	yes	no
Preferred weaponry	9mm. .22	automatic	9mm. .380	uzi .357 9mm.	automatic .380 .25
Major gang-related assaults endured	shot at	shot	shot	shot	shot at

*Material based upon selected responses to Gang Affiliation Interview (Appendix A)

due to gang-related fighting. In short, for all of the subjects, their gang affiliations appeared to transcend issues of time, space, and circumstance and to constitute an enduring, overarching fact of existence and identity.

Childhood Exposure to Violence

Based on their responses to the Childhood Traumatic Violence Checklist (Appendix D), as well as subsequent nonstructured interview disclosures, all subjects were, prior to age 12, exposed to significant amounts of interpersonal and community violence (Table 3). As young children, all had continuous firsthand exposure to guns and gunfire (most of the subjects, in fact, could not recall a time when guns were not omnipresent in their lives) and all had personally witnessed at least one person get shot. One subject had himself been shot at age 11, prior to his own gang involvement.

The witnessing of violent death due to gang and drug warfare was reported as a fixed and ongoing aspect of childhood life by all of the subjects. Two had witnessed killings; four had, at least once, witnessed people dying on the streets; four had experienced the violent death of someone they personally knew; and two reported the deaths of young schoolmates by gunfire (in one case, the subject had personally witnessed the lethal shooting of his best friend at age 11). Three out of five subjects recalled attending funerals for other children and/or adolescents prior to age 12.

Regardless of the content or intensity of the violence reported, the subjects generally could not recall any flagrant sense of distress or negative emotional consequence in association with their experiences. In fact, they seemed bewildered, if not amused, at the suggestion that their experiences might have been in some way formidable. To all of them, violence was simply built in to the day-to-day routine of their

childhood lives: expectable, in some cases tedious in its constancy, and in some, the stuff of adventure.

Despite the abundance of personal exposure to violence reported collectively by the subject sample, none of the subjects considered himself to have been personally "victimized" by violence as a child, even the subject who was shot at age 11. "Whuppings" by adult caretakers were universally perceived as "deserved" and therefore not reflective of violent parental intent, and physical altercations with peers (which all subjects had experienced multiple times before age 12) were remembered as being typically self-instigated. The subject who was shot (to be discussed in detail later on) did not recall the incident until well into the nonstructured interviews and even then, did not consider himself to have been the victim of a violent crime. No subject, in short, viewed himself retrospectively as a recipient of childhood violence.

Table 3

Significant Cross-Subject Frequencies of Exposure to Violence Through Age 11*

Type of violence	Frequency of exposure n=5		
	Never	Once	Often
Heard gunshots	0	0	5
Seen a gun	0	0	5
Seen someone threaten to fire a gun at someone	0	0	5
Seen someone fire a gun at someone	1	0	4
Known someone who carried a gun regularly	0	0	5
Seen someone get shot	0	2	3
Been shot yourself	4	1	0
Seen someone stabbed	3	1	1
Seen someone killed	3	0	2
Seen someone dying	1	1	3

(table continues)

Table 3 (continued)

Significant Cross-Subject Frequencies of Exposure to Violence Through Age 11

Type of violence	Frequency of exposure n=5		
	Never	Once	Often
Known someone who was killed	1	3	1
Seen a fight where someone got hurt	0	0	5
Been in a fight yourself	0	0	5
Seen a family member get hurt by someone else	1	0	4
Seen a friend hurt or killed	0	1	4
Known a schoolmate who was hurt by someone	0	1	4
Known a schoolmate who was killed	3	1	1
Seen a drive-by shooting	2	0	3
Been to a funeral of an adult who was killed	2	1	2

(table continues)

Table 3 (continued)

Significant Cross-Subject Reports of Exposure to Violence Through Age 11

Type of violence	Frequency of exposure n=5		
	Never	Once	Often
Been to a funeral of a child or teenager who was killed	2	2	1
Been physically hurt by an adult	2	0	3
Been physically hurt by a child or teenager	2	1	2
Seen violence	0	0	5
Known about violence in your neighborhood	0	0	5
Been a victim of violence	5	0	0

* Material derived from responses to Childhood Traumatic Violence Checklist (Appendix D) and subsequent interview disclosures. Any seeming discrepancies are due to inconsistencies in subject reporting rather than errors in tabulation.

Responses to the Researcher

Expectedly, all of the subjects, with one exception (Subject 3), evinced some initial outward wariness of the researcher. However, this early caution, which largely took the form of a lack of verbal spontaneity and elaboration, did not seem much more exaggerated than what one might expect from any group of adolescent research subjects. Although one subject (Subject 4) conveyed a negative reaction to the race of the researcher, by the midpoint in the overall interview process, all the other subjects seemed fairly comfortable, even enthusiastic, about telling their stories and seemed to have developed a cooperative rapport with the investigator.

In the case of Subject 4, his suspiciousness of the researcher did not abate over time and eventually erupted during the fifth interview when he elected to terminate his participation in the project prematurely (he did not, however, withdraw his consent to use data collected up to that point). Very simply, he refused to continue the interviews on the basis of his feeling that "white people" cannot be trusted and, more specifically, that the researcher might be some kind of informant whose aim was to uncover any kind of leadership position he might occupy within his gang. Despite strong efforts on the part of the researcher to address his concerns and to reassure him of her actual motivations, Subject 4 remained steadfastly unwilling to cooperate any further in the study. Although it was impossible to discern the actual impact of his suspicions on the data, the researcher found no overt evidence that the content of his verbal disclosures was invalid. More than likely, he simply withheld information pertaining to his own activity and position within his gang.

Katz (1988) discussed how adolescent street "thugs" rarely show interest, positive or negative, in people who reside outside their own world, and this dynamic seemed to exemplify the neutral manner in which the subjects generally responded to the researcher.

Overall, they appeared unconcerned with either impressing her or provoking her, as though her presence was immaterial and her view of them irrelevant. Faigen (1996, personal communication) was struck by this phenomenon and speculated that it may have reflected a "resistance to longing or desire" on the part of the subjects, or in other words, a defensive refusal to either expect or want anything from someone perceived as external to the boundaries of their own social universes. Indeed, while they seemed willing to communicate, they did not appear invested in or otherwise involved with the actual person of the investigator. She was seemingly insignificant to them beyond her role in getting them out of their cells, work, or school.

Also, it must be added that the researcher actively created an interview environment devoid of confrontation, criticism, moral judgment, and expectation. In other words, she did not insert herself too prominently in the interactions, other than to ask questions and clarify meaning. It is likely, therefore, that the non-intrusive quality of the interviews also figured significantly in the seeming lack of pronounced personal reactions to the examiner.

Within-Case Analyses

As each subject discussed his adolescent gang experiences with the researcher and interacted with her in his own way, particular thematic patterns emerged which appeared highly relevant to the study issue. Specifically, these patterns, encoded by the researcher as "categories of meaning," reflected certain psychological experiences enabled by violent gang membership which appeared indelibly, adaptively bound to each subject's childhood experiences of violent traumatic exposure. Each of these meaning categories, in other words, was viewed as representing a potential and specific psychological link between the subject's passively endured experiences of violence as a young child and his eventual action as a violent gang member. Due to the researcher's effort to remain tied to

the subjective experience of the subjects, she employed labels for these categories which would, as closely as possible, capture the idiosyncratic nature of these links. In other words, the meaning codes were not necessarily labeled consistently across subjects, even when the particular themes of experience they referenced were similar, in order to preserve the subjects' uniqueness and variations in meaning.

Due to the ongoingness of the subjects' psychological experiences, their stories are narrated in the present tense. Although not denoted as such, interpretations not only reflect the researcher's objective reading of the data and theoretical biases, but also her own psychological experience of the subjects.

Subject 1: The Case of Li'l C

Significant Childhood Experiences

Dying, according to Li'l C, is just a fact of living. He says it does not worry him and never has--"Everybody gonna get their chance one day. . . . I ain't saying I can't die, 'cause I know I am." Indeed, Li'l C knows about the tyranny of lethal violence all too well. The gunfire outside his home as a young child was ever-constant and a source of immense anxiety in his mother, who he recalls issuing regular orders to "hit the lights and get down on the floor." Frequently throughout his early childhood, she drove him to school in order that he be protected from random gang violence, and later, after getting caught herself in the actual crossfire of a gang conflict, began to wear a bullet-proof vest. At age seven, Li'l C lost a close aunt to cancer; at 12, a friend was killed in a gang war; at 13, his own brother was nonfatally shot by a rival gang and his mother endured a massive stroke.

Most significantly, however, was Li'l C's firsthand exposure to the murder of his best friend by a gang at age 11. The friend was not in a gang, but apparently got caught

in the crossfire of a war while on his way home from school. About this incident, which he witnessed from close proximity, and interestingly, did not recall when initially asked by the researcher, Li'l C remembers little beyond its most crude details--"They was shooting. They just got to shooting. That was that. . . . He got shot in the back. He died. . . . I ain't really feel nothing. I was in shock. . . . I just don't think about it really. I don't think about it."

Despite the notable absence of elaboration in his description of this event, Li'l C does retain a fixed mental imprint of his friend's dead face. It is as though the entire episode has been reduced down to the registration of this singular perceptual detail. The monotony and perseverativeness with which he describes this snapshot image is striking and seems to imply an ongoing visual captivation with the event--"He didn't look the same really. . . . Like his face, his face got dark. He was like light, and his face got dark. . . . He didn't look the same. His face just got dark. It got dark."

Now, at 15, Li'l C's early life feels to him like a distant blur, its meaning to him difficult to discern, any relational and affective contours seemingly blended into the contextual background of his memory. The details of his life prior to his membership in the Vice Lords escape him now. All that he can confidently recall is the pervasive sense of boredom and restlessness with which he experienced his life then, the feeling of confinement inside his room, and the sleep that would eventually, and thankfully, overtake him.

During those days, only his video games would punctuate the long stretches of nothingness. His endless hours of play with these games--Axman, Street Fighter, Mortal Combat--he remembers with remarkable clarity and a vividness which seems sorely missing from his descriptions of real life people and events. These games, he claims, could engage him in a way unparalleled by anything else in his immediate environment. However, as he became increasingly skillful in his play, they no longer held their thrill

for him, their magic dispelled by his mastery over them, and he began, in early adolescence, to actively seek bigger and better forms of excitement.

The Vice Lords

According to Li'l C, he became a Vice Lord at the age of 12 because "I was just bored. I really had nothing to do, just go to school all the time." He was deeply and unremittingly bored, itching, so to speak, for action. He felt imprisoned in his home and by the inertia imposed upon him. He remembers his mother trying to keep him indoors during gang shootings and his own persistent efforts to get outside and find out what the fuss was all about. Nothing else--not school, church, or family--could capture his heart and imagination quite like the action on the streets outside his house.

Once a Vice Lord, Li'l C committed himself wholeheartedly to adopting the codes, values, and expectations spelled out in the organization's constitutional literature. With the help of his much-older brother, also a Vice Lord, he quickly became competent in the ways of the streets--"What to do, how to do it. About everything. How to sell drugs. How to kill people and not get caught." Beginning at the age of 12, he was arrested for a series of auto thefts. His first use of a firearm, at 13, "felt normal," "fun," and was followed by an ongoingly intense desire to shoot--"Just for the heck of it. . . . Sometimes I don't shoot it at people. I shoot it in the air, just shoot the whole clip out sometimes. All nineteen shots." At 14, he was convicted on a count of first degree murder for lethally shooting a man in the back three times for refusing to pay a drug debt and is now serving three years in juvenile prison.

Categories of Meaning

Action as self-stimulating and self-soothing.

Li'l C lives in a psychological world dominated by alternate states of intense, overwhelming rage on the one hand, and profound numbness and boredom on the other. He counters each of these states with action, motion, and the pursuit of thrill, and in so doing, attempts to somehow equilibrate his inner life. It is a precarious balancing act, a frantic, though active, struggle to transform these opposing, yet equally unbearable, psychological experiences. Through his use of action, Li'l C strives continually for a state of optimal stimulation.

Boredom is one of the defining features of Li'l C's psychological life and was admittedly a primary motivation for joining the Vice Lords, insofar as they promised him opportunities for movement, excitement, and most importantly, the thrill of risk. He describes himself as "empty headed," referring to the barrenness of his internal life--"I know I ain't got nothing there"--and insists that the only time he really feels alive is when he is out with his friends engaged in some form of play or combat. Indeed, the raw and risky physicality of gang life seems to provide welcome opposition to the extreme lethargy and emptiness which are so central to his psychic life.

Li'l C describes life with the Vice Lords as a perpetual party--"We have fun, really, lotta fun. We have fun all the time"--and as full of surprising twists and turns which keep him in a state of engaged and excited vigilance--"Like a maze. . . . Everywhere you go you get trapped somewhere. You got to find a way out." He cannot imagine life without the thrill that gang life offers him. When asked how he would feel given the chance to move to a nonviolent neighborhood, he states, without hesitation, "I would have to liven it up. Have to start my organization. Bring something to it."

The gang activity he enjoys most, he says, is the fighting, which again he claims is largely motivated by the need to counteract his chronic sense of tedium--"Just killing

time, you know. You feel like doing stuff. . . . You feel like nothing, you're not doing nothing, [so] you might as well do *that*." Violence, then, lifts him out of his slumber, transforms his numbed and constricted self, and can therefore be viewed as an attempt at self-invigoration--"Ain't nobody gonna get tired of it. . . . It makes you feel good, I guess."

However, because novelty and ever-increasing thrill are essential to Li'l C's efforts to stimulate himself, he does wonder if his Vice Lords can keep up with his rising threshold and need for violence. Sometimes already, he says, the violence does not fully alleviate his boredom--"Because they don't really be doing it. Sometimes they only shoot one time. Cut the time. Boom boom, that's it. And then they stop."

Expectedly, given the restrictions on his personal movement and the accompanying absence of opportunity for action, life inside the prison is nearly unbearable for Li'l C--"You're trapped, period, and you can't do nothing about it"--and is likely reminiscent of his early days confined within his mother's house. Again, he is beset by immense boredom, sleeps continually, and says that he "would rather be dead than be locked up."

As stated previously, for Li'l C, violence appears to be a virtual panacea for intolerable inner states, a way of titrating profound emptiness as well as intense, nonspecific rage. He does not know why he feels angry "all the time," only that he is driven to discharge of it in the form of violent action. It is an immediate and urgent response, unmediated by thought or language, to an inner experience triggered by an unknown stimulus:

> You know, that's my evil side really. . . . I get mad at people sometimes. I get mad easy. . . . You just got to do what you got to do. Whatever's on my mind to do, I do it. Whatever comes to my mind first, I do it. *[Researcher: What usually comes to*

your mind?] I'm gonna beat someone up out on the streets. . . . Yeah, I feel like I want to beat somebody's head.

After a physical altercation or shoot-out, he says, he feels remarkably different, regardless of whether he wins or loses. Through the simple perpetration of action, he feels "Better. . . . I feel good now. Like I just calm down."

Bereft of opportunities to fight in prison--actually he refuses to fight out of the fear of getting "more time"--Li'l C contends with his rageful inner tensions by going to sleep (an interesting parallel to the infant's termination of inner stress through sleep, as discussed by Krystal [1988]). Unable to fight, he says dying is the only way he can imagine out of this conundrum--"'Cause I be straight then. . . . I want to be free."

In sum, Li'l C's use of action for transforming his own under- and over-stimulated psychic states obviously reflects a homeostatic aim and suggests the adaptive value of violence in his overall psychological life. Violence, for Li'l C, is experienced as a vital mechanism for asserting active control over otherwise uncontrollable inner states which seem to be devoid of both content and identifiable links to his own life history. It could be reasonably argued that his alternate experiences of boredom and rage are actual and diagnosable forms of the numbing and hyperarousal patterns of PTSD. Given this view, his violent action must be appreciated in terms of its defensive and recuperative psychological function.

Thrill-seeking and mastery.

Before he became a gang fighter, Li'l C was a voracious player of interactive video games. He makes clear in his descriptions of the play that it was not so much the simple victory over his rival he pursued--in fact, when winning was too easy, he quickly moved

on to another game--but rather the experience of the near miss, of the close encounter with destruction, and his (hopefully) eventual survival of and transcendence over the evil monster who would seek to demolish him. He was as much interested in the specific prowess of the rival as he was in his own, and in fact, his enjoyment of the game seems to have depended on having a particularly vile and powerful opponent. For someone who considers himself "empty headed" and who claims to remember little about his own life, his memory for certain details of these games is quite astounding and undoubtedly reflects their symbolic importance:

> [The monster] was real big and had four eyes and a lot of arms. And he would try to throw hammers at you. . . . [The bad guys] got special moves, like some of them, they can snatch your heart out. They hold it up in the air and it still be pumping, blood dripping from it. . . . One of them got a rope with like a hook or something on the edge and [he] throw it at you and try to hook onto your neck and pull you and upper cut you. . . . And there's another one where . . . it's a lady in there. She blow a kiss at your heart and you turn into ashes.

He remembers, too, his delight in partaking of the magical powers of the characters he would elect to play:

> Reagan . . . he's got his hands. You press the button and sharp claws come out. Sharp metal claws. Scratch people. . . . Storm, he could make thunder come down and rain, fly. . . . And Iceman, he could throw ice around everywhere. Just throw ice at them and they freeze up.

The objectives of these games were variations on a constant theme--to enter the field of danger, engage in mighty battle against a fearless and evil opponent, and emerge unscathed. While this is hardly an unusual motivation among children at play, and is, in fact, the actual stated objective of many childhood games, what is compelling in Li'l C's case is the direct connection he draws between his experience of these video games and his subsequent experience of gang life. As stated previously, he likens his world of gang combat to a maze:

> It's like, everywhere you go you get trapped or something. You got to find, you got to get out of that trap. Just a big, fun game, you know, but it's for real. *[Researcher: Are there special powers?]* Yeah, guns. *[Researcher: And who are the bad guys?]* Everybody. Every gang you go up against.

Li'l C has effectively imposed the themes and objectives of his repetitive childhood play onto the real social landscape of his life, except that now what is at stake is far greater than the demise of a fictitious self-substitute. And interestingly, the higher stakes seem to be precisely the point. He has upped the ante, so to speak, in order to enhance the degree of dangerous thrill. It is the creation of a certain state of inner tension that he appears to be after, a tension comprised of both fear and hopeful anticipation of survival. He calls it "fun," and yet his regular donning of a bullet-proof vest betrays his knowledge that it is also deadly serious.

According to Balint (1959), the pursuit of greater and greater thrill is aimed at the mastery of self-evoked, trauma-reminiscent anxieties. Although what Li'l C specifically attempts to master is unknown, locked inside the caverns of his unconscious, it would generally seem to be the fear of his own annihilation, the threat of which is continually

and actively recreated in the act of gang warfare and gloriously survived every time he returns from the streets alive.

Concretization: Telling and remembering.

When Li'l C murdered his drug client, it very much surprised him, not because he did not think himself capable of killing, but because his trigger finger seemed have a mind of its own--"I don't know, but I had my hand on [the gun] and I just pulled it out and shot him." To this day, he does not really know why he shot this man in the back three times. He says he had no conscious plan or desire to kill him and that he felt and thought "nothing" following the shooting. He simply "walked away" as his victim lay "hollering" on the ground.

The violence Li'l C regularly engages in, and often instigates, is beyond his comprehension. Although he cites certain reasons that might result in a gang conflict--money, turf, shows of disrespect--they do not seem to strike him as entirely credible, as though there must be a more likely motivation:

> People throw up their signs and they get into a fight, just to be starting stuff. . . . Up in here, it's dissin', or out there, blocks, strips. Stupid stuff. It's stupid 'cause they fight over stupid stuff, like, "you called me 'bitch'" and all that.

Li'l C knows somehow that the stated rationalizations do not explain his own intense compulsion to fight. Other than the sudden, momentary awareness of an urge to perpetrate physical harm, he has absolutely no idea of why he does it. It seems to simply pour out of him--"When I want to do something, I just do it. [The others] be stalling. They be waiting on me. I don't wait on nothing."

Li'l C lives in a world of action, a world where feelings, sensations, and memories are given compulsive and concrete expression. He feels, therefore he acts. There is no transitional space, no reflective moment, no thought, in other words, built in to the moment of surrender to the violent urge. One can only speculate the meaning of his repetitive and active assault on the human environment. Certainly, if one understands action as a communicative medium and memorial structure, one might consider Li'l C's murder of his drug client to tell the following story:

> Gang members shot my best friend in the back. I don't know why they did it. It was senseless. They didn't care. They just walked way while he lay screaming on the ground.

Although this is simply a speculative interpretation, it illustrates the important idea that Li'l C's seemingly compulsive enactment of violence might represent a memory in action, a concretization, in ongoing and contemporary form, of early, unarticulated experiences with violence. If so, his violence might be seen partially as an effort to recreate, in active form, aspects of his own lost history in order that they might be mastered, integrated, and given affirmative notice by the outer world.

Group merger and the recreation of identity.

"It seems like when I was born, my first words were, 'Thug for life. Papa pass the mack'." Li'l C clearly envisions himself as destined to gangbang. It is a mode of being, fervently and proudly embraced, which has seemed to replace all other possible and earlier versions of himself. Although he can vaguely remember moments of his own altruism--"I had things my sister wanted and she asked me for it, and I gave it to her"--he

is abundantly invested in a contemporary identity which is devoid of any vestige of generosity, concern, and, above all, his own needful desire.

Li'l C seems consciously to know little about his own historical self and claims to "only think about what I'm going to do tomorrow." He believes the personal past to be irrelevant to who he is now, as though he was born at the age of 12 to find himself already created in the image of a street gangster. In other words, Li'l C's autobiography appears to have been psychically erased and supplanted by the history, mythology, and ongoing culture of the Vice Lords. Indeed, he is proud of the longevity, the power, and reputation of the Vice Lords in the U.S. and can recite the history of the organization with an enthusiasm and detail that bears stunning contrast to the stark and foggy articulation of his own life. The identity of the group, including its structure, purpose, and ancestry, seems inseparable from his own. He has, in a very enduring and meaningful way, enlisted the attributes of his gang towards creating an identity for himself which is both absolute and subjectively complete. Psychologically, he seems to have utterly merged himself with the group to which he now belongs.

His association with the Vice Lords is felt to offer Li'l C an entry into personal power which multiplies as his loyalty to and knowledge about the organization increases. For a child who went through school with a fairly serious learning impediment, his ability to absorb and articulate "juice," or gang knowledge, is a source of extreme pleasure for him. His gang affiliation, he says, has given him an incentive to go to school, a reason to avoid drugs, and a desire to learn a professional trade. In short, Li'l C experiences himself as having undergone a complete renovation of personality, of aptitude, and of desire via his gang membership. He claims he will do anything his Minister requests of him, not under duress, but because the objectives of the organization have truly become his own.

Through the merging of his identity with that of his gang, Li'l C feels himself to have been transformed, his own bitter history and limitations wiped away, his diffuse and unarticulated experience replaced with purpose, clarity, and grandeur. Perhaps most significantly, he now knows who he is, who he is not, and what he must do--"It's just that we do things that other people don't, regular people. . . . We killers and they not."

Omnipotent resignation: The mastery of death anxiety.

On a regular and voluntary basis, Li'l C walks headlong into situations of extreme danger. He is neither suicidal nor in some form of delusional denial about the possibility of his own violent death, but rather seems to have an attitude of confident expectation that he will, in fact, die, a certainty that seems, ironically, to mitigate, if not eradicate, his feelings of fear and vulnerability. He is not, he insists, afraid of dying:

> It's gonna come to you. You're gonna die anyway, no matter what. . . . You don't know where you're gonna die. I can die right now. You never know. . . . Even if I don't make it happen, I'm still gonna die. So it's all the same. If you don't [make it happen], you're still gonna die. If you do, you're still gonna die. It don't matter.

When asked whether he thinks about getting shot, he says, "No, I ain't ever thought that 'cause I *know* I can get shot. . . . It just doesn't bother me." It is as though his certainty about dying eliminates the need to give the idea any further contemplation. He does not fear death because to do so would imply a wish for something better, a hopefulness which is simply not supported by his own dire perception of the facts--"If it's

the time, it's the time. I just can't say I don't want to get killed when I know I'm gonna get killed."

Li'l C's orientation to death does not simply reflect a realistic resignation to an uncontrollable social reality, but rather is an effective *defensive* adaptation insofar as it successfully enables him to ward off death anxiety by making the act of dying at once both utterly predetermined and emotionally irrelevant. Li'l C's ready concession to his own mortality appears to be an omnipotent, counterphobic reconfiguring of the future, or, in other words, an attempt to prematurely master the future in order to stave off feelings of anticipatory anxiety conjured up from the past and continually revived in the present.

Subject 2: The Case of Li'l Mook

Significant Childhood Experiences

Li'l Mook, age 16, does not like to think about his violent past--"I don't be thinking about violence. Nope, that's in the past. I let what be in the past, be in the past." In his early interviews with the researcher, Li'l Mook vehemently denied any exposure to childhood violence. When he later, beginning in the fifth interview, began spontaneously to disclose specific encounters with early violence, the memories seemed to honestly surprise him, as though they had not entered the realm of conscious thought for a very long time.

Li'l Mook was raised in Vice Lord territory by his single mother. Several of his uncles are Vice Lords, as is his father, with whom he has no contact and who is currently serving a prison sentence for first degree murder.

About his early life, Li'l Mook remembers spending hours, "when [I] was real, real, real, real little," in captivated amusement at the front window of his inner city apartment as gangsters and drug dealers shot each other up "over money, over drugs, over everything." Despite his mother's efforts to interrupt these daily window vigils, he remained steadfastly glued to his perch, as though visually taken hostage, transfixed, by the bloody scenes before him:

> I had forgotten about that. I don't know what made me think about that. . . . It was a long, long, long, time ago. Between the ages of one, two, and three. . . . I don't remember too much. I just look out the window and see people getting killed. Used to laugh at 'em. Instead of watching it on T.V., you can look out the window

> and see it happening. . . . Everyday. It was an everyday thing. I guess they was in a war. . . . I saw people dying. You'd see bullets in 'em too.

Li'l Mook remembers deriving an immense amount of pleasure from witnessing these shootings and recalls his disappointment and sense of loss when, at the age of five, his family moved to another, apparently safer, neighborhood--"It was just quiet. I missed looking out the window. [In the new neighborhood] you look out the window and you see cars and trees. [In the old neighborhood] I used to look out the window and see people shooting." However, in time, this new neighborhood, too, became overtaken by gang and drug activity, a change which Li'l Mook says he gladly welcomed--"Yeah, it changed. It just got noisy. . . . I'm talking about loud music and shooting. . . . It was straight."

At the age of 11, just prior to his own active and criminal involvement in the Vice Lords, Li'l Mook was shot in the leg by a gang, an event which he did not mention until his sixth interview with the researcher and which he claims to remember only vaguely--"Look how long ago that was. I can barely remember what happened last week and you're talking about five years ago." To Li'l Mook, this experience feels a lifetime away and as though somehow lost inside the abundance of personal violence endured since then--"Somebody get shot everyday. I used to get shot at almost everyday." He describes the incident with a notable lack of affect, though he does recall feeling frightened at the time:

> I was at the store . . . and that's where they be at and they saw me coming around the store. . . . Just by myself, went to the store. I remember going . . . early in the morning to get some milk and just hearing gunshots. I didn't know where it was

> coming from and I just started running and I looked down at my leg, seen red. I was in shock. . . . When I got home, I went into shock. I just fell.

Li'l Mook believes he was shot because the gang in question mistook him for a younger brother of a rival gang member who ostensibly had been shooting at them. In his view, then, the shooting was an act of revenge, a motivation which would later figure prominently in Li'l Mook's own justifications for killing.

He says that being shot did not hurt much, "just stung," and that he was able to walk again a week later. He denies any immediate or subsequent emotional reaction to the event, only that he avoided the specific site of the shooting "for awhile." Eventually, he says, he was no longer afraid of getting hurt--"I just got an idea that if I get shot, it was meant for me to get shot. If I die, it was meant for me to die"--and began to frequent the area once again. It was at this same time that he also intensified his criminal involvement with the Vice Lords.

The Vice Lords

Li'l Mook cannot seem to pinpoint the exact moment or age at which his evolution as a Vice Lord began, only that he was somewhere between nine and 11 years old. He has always loved to fight--"It was just fun, going around and beating people up"--and spent his younger years at a local park learning boxing moves from an adult trainer and participating in formal boxing tournaments. His reputation for and love of fighting quickly earned him the respect of the older Vice Lords and by the time he was incarcerated at 14, he had been promoted from the rank-and-file to Chief Violator (i.e., a member responsible for physically punishing members who disobey gang law). Although proficient with a variety of firearms, and having a pronounced tendency to use

them--"I've shot at about 150 people"--Li'l Mook's first love continues to be the use of his fists.

According to Li'l Mook, joining a gang is, in his neighborhood, just a cultural given, something everybody does. He cannot imagine any other way of life or anything that could possibly alter his intense commitment to membership:

> That's what I choose to be and that's what I'm gonna be. I don't know why I choose to be that. I was real, real little when I choosed a gang. . . . Can't nobody stop me. I'm gonna do what I want to do anyway. My mother [used to say], "You can't hang around with them." But who was she to tell me what I can do?

Li'l Mook was first arrested at the age of 14 for gang-related fighting in school. Since then, he has been arrested "about 12 times" for fighting, twice on drug charges, and is currently serving three years on a first degree murder conviction.

Categories of Meaning

Violence and omnipotence: The denial of fear.

> What would I get scared for? I don't get scared of nothing. *[Researcher: But when you were 11, getting shot in the leg scared you.]* That's why I ain't scared of nothing. . . . I know how bullets feel, and ain't nobody gonna beat me up. There wasn't really nothing to scare me back then. Just, I didn't think I was gonna get shot at a real, real early age. . . . I ain't scared of nothing no more. *[Researcher: I wonder how you got to be so brave.]* I grew up around the projects. Just looking out the window, seeing people die.

As though rising out of the dust in virtual protest, Li'l Mook has emerged from his early experiences with violence armed with a desire for vengeance (more on this later) and an impenetrable grandiosity. He literally seems to have banished all residues of fear and vulnerability from his psyche and has, in fact, enlisted his very survival of these childhood experiences towards his own omnipotence. At the center of his effort, the thing that somehow makes this transformation of self possible, is his violence--"You got to enjoy [shooting], 'cause first you be scared, then you do it, then you get fun. . . . When you shooting at somebody, you ain't scared of nothing."

As though to say "fuck you" to some unspeakable remembrance, Li'l Mook, via the ruthless brandishing of his gun, effectively and actively alters his own subjective world, replacing terror with omnipotence, passivity with power. Shooting, fighting, killing--these are the mechanisms he employs in order to assure himself of both his invulnerability in the world and his masterful control over his psychic states. As though addicted, Li'l Mook never feels better than when he is fighting. There is never, he claims, any remorse or regret following his actions, only an expanded sense of himself--"I just feel real high. I be straight. It's just, you feel better. Straight." He claims he has never lost a fight and refuses to even hypothetically play with the notion of losing--"I ain't never gonna lose. It's not over 'til I win."

Given its role in transforming fear into feelings of power and control, violence, for Li'l Mook, is psychologically essential. When asked how he would feel if he could never fight again, he says:

> That's just like telling you [that] you can't open the window ever again when its 150 degrees in the room. . . . I'm gonna fight, no matter what they say. I'm gonna fight 'cause I like to hurt people. . . . I like the feeling.

The feeling to which Li'l Mook refers is power, the pursuit of which is a central, organizing agenda and which he believes is most reliably achieved through the perpetration of violence and the evocation of fear in others. He does not allow himself to be one-upped by anyone:

> See, the last person that did something to me was a bus. Splashed the behind of my white suit. Splashed water on me and I shot at him. I'm walking down [a local street], I'm minding my own business, man. I don't want to fight nobody. I don't even want to hurt nobody today. Seemed like the bus just pulled over a little bit so it can splash mud and water on me. So I just shot the tires out of that motherfucker. . . . Whipping somebody's ass is my first reaction. . . .Well, if they fuck up, I'm gonna fuck them up. . . . [The bus driver] switched over and splashed water on me and everybody laughed. Since the people on the bus thought that was funny, I thought shooting at them was fun. Yeah, they were scared. They ain't gonna laugh no more.

It would be overly simplistic to interpret Li'l Mook's violent reaction to the bus as a psychological breakdown in the face of narcissistic injury. Though undoubtedly his narcissism was punctured by the action of the bus driver and the laughter of the passengers, it seems clear that Li'l Mook reacted, not in a helpless, fragmented rage, but in an omnipotent effort to reinstate his own control over the situation. In this sense, his violence must be understood in terms of its psychologically cohering and anabolic value, and as an adaptive mechanism for transforming feelings of powerlessness.

<u>Repetition: The mastery of traumatic anxiety.</u>

Li'l Mook seems literally captivated by violence, the experience of which has a deep resonance for him that seems to go beyond any instrumental aim. He describes himself as endlessly drawn to situations that embroil him in some kind of violent conflict, even, if not especially, when his own physical safety is jeopardized. The phenomenology of this experience, much less its meaning, is difficult to discern, and yet it seems to have something to do with subjecting himself, over and over again, to a particular traumatic stimulus in order to familiarize himself with, or otherwise integrate, the feelings evoked by it. As a young child, Li'l Mook sat windowside for hours "watching people die," as though forcing himself to make comprehensible the absurdity of what was happening outside his home (and inside himself). His current fascination with violence seems to contain a parallel aim, namely, to desensitize himself to, or to master, a specific set of anxieties, most probably related to murder and death, which have now become dislodged from their original source and over which he now strives to assert active control.

The night before the murder which landed Li'l Mook in prison, he dreamed that he was being surrounded by rival gang members and that he killed one of them in self defense. The following day, he and a cousin walked headlong into enemy territory, ostensibly on their way to somewhere else, and found themselves immediately surrounded by five members of a rival set:

> We got back down there where their park's at. So we was walking past there. They were smoking, they was drinking, I think. And they looked [at us]. . . . It was like, well, if it was gonna happen, it's gonna happen. If we gonna die, we gonna die. So they started coming at us. So they surrounded my cousin and one of them swung and hit him. Then this [other] dude, he tried to hit me. So I just up and started shooting.

Before it was over, "75 more" members of the rival gang had arrived, and Li'l Mook had shot four of them in self-defense, one of them fatally in the chest:

> I was just shooting. Shooting at everybody that tried to get my cousin and me. There was a lot of them, so they probably would have killed us. . . . I couldn't let them beat us up. Yeah, who knows, they probably would have killed us.

Despite the huge imbalance of numbers (two versus 80), Li'l Mook claims that no one from the rival set ever pulled a gun:

> How was they gonna shoot? They was gonna hit somebody in their mob before they hit me. . . . They was running, trying to. Once I started shooting, they didn't have no time. They didn't have no time to get no gun. *[Researcher: They could've pulled a gun out of their coat.]* Then I would have shot them. *[Researcher: But there were 80 of them. You couldn't take on 80 with your gun, could you?]* [Terrence] was coming. [Virgil] was coming. [Daryl] was coming. My brother was coming.

Although this singular event appears, in its superficial aspects, to be a fairly typical gang encounter, the deconstruction of Li'l Mook's subjective experience of it illustrates how he actively employs the danger in his contemporary environment in order to face, head on, the fear engendered by it. Although he views his dream as nothing more than a magical foretelling of the future, it seems likely that his presence in rival territory the next day was masterminded by Li'l Mook--after all, he knowingly and willfully entered a situation fraught with danger--in order to contend with the persecutory anxieties revealed

in, and perhaps aroused by, the dream. In other words, he seems to have marched headlong into a real life situation in which both the emotional and narrative contents of the dream could be replicated. He then responded actively to a belief that his own death was indeed imminent and probable--"If it was gonna happen, it's gonna happen. If we gonna die, we gonna die" (which is not to say that he was not truly in danger, only that his violent response, as well as his experience of the entire situation, was comprised of both real and fantasied aspects). And lastly, he emerged victorious in his survival and with the knowledge that he had successfully turned the tables on his enemies--it was, after all, they who ran away in trepidation, they who failed to respond to the quick and blinding flash of his gun.

(It must be further noted that his awareness of the approach of his own gang friends--Terrence, Virgil, Daryl, and his brother--seems to have given him great comfort, if not an outright jolt of omnipotent courage. Even though they were simply enroute to the scene and could not yet offer actual backup, somehow Li'l Mook used the thought of their proximity towards countering whatever anxiety he felt at the time.)

Fantasies of endangerment and their associated anxieties appear to underlie Li'l Mook's primary conscious motivations for perpetrating gang violence, namely, vengeance and self-defense, and likely arise from his early chronic experiences of violence, as well as his ongoing residence within an extremely violent milieu. No matter how slight a given interpersonal provocation, he immediately assumes hostile intent on the part of the other person and reacts with violent force. It is not simply to overt invitations to conflict that he responds, but also to the meaning he attributes to his own perceptions:

> People be looking at me. I don't like people looking at me at all. They don't gotta watch me, they don't gotta talk to me. . . . They just get to looking at me and I get

> to fighting. I came down from confinement to the gym and I saw somebody just looking at me, and I broke his jaw. Then, in the dining room, I saw somebody looking at me and I broke his jaw. . . . I don't look at them, they don't got no business looking at me. . . . It's like they wanna fight. That's not what they think, but that's what I take it as.

The fact is, Li'l Mook *does* look at them. He willfully enters the field of their gaze and applies his own ready interpretation to the visual encounter. Over and over again, he enacts a specific scenario, one in which his anxieties are aroused in the form of persecutory fantasy. However, unlike the passively endured "shock" which resulted from his childhood experiences, he now rises up in retaliation, overtakes his perceived enemy, and most significantly, asserts active control--"I'm gonna get them before they get me"--over his anxiety. Li'l Mook has effectively created a world for himself in which the experience of personal threat is perpetually and flagrantly self-activated, even by the most trivial of interactions, and ongoingly granted new, triumphant endings.

Retrospective vengeance as a function of violence.

Li'l Mook largely perceives the objects of his violence as guilty of some personal crime against him and his violence as a way of achieving retribution. By repeatedly casting his victims into villainous roles, scapegoating them, as it were, and forcing them to endure dire, often lethal, penalties for their supposed crimes, Li'l Mook seems to be tenaciously enacting a deeply significant wish for personal vengeance. He never feels guilty for the harm he inflicts, but rather self-righteous, even when he cannot articulate the precise nature of the crime he is supposedly avenging. He is, at heart, a vigilante--judge, jury, and executioner for any assault directed against him, no matter how big, how

slight, how real, or how imagined--"I feel it's deserved, that they deserve *more* than what I did to them. That's what I feel."

Li'l Mook's relationship to the victim is largely immaterial in this regard. The alleged wrongdoer has, for Li'l Mook, many faces, including people he does not know, his family, and even his own Vice Lord set--"If they did something to me in the past, I'm gonna hurt 'em." While he may have clear reasons for hating certain people in his life, the compelling dynamic here is the intensity of his compulsion to violently avenge himself. He does not simply feel enraged, or even plagued with fantasies of revenge, but feels actively and concretely driven to destroy those he believes have hurt him.

It seems reasonable to suppose that an important psychological component of inter-gang retaliation is sponsored by the collective wish to "get back at" violently dangerous figures from childhood, and this seems certainly the case with Li'l Mook, a direct illustration of which lies in his consuming desire to eliminate the Vice Lord set, the "Black Kings" (pseudonym), who he seems to suspect were responsible for shooting him as a child. (It was also a "Black King" that Li'l Mook murdered, resulting in his current incarceration.) Although Li'l Mook himself does not draw a conscious link between his perseverative hatred and murderous action against the "Black Kings" and his own historical experience, his preoccupation with them would seem to betray such a connection. For instance, when discussing the goal of Vice Lord unity, he says:

> We'd be shooting at the [Black Kings] still. . . . I know what [we] should do to [them]. Let the natural gods get they ass. If we want to kill all the [Black Kings], we can. All we got to do is go right there on [their block]. Just shoot all of them right there. No more [Black Kings]!

In sum, Li'l Mook's personal talion principle, "Ain't nobody gonna do something to me and I don't do nothing back," is a central motivation behind much of the violence he commits, one which is entirely supported by his gang's agenda and which would appear, given the driving intensity of his vengeful feelings, to have symbolic significance. That is to say, it seems likely that he displaces onto contemporary figures his rage over crimes committed against him in the past, and by so doing, strives belatedly to restore a certain balance of justice to his young life.

Merger with gang law: The pathway to transcendence.

As a member of the Vice Lords, Li'l Mook believes himself to have an inroad to secret, even divine, knowledge, which in turn, paves the pathway to ultimate power. He embraces, guards, and abides by the rules which comprise this knowledge with an unquestioned reverence typically observed in members of fanatic religious and political sects. These rules define the parameters for morality, action, and personal nobility within the set and thereby remove the vicissitudes of inner conflict--guilt, relativism, inertia--from some of the more perplexing dilemmas of life. They are powerfully seductive to Li'l Mook and objects of his absolute fidelity:

> It's the Muslims where we get our secrets from. Their secrets is our lit[erature]. What they say, we do. Whatever they say, we do. If they say, rape people, I rape people all my life. But it don't say that, so I don't do that. . . . *[Researcher: How do you know the rules are true?]* They true! Where they come from, they gotta be true. . . . I honor them. I like them rules more than I like my sister. To me, for [anyone] to be [a Vice Lord], he gotta know the rules. *[Researcher: So the rules make you who you are?]* Hit the hammer on the head, the nail on the head, right

> on the coffin! . . . If you come to me and don't know the "Four Basics," you can't get nothing from me.

Via his thorough knowledge of Vice Lord "lit" (i.e., private "handbook" which includes constitution, laws, history, sacred text, and secrets of the organization), Li'l Mook knows exactly "what I gotta do" from one minute to the next. On his own, he insists, he would be "nobody." The knowledge he has incorporated as a Vice Lord enables him to transcend ordinariness, to enter the realm of the gods. It is, in the insular world of urban street life, his entry into power:

> Knowledge is power. . . . Without power, then what? You can't do nothing without power. How you gonna have power outside the gang? You can't tell nobody what to do if they in a gang and you not, and you say you caught [power] over there. How you [catch] it over there if you don't know what they know? *[Researcher: What kind of power are you talking about?]* Juice. Knowledge. Not that you get out of a school book. Muslim knowledge. Yeah, like if a Muslim come and they flip [a gang sign], they can take over that mob 'cause they know stuff that a lot of people don't know.

In Li'l Mook's view, the gang itself is ordained with elite majesty due to its direct ancestral connection to Allah--"That's who [the Vice Lords] get their knowledge from. The Muslims. They made us come, they made us come. See, we come from Allah and Allah is who the Muslims look up to. And that's who we look up to."

While it is impossible to conjecture the precise meaning of the supremacy Li'l Mook attributes to the ideological structure of his gang (he flatly refused to discuss any specific codes), it does seem to resemble certain forms of fervent nationalism or

religiosity. There is, for instance, his belief in the absolute rightness and glory of the laws of the organization, and his projection onto the group certain idealized traits which are then perceived as residing "out there," external to himself. Indeed, he seems to worship the gang as an omnipotent and deified object to which he willfully surrenders in order to partake of its immeasurable power. For an adolescent bereft of opportunity, with a father in prison he barely knows, a bullet scar that "won't ever go away," and memories of dead bodies punctured with bullet holes, preserving the fantasy that he is privy to a divine and transcendent truth, the signposts to which are clearly marked, must feel like an ongoing psychological imperative.

Subject 3: The Case of Kujo

Significant Childhood Experiences

Kujo's earliest memory is of darkness:

> Like I wasn't living. . . . It was just like I was asleep. It was all black, but I could see. But I didn't see nothing but blackness though. . . . I wasn't even born then. . . . Before I was born. But you don't know when you was born, you know what I'm saying. See, I can't explain it to you. It's just something that's whole different. A whole 'nother wacko world or something. . . . If I did try to put it in words, it wouldn't make no sense, you know what I'm saying.

Kujo's recall of his childhood life is riddled with confusion, gaps, and contradictions. He has difficulty keeping separate his current violence as a gang member from his memories of passive violence endured as a child, as though all of it has

become psychologically entwined, the remembrances of each time period alternately creating and negating the other. The question of the origins of his violence, i.e., whether arising from a transformative encounter with a deleterious and destructive environment, or the result of his own, genetically provided "violent soul"--continues to be one of his central preoccupations.

He believes, on the one hand, that he was "never a victim," that he was born violent, innately beyond the control of his caretakers--"I was just bad like that. Just a bad boy"--and deserving of any punitive force employed by his mother, no matter how harsh--"I used to get my butt whupped. I used to get tore up. . . . You be doing something bad, you get a whupping. . . . We just got belt whupped 'cause we deserved it. . . . I used to be bad, real bad."

On the other hand, in his more poignant, contemplative moments, Kujo views himself as created by the culture of his milieu--cruelly robbed of certain experiences and confronted prematurely with others:

> When you grow up, man, things get hard. . . . Things get hectic. And things die. Things that you love, things that's inside you that hurt you, you know, hurts you real bad, and mess you up mentally. . . . 'Cause there's things you see everyday, you know, that's very, very bad. . . . Just because the bad environment I grew up in, I got this here bad impression, you know what I'm saying.

For Kujo, age 17, the landscape of the remembered past is literally pockmarked by violence. Guns, gunfire, killings--all were fixed staples in his developmental experience, almost mundane in their omnipresence within and around the urban housing project where he lived with his siblings and single mother (he has never known his father):

> Yeah, I've seen a whole lot of people die. That's why it don't ever phase me. If I see someone get shot in the head, I be like, hey, he got shot in the head. It don't ever be like, "ooh ooh," you know. I been through that already, see, you know what I'm saying. It don't bother me no more. . . . You get used to it.

Kujo recalls how he would eagerly approach the aftermaths of violent crimes, observing with particular interest the wounds, the labored breathing, the stillness, of the victims. In school, too, he remembers the bloody fights which would break out between young members of rival gangs--"Yeah, I seen boys that, in class, in seventh grade, get their heads split open by a bat, you know. There was a whole lot of boys beating this other boy up with bricks. . . . It ain't nothing new." Also in seventh grade, Kujo witnessed his good friend get run down by a truck outside the school playground. In his recollection of the event, which seems to have occurred in the most childlike of moments, the instant of his friend's collision with the vehicle is curiously absent, as though edited out of visual memory:

> I went over there and he was dead, you know. And now he's being dead and that hurt me a lot. We was all playing and all of a sudden, he say he was gonna cross the street; he was gonna go buy him some candy to eat at school. Next thing I remember I'm looking at him on the side of the curb. He's just gone, he was. He was going in the street and he died right there. I seen him. I was looking at him.

Closer to home, Kujo lost a close aunt when quite young, and later, a cousin to a gang war. Also, in addition to his regular "whuppings" by his mother, he recalls the ongoing beating of his older sister by her boyfriend and the sense of impotent rage it would arouse in him:

> She got hurt bad, but I couldn't do nothing, you know what I'm saying. I was little, you know. I couldn't really do nothing about it. I said, "Get off my sister." [Laughter] Yeah, then he beat me up. That's probably what made me want to do . . . things.

Even as a very young child, Kujo remembers feeling transfixed by violence. Whenever he would see a police officer, for instance, he would gaze longingly at the gun, wishing it were his own. His favorite childhood game was "cops and robbers," with he, of course, always demanding to play the latter. The basic theme of the play, a literal precursor of things to come, rarely changed:

> The police was always chasing me. I'm already dead. I used to always beat the police up though. If you be the cop, you got to get your ass kicked and shit like that, you know. 'Cause they told us if they catch us, they got to arrest us and the minute they arrest us, [they] gonna beat [us] up. And we beat *him* up. We bust his lip, threw him down the stairs.

Upon considering his early exposure to violence, Kujo seems perplexed, as though unable to completely fathom its place in the continuity of his life experience. It is when he is discussing his own perpetration of violence that he is the most clear. He supposes that he will die young, though is not sure. In any event, he says, he is prepared for it and, in fact, believes that his death will bring a certain clarity to the confusion that still pervades him. Although he does not state it specifically, the confusion he speaks of likely refers to the "blackness" that veils his memory:

> I ain't scared to die, you know. . . . It's when it's my time to come, you know what I'm saying. When God is ready for me. I got a lot of questions to ask God anyway. . . . A lot of questions, a whole lot of things I want him to explain to me. A whole lot.

The Disciples

> Well, all I got to say is [the Disciples] was there for me. And I was hurt and needed help, you know, I needed money. . . . They gave me love. They showed me, you know what I'm saying, the way to let all your frustrations out, you know. Hey, be successful to something, you know what I'm saying.

At 12, Kujo became a proud member of the "largest organization in the whole wide world." Given his early proclivity to violence, becoming a Disciple was the most natural thing in the world to Kujo, and he has never regretted, for one moment, his decision to join:

> 'Cause when I was little, I always said I wanted to be a [Disciple], you know. . . . It's just me, you know. I'm a [Disciple] and I'll be a [Disciple] until I die. It's as simple as that, you know. Ain't nobody trained me or nothing.

His joint abilities to function as a leader and to contribute to the gang's treasury, as well as his willing and unambivalent commission of extreme violence (as in drive-by shootings, for instance), quickly earned him the respect of both his peers and his authorities within the organization, and within short order, he had been promoted to the rank of Chief Security (i.e., a member responsible for ensuring the safety of members

during highly charged and conflictual situations). He is extremely devoted to the "laws and policies" of the gang and believes passionately in the importance of representing the organization with pride, loyalty, and, above all, the utmost of fearlessness.

He says an important benefit of his gang involvement has been his ability to care for his mother financially. Although he claims that she has been distressed by his choice of vocation, she has also apparently been willing to accept his assistance:

> At least I did have good food on the table. I'd help my mama pay the rent and she'd be happy, you know. I always keep our phone on. It was me, and I was feeling good for what I was doing. . . . I bought my mama furniture before. . . . I done bought bedroom sets. I done gave my mama over $6000.

Kujo was first arrested at 14 for the possession of marijuana, again at 15 for robbery (for which he served time in juvenile prison), and is now serving two and a half years at St. Charles for a felony armed robbery crime. He has never been faced with serious drug or murder charges, a fact he attributes to his ability to outsmart the police and his refusal to leave any witnesses within his wake--"You just do it and be gone, man, and don't be singing. You just do it right, man."

Categories of Meaning

The re-animation of mind: Violence as manic defense.

"I always had courage 'cause I was already dead when I was little." Kujo is plagued by a primordial sense of his own deadness, a keenly experienced psychic obliteration which he strives frantically, wildly, violently to rid himself of. Through the perpetration of slaughter, the ingestion of marijuana, and the unlimited expenditure of money, he strives to resuscitate himself, to stimulate into life a mind overtaken by nothingness. These activities do not simply provide him with excitement, but rather are his entry into life itself. They are manically driven attempts to alter an ever-looming, internally arising sense of annihilation and to render himself as real. He recalls his first experience firing a gun:

> I just got the feeling, and that's when I started to doing crazy things and stuff. . . . It was like, you know what I'm saying, really real. It was real to me, you know. It was real. . . . See, once you pull the trigger one time, you're just gonna keep pulling it. And then it just feel good, and then you got away with it and then you gonna do it again, you know what I'm saying.

Violence is the cornerstone of Kujo's effort to transform his sense of inner absence. Through the act of killing, he projects onto his target his own deadness, and in the process, achieves a massive transfiguration of mind. He kills, not in search of some instrumental objective, but brutally, sadistically, remorselessly, the death of his victim being an end unto itself:

> I ain't got remorse for no motherfucker. Once I kill them, [they] just be dead. Not looking at you; they just be dead. I just be looking; he dead then. I don't have no remorse. So I shot, I killed motherfuckers, man. I done tortured motherfuckers, man. I sic pit bulls on motherfuckers and let them pull plugs out of them and laughed about it--ha, ha, ha--look at you now motherfucker. . . . It's amazing to me, you know what I'm saying. To see them motherfuckers go through pain and suffer. *[Researcher: So you like to watch?]* Yeah.

Through the perpetration of murder and the evocation of terror, Kujo deposits onto the outside world the terrorized wreckage of his psyche. His own symbolic death, in other words, is given stunning and continual replay in the minds of other people, who become living (via their deaths) testaments to his inner experience. In the act of killing and in the subsequent process of watching them suffer and die, he brings to life a psychological reality untraversed by the reparative power of thought and language.

Kujo, therefore, does not experience his victims as subjects, replete with desires, fears, and experiences of their own, but as objects whose only role is to die on behalf of his own redemption. Even without actually killing them, he strips them of life by rendering their uniqueness obsolete, pulverizing them, as through a mill, into a singular vile category. Given this ability to dehumanize, to psychologically eliminate, the other, it is not surprising that Kujo has been immensely successful in the rituals of gang warfare:

> I used to try to kill every motherfucker in my position I could get my hands on, man. Man, shit, I done tortured the motherfuckers before. I did all type of shit to the motherfuckers. That's 'cause I don't like 'em. If you ain't [Disciple], you ain't nothing, simple as that. . . . Motherfuckers ain't [Disciple], they ain't shit to me. Just another nigger in the morgue.

Because he feels dead already, Kujo can move through the world unimpeded by the fear of dying, his omnipotent ruthlessness enhanced by his readiness, even willingness, to be killed:

> Can't no one ever do nothing to me. The police, nothing, you know what I'm saying. 'Cause I don't give a fuck about no police. I kill police in a minute. I done shot at police. . . . I opened up on the side of the police car and shot all up in there. He didn't die; he survived, but I was just badness. It was the courage I had, you know. So that's why I ain't really scared of nothing. Why [be scared] if a person's only fear is dying. I ain't scared to die. . . .You kill me, you put a gun to my head, I ain't gonna blink a soul, man. You kill me, you kill me.

Kujo's employment of certain objects in the outside world in order to equilibrate his inner life has a manic, addictive, all-consuming quality. He smokes marijuana and spends money, for instance, with the same intensity and unstoppability with which he kills, all with the intent of metamorphosing his subjectivity. (Marijuana specifically, he claims, makes him feel "normal," keeps his mind from being cluttered with fragments of free-floating memorial debris. It neither calms nor stimulates him exactly, but rather pulls things into order, helps him to feel real, a literal medication for the mind.) In his desperate attempt to keep his psyche from collapsing, he seizes upon these objects, and others, and engulfs them, experiences them as essential, and for a time, transcends his state of emptiness--"I want everything I want, everything I see. If I want it, I want it, you know what I'm saying. That's what I want."

Deprived of access to the instruments of his self-revivification, as he is in prison, Kujo descends despairing into confusion and inner chaos. He knows what he needs in

order to feel better and the intensity of his desperation is beyond ordinary comprehension:

> This motherfucking place driving me crazy, man. This motherfucker don't do shit but make you want to go out and . . . kill the motherfuckers, sell all the drugs you can sell. . . . They do not know what they're doing by locking a motherfucker up. . . . I got so much anger built up in me, man. When I was on the street, I had everything I wanted, so there wasn't no anger around me. . . . Just go out and just do something to torture them; put them in the alley or something. Do something. Man, you just don't know, man. Whew. . . . I swear, man, I gotta get up out of this place, man. I'm turning crazy and everything, man. They turning everything crazy, crazy, crazy, man.

In sum, violence, in addition to certain other provisions of gang life, is inextricably bound to Kujo's sense of psychological intactness, at least in fantasy. Perhaps more than any other subject, Kujo experiences violence as a need, a literal nutriment for a mind which feels perpetually on the verge of extinction. Although it is impossible to determine the precise nature of his trauma, given its registration in the most archaic levels of experience, his rampant, desperate quest to actively perpetrate death again and again would seem to indicate an early experience of the most psychically implosive kind. His violence, then, must be understood as an attempt to bring himself back to life, to render a hyper-realism to his inner phantasmagoria. As Kujo replied when asked if he ever had nightmares, "Hell no. I ain't been having no nightmares, man. This shit realistic. This shit for real."

Why was I born? The function of gang narrative.

The requirements of living pose an ongoing series of existential quandaries for Kujo. Death he understands, insofar as it comprises the organizing center of his psychological universe. Life, by contrast, bewilders him, as though his physical entry into the world was some kind of unfathomable oversight, leaving him saddled with the seemingly impossible task of discerning a role, an overriding purpose to his presence on the planet. In short, he feels continually faced with a fogginess of existential meaning, a "life anxiety," as it were, which has as its primary conundrums: Why was I born?, Why am I here?, Who shall I be?, and What will it all have meant once I'm dead?:

> The answers that I want, can't nobody give to me. Can't no priest give to me, can't no president give to me, can't no Democrat give to me. . . . I want to find out some answers. Seem like can't nobody give 'em to me. . . . The answers, I'd die for them. . . . I don't even know why I'm on the earth, man. I don't even know why I be on it. I don't know where I'm supposed to be; I don't know what I'm supposed to do. I'm just doing things to survive, you know what I'm saying.

Kujo's desperate attempts to explain to himself the bizarre fact of his existence seems partially, if not fully, driven by a desire to comprehend his mother's motivations for giving birth to him in the first place. Embedded in his quest for meaning, in other words, is a perplexity over the essential point of birth itself, and whether there is some kind of purpose to living beyond simply dying:

> I want it to make sense. I'm still trying to figure things out myself. Still trying to figure out why I'm on this world. . . . What's the purpose of having another life if

> you're gonna die again? We're living to die, right? That's all it is, man. The new come in, the old die, simple as that. . . . [What if] it just kept re[pro]ducing and re[pro]ducing and the world got fucked up with a lot of people? There ain't nowhere for them to go because it's crowded. . . . I think my mind fucked up.

In stunning juxtaposition to Kujo's nihilism is the clarity of mind he seems to experience in relation to his identity as a gang member. His Discipleship seems to coalesce, or quiet, his confusion, to provide him with a grand, overarching purpose for living and to thereby quell the anxieties generated by his sense of being pointless and abstract. It overlays his experience with a primary, organizing, and linear narrative that tells him who he is--"I'm gonna be a [Disciple] for the rest of my life. That's all I be, a [Disciple]"--provides him with an immediate and concrete function (namely, making money for the organization and participating in the rituals of gang warfare), and most importantly, removes the senselessness from his eventual death by granting him the nobility of warriorhood:

> Go on and kill me. Do what you gotta do to me. . . . I'd fight, you know what I'm saying. At least I did fight, you know, just before I left, you know. Yeah, I'd die with honor. [Place a] fist across my chest and tell Larry Hoover I did my best.

The identification with his gang's narrative of purpose, then, diminishes Kujo's state of overwrought confusion by structuring his experience, by rendering a coherent meaning to his undeniable presence in the world:

> You got to be what you gonna be, right? You is what you is, right? You do what you know how to do best, right? I didn't know what I was supposed to be, so I

> made me someone, you know what I'm saying. I made me somebody. And I just wanted to be something. I don't know who I'd be if I wasn't doing this. I don't think I... Nah, I will be doing this. This is the best way I see it, man. I can't see it no way else.

Love and reparation: The paternal surrogacy of the gang.

> Some kids wish they was never a kid 'cause they don't want to be in that position no more. Like your father neglected you when you was little. That mess your whole childhood up. Then that kid don't want to be no kid no more, you know what I'm saying, 'cause he don't want to go there no more. He done grew up.

Kujo's longing for a paternal figure is paramount in his relational world and seems to be among his primary motivations for becoming a Disciple. He does not trust women, and in fact, appears to view them as cunning, exploitative, and insincere, a transferential experience likely generated by his early relationships to female caretakers, his mother in particular:

> Ain't no woman gonna boss me around. . . . Tell they man what to do, send them to the store. They take advantage of them, you know. I can tell if she don't love him . . . and she's just saying that 'cause, you know, she want to try to get my money. I hear a lot of girls, they be saying they love you . . . and then, will you buy me this and that. It's like a joke, you know. . . . My mama really didn't know nothing about me, you know. And she never used to sit down and talk to us and ask us what we be doing outside, you know what I'm saying, like a mother's supposed to do. And I ain't never had no father, so...

In Kujo's fantasies, the presence of a father in his early life would have offset the dominance of his mother and provided him with a structure, a way of knowing what he ought to do, and how. It would, he believes, have dramatically altered the course of his young life:

> If I had a father, I probably wouldn't be in this place, you know. I never had one; I never seen a father. . . . He would probably sit down and talk to me. I would have listened to my father more than . . . my mother 'cause he's a man. My mama don't know what she's talking about. If I had a daddy now, it would be whole different story, you know. I never had one; that's probably why I'm like that now. I wouldn't have joined a gang or something. I think I probably never would have dropped out of school if I had a father. And if I would have had the type of father I wanted, to teach me right from wrong, you know . . . this would be my last year, you know what I'm saying, in high school or something.

The paternal provisions afforded by gang life, namely, masculine caretaking, guidance, protection, and objects for identification, suggest a remarkably compelling explanation for the importance of the gang in the lives of so many fatherless urban adolescent boys. In Kujo's life specifically, his Disciples provide for him a myriad of functions that he, in fantasy, links to the role of the father, and as such, help him to achieve a reparation of the gaps created by his father's absence and his mother's limitations:

> That's who gave me love, man, showed me love. Nobody wasn't there for me. They was there for me. You know, if I'm down, lift me up. If I needed money,

> they'd give it to me. I just like how they carry theyself, and I just wanted to be like one of them. . . . They showed me how to make money. I didn't know nothing like that, you know. Bought me clothes, you know. Gave me things, things that nobody ever did for me before. . . . They showed me how to take care of myself, and then I started doing it on my own. If it weren't for them, I'd be walking around . . . I wouldn't know. I'd never know.

Deprived of a father, unknown by his mother, Kujo feels an awesome respect for and loyalty to his Disciples for, among other things, providing him with models for identification. Actually, insofar as the gang functions psychologically for him as a singular, homogeneous entity, he does not specify discrete individuals, but rather cites the entire organization as the object of his admiration--"My gang is my role model. The [Disciples]. . . . That's basically who I follow. And that's who I'm like and that's who I be like." Just as he imagines a father might have taught him essential lessons about finding his place in the world, the Disciples, he feels, have instructed him in the ways of the streets, and by so doing, have enabled his very survival:

> There's young people out there that ain't even in gangs, and doing drugs and everything. Gangs are pulling them in and taking care of them and showing them, don't do this. If you're gonna do it, at least sell it to somebody. Don't kill yourself, kill somebody else. Take care of yourself, that's what I learned. Don't do it. If you gonna sell supplies, don't do your own supplies, 'cause if you do your own supplies, you're gonna wind up like the other person you're selling it to.

Subject 4: The Case of Carl

Significant Childhood Experiences

The sights and sounds of his earliest encounters with lethal violence are crudely, yet firmly, etched in Carl's memory. The "boom boom boom" and "pop pop pop" of gunfire, the quick movements of perpetrators and bystanders, the prone body of the victim, the familiar sight of the gun--all are retained in remarkably bland and nondetailed recollective accounts of presumably significant childhood experiences. At age six or seven, "probably younger," Carl recalls watching from the arms of his sister as his older brother shot another young man in the head three times at close range. Aside from his simple perceptual registration of it--"[I was] just looking; jumped from the sound, but just looked"--Carl recalls nothing of his own emotional reaction to this event.

Several years later, while playing basketball on a neighborhood playground, Carl describes witnessing the lethal shooting of a local drug addict by two drug operators. Paraphrasing the event in stunningly stark and perceptual, somewhat childlike, terms--"Boom boom boom, he's dead"--Carl again, and not surprisingly, only reports the gross, concrete aspects of the experience and denies any evocation of meaningful affect--"It didn't happen to me, so I didn't care. . . . Go on about my business. . . . Don't bother me about another person getting hurt no way." He remembers that there were five shots altogether and even that he took the time to retrieve his shirt before fleeing the scene, but the tone, the texture, the *feel* of the event has been seemingly obliterated from mind, as if he were describing a distant and encapsulated scene, instead of an experience containing personal relevance, meaning, and impact. In fact, all of his descriptions of early violent experiences, of which there were many, are strikingly devoid of any sense of personal *effect*, other than the rote, enduring imprint of visual and auditory detail. In other words, Carl himself, as an experiencing subject, seems glaringly and compellingly omitted from his own conscious, verbal recollection of these notable childhood events.

Carl, age 17, was raised by his mother (except for those times during which he was removed from her care by the local child protection agency) in a notoriously violent urban housing project. By the age of 11, he had witnessed immense amounts and varieties of human violence--shootings, stabbings, beatings--sometimes fatal, sometimes not, in connection with his early and continuous exposure to ghetto street life. His mother, apparently always a physically fragile woman, currently resides in a nursing home, and his father, with whom he had regular contact, died of a heart attack at the age of 46, when Carl was nine years old. His feelings about his parents are, again, somewhat unclear in terms of actual detail, but about the death of his father, he states, "When he died, it was coming to him. . . . It's gonna happen sooner or later. It ain't like he went out there and killed *me*. Hey, if it happen, it happen." About his mother, he simply says that he does not trust her.

The Disciples

Carl cannot remember a time when he did not look forward to becoming a Disciple:

> I been around them folks all my life. . . . I seen them, know the kind of stuff they do, you know, how they do it. And it was just like sooner or later I was gonna be one. . . . Went around talking about [Disciples] this and that. You know, they just thought it was cute. They looked and laughed at me, told the people, "Look at shorty," you know. . . . Yep, sure enough, you know, sooner became later.

For Carl, becoming a member of the Disciples was not a matter of conscious decision, and certainly not of seduction and recruitment in the circumscribed sense, but rather of putting an actual name to a view of himself, an identity, as it were, whose

evolution had long since begun. He was then as he is now--tough, relentless, and unafraid--"Ain't nothing changed but my shoe size." Very simply, becoming a Disciple was the logical, most compatible, next step--"It just came natural to me. . . . It's just natural." He clearly remembers his sense of significance on the day he first proved himself to the older Disciples. He was nine years old:

> The time when I first, when I joined, when we had a little fight on the basketball court and these couple of guys were there and said, "Man, you coming to see me" and I said "yeah." I wasn't nothing but nine. I ain't ever looked my right age, you know. . . . At the time, I did a little more than one of the [older] fellas, and they were comparing our sizes and ages and whatever, telling [the older guy], "Ain't you pitiful. That shorty more real than you is," and all that, and I just let it go to my head.

Carl fired a gun the first time he ever held one, at the age of nine. It already felt familiar in his hand, like it somehow just fit right. By the age of 12, he had his first attempted murder arrest (for which he served six months in detention), and at the age of 14, he was convicted on two counts of attempted murder and one count of felony armed robbery, for which he is currently serving four years at IYC-St. Charles.

When asked whether he thinks about leaving the Disciples, he says, "No, after awhile, it just turns into love. . . . It's just too deep into me now." He does, however, imagine making changes:

> I'm gonna try to go to junior college. . . . I got to do something to keep me out of trouble. And after a year or so of being out, I'll try to try out for the CBA basketball team. . . . I don't want to go back to where I came from, my set, you

> know. I don't want to go back 'cause out there you be respected in the wrong way and I don't want to be respected like that. I don't want to be remembered like that.

But then, as though suddenly struck by the hopelessness of his situation, or perhaps by the sheer irresistibility of what he does, he states unequivocally, "I'll come back to jail. I know that."

Categories of Meaning

The denial of affect: Omnipotent rationality and the importance of being cool.

In Carl's psychological world, little is incidental, random, or beyond comprehension, and nothing he does falls outside the range of his own mental control. He prides himself immensely on his ability to remain calm, in charge, and unemotional when faced with conflict or danger. In fact, he declares himself basically nonviolent on the grounds that the violence he commits is rational, necessary, and the product of a mental deliberation. His violence, he believes, is driven neither by emotion nor instinct. He loathes drive-by shootings and muggings, for instance, because they reflect a certain loss of reserve, of self-control. They are, he says, "a waste" and "unnecessary" because they are rarely instrumental, and if anything, "throw heat to the set."

Carl sees himself as beyond impulse, beyond raw desire. There always exists a plan, a purpose, an order to what he does. When he is violent, "it is because *I* decide." He thereby reduces such action to willful and conscious determinants and eliminates any sense of his own urgency or passion. Although he acknowledges that there have been

times in which he has fought "without knowing why at the time," he retrospectively applies a logical motive, an instrumental intent, to his actions:

> I could bust someone's head or something and I still be going after them. . . . When you're doing it, it don't seem like you're doing it to set an example, but when it's all over, you know why you just did it. . . . You know that, deep inside, you done did it to set an example, to let other people know that you ain't the one they gonna get they reputation on. . . . In everybody else's eyes, you just ain't the one to fuck with.

Carl thereby strips even the most frenzied of actions of their rageful and fearful aspects. In his view, he does not fight because he feels threatened or enraged, but in order to make a point.

Even acting on behalf of his own self-preservation is cloaked in rationality, as though some explanation beyond the wish to survive is required. He defends himself against attack, not because it is instinctive to do so, but because it makes logical sense and it is what he has been trained to do. It comes down, for him, to choosing amongst his range of possible alternatives and coming up with the most rational plan of action. When describing the incident that resulted in his incarceration, he explains:

> I thought, I ain't got no time for this. . . . I wasn't gonna fight no 30 niggers, so I just got to shooting. . . . I could have fought, I could have ran, but I ain't backing down from nobody, and I ain't gonna be dumb about it either. So if I got an easy way out, I'm gonna take that easy way. And that was my teachings . . . and now I'm paying my consequences.

Unlike the other subjects, Carl does not acknowledge any acute sense of pleasure derived from his life as a Disciple. Again, he boils down his own motivation, as well as the violent motives of his rivals, to a very specific concrete gain:

> Money . . . that's all it's about. . . . What's so fun about being around a group of thugs, watching your back all day? . . . But that money will keep you out. You got something to stand there for. . . . If I'm out there doing whatever I'm doing to make money, and he out there, and I'm making more money than he is, he gonna do everything in his will to try and stop me. . . . Everything is competitive in this world.

By converting the unknown, the emotional, and the reactive into concrete and rational experience, Carl effectively avoids the consideration of his own emotional subjectivity, and, in fact, consciously eradicates it. Adorno, et al. (1982) refer to this psychological process as "anti-intraception," which they define as the tendency to reduce experience to its most tangible and intellectual forms and to avoid its sensual, imaginative components out of a fear of being overtaken by affect. Indeed, reflected in his hypercathexis of mind and thought is a seeming effort on Carl's part to reduce his awareness of tension states and to bring the world, chaos and all, under his own conscious and rational control. In this way, he grants order to his experience and provides a ready explanation to all things malevolent. Most significantly, he brings his own unfathomable and passive experiences under his own direction, or, in other words, under the rubric of his own powerful mind.

<u>The re-rendering of passivity The mastery of death anxiety.</u>

Evidenced in much of Carl's discourse is the re-rendering of passive modes of experiencing into active form, an effort which seems to reflect both an attempt to omnipotently control his experience and to retrospectively make comprehensible, or master, the perpetual, seemingly senseless, violence of his childhood. In regard to death specifically, Carl seems to have utterly transformed the role of the victim, re-narrativized it, so to speak, in a way that both mitigates the victim's helplessness as well as rationally explicates his or her encounter with violence. In short, he blames the victim, and in so doing, creates an illusion for himself in which bad things do not befall the wise, the ready, and the self-controlled, qualities with which he himself is greatly endowed.

As described earlier, through his persistent application of reason, Carl effectively obliterates his own knowledge of disorder, chaos, and passivity and supplants it with a vision of the world in which one's experiences are linearly bound to one's own active, conscious will. He believes, for instance, that the drug murder he witnessed as a young child was due to the victim's own actions--"Damn, that's fucked up or something. Got shot over some dope." *[Researcher: "And that's a stupid reason for someone to kill someone?"]* "No. That was stupid of *him* to start smoking."

Violent death, he believes, is a direct outcome of the victim's stupidity, weakness, or incompetence. As such, it can be controlled, even averted, through intelligence, good sense, and proper vigilance:

> I shot this guy up. [A lady] come out, "Yeah, I seen him do this and do that." What that tell you about her, you know what I'm saying? . . . What if I had stopped and killed her and her kids? She was being stupid.

> O.K., I shot this dude a couple of times, three or four times. But some white girl, you know, she just come out of the blue and told [the police] that I just stood over him. Well I did stand over him and shoot him, she told them that, but she told them that when I shot him I bent down and went in his pockets and took his money. You know that didn't help me none. . . . Somebody always want to play the Good Samaritan and that's why innocent people be getting hurt. . . . What's that gonna make me wanna do? People should just mind their own business in this world. . . . And then, it didn't help me no worser because somebody shot the girl . . . after she came to court on me. I ain't gonna lie. I think it was one of my boys. . . . No, she wasn't killed. I mean she was paralyzed and all that, but she wasn't killed. She'd have minded her business and it never would have happened.

This "girl" Carl refers to, in other words, could have avoided her intersection with violence had she simply exercised some restraint of conscience. Although his contempt for his victims is clear, he empowers them, grants them a means, in his own mind, by which they might save themselves. He makes them essential to the violent act by giving them an instrumental role in its perpetration.

There appears at work an undeniable effort on Carl's part to master, or possibly pacify, his own anxieties about death. After all, if dying is in one's own hands, then one truly has omnipotent control and is not at the passive mercy of external or random forces. Furthermore, by altering the meaning of violent death, by lifting it out of the realm of the absurd and affixing to it a rational, linear structure, it becomes fathomable, predictable, and, as such, within the grasp of ordinary conscious thought.

Group ties and transcendence.

Carl's devotion to his fellow Disciples is admittedly a driving force behind much of the violence he commits. It is not a "love," as he calls it, which is person-specific, but rather an abiding attachment to "The Disciples" as a discrete, powerful, and shared psychological entity. As a young leader within the organization, he feels intensely connected to and responsible for his "boys" and regularly jeopardizes his own well-being on behalf of the overall group. Similar to the narcissistic group ties among youthful combat soldiers as described by van der Kolk (1985), Carl experiences threats to any part of his gang as a personal assault requiring immediate defense and retribution. He describes a recent incident at St. Charles which resulted, for him, in five days of solitary confinement. It was, he insists, completely worth the price paid:

> [The rival gang] had sent this little dude at one of my partners. . . . You see, I ain't gonna play with the little foot soldiers. . . . I'm going straight for the man himself. So I went for one of their little elites . . . went at him, we got to fighting and another one of his boys tried to jump in. Well, you know, I got to fighting both of them and one of them slipped on some water or something and I got to stomping him.

No one, not even his girlfriend, can evoke the passionate ferocity with which he will defend his Disciples:

> Fuck her. I don't care about her. . . . If they get to whupping on her ass, I'm getting in my car and leave. I ain't got nothing to do with that. There probably was a reason why they whooping her ass. . . . It would be different if it was a friend.

Carl is, first and foremost, a Disciple. His commitment to and defense of his "boys" overrides any other consideration--"No matter what, right or wrong, I draw [my gun]." They are, he says, "just like family" and he would fight to the death for them rather than save himself--"Whatever happens, if we're walking and somebody come at us, ain't no use running, one of us running, if both of us ain't. . . . Yeah, we're going down together."

Gang life for Carl *is* group life and within this group, he finds power, principle, and most importantly, something larger than himself to be faithful to, to be bound up in. The gang seems to function as an omnipotent object which both sanctions and defines personal action, as well as clarifies who is who on a social battleground of potential enemies. In a world in which he trusts nobody, "not even my own mama," and in which violent death feels always imminent, Carl's love for his Disciples grants him a transcendent purpose which lifts him out of both moral confusion and solitude, as well as assures him that he will die neither senselessly nor alone.

Projection and the disavowal of traumatic affect.

Although Carl vehemently denies any sense of emotional reaction to his early experiences with violence, both his contemporary world view and his intentional evocation of particular affects in others seem to betray the form of his own repressed traumatic affect. Without comprehending its link to his own history, Carl admittedly views others, even those he knows well, as intensely unpredictable and therefore unworthy of his trust:

> You never know who will try something when. . . . People be thinking they know other people, but they don't. . . . Say you might trust a person or something, like two ladies, they be friends or whatever, you know, good friends. This one lady mess around with the other lady's boyfriend. She thinks, "I know this is going to cause an argument," but you never know how that lady really feel about that, you know. She might want him by herself, so she kill her friend. People just do stuff. . . . To this day I try to figure out why I don't trust nobody, but it don't ever come to me, so I just don't trust nobody.

What Carl seems to be describing here is the sense that one's knowledge about and perceptions of another are ultimately illusory, spurious, and can therefore never be counted on--"I even watch my back around my own family." To ever suppose that one can really know anyone else is tantamount, he believes, to leaving oneself open to the shock and surprise of hidden or unconsidered truths. People, he believes, will turn on you in an instant.

His experience that "you never know" and that there are no perceptions that can be confidently held in mind is, not surprisingly, actively repeated by Carl in the subtleties of his own interplay with others, except that now it becomes *he* who is precarious, enigmatic, impossible to pin down. Not knowing and not trusting have been enduringly transformed into a self which can neither be known nor trusted by others. Very simply, he aims to keep people in an ongoing state of nonspecific vigilance. It is not the simple "aura of dread" (Katz, 1988) that he constructs, or a portrayal of himself as villainous, but rather he attempts to evoke in the other a free-floating tension, a suspension of their own sense of knowing. He does not set out to create fear, but confusion. It is not him that they do not trust so much, but their own perceptions of him. He has rendered

himself beyond categorization, beyond prediction, someone capable of nothing or all things--one just never knows. It is a state of unpreparedness in others that he aims for:

> I don't like to be known, period, 'cause I like to be the outcast. If you're the outcast and you do something, they didn't suspect you to do [it]. . . . I just don't want people to know when to suspect nothing. Whether I'm gonna do good, bad, half and half . . . they see I did it, or didn't do it, or whatever. . . . I want them to be suspicious of me . . . wonder what he's gonna do next and this and that. . . . I'd rather for a person not to be scared of me than be scared, 'cause a person to be so scared, they get stuck up on what they think I'm gonna do.

By strategically manipulating his joint propensities for violence and self-control, Carl seems to mastermind the nameless anxiety with which people respond to him. It is a subtle form of mind control, insistently and repeatedly engaged in, that would seem to suggest an attempt to resurrect, in active form, a disavowed experience of his own. By repeatedly evoking in others this sense of "wonder," of not knowing what he might do next, Carl projects and recreates in someone else his own forgotten traumatic confusion, his sense that there is no such thing as certainty, and no faith in another human that cannot be destroyed in a single violent instant.

Subject 5: The Case of C-Tray

Significant Childhood Experiences

Gunfire and killings have never much consciously bothered C-Tray, he claims, because of their regular presence within the urban housing projects he grew up in and around. He recalls being caught in the crossfire of a drive-by shooting at the age of nine:

> Me and my stepmother, you know, my dad's ex-wife, we was walking down the street, going to church, and we were walking past the projects and people was in the parking lot and they got to shooting. The car fled still shooting and stuff, and she was pregnant, my stepmother, so we got right in the middle into the crossfire. Me and my stepmother and my little sister. . . . I was just mad, 'cause it could have hit my little sister or hit [my stepmother] and my little brother she was carrying. They ducked down, they laid on the ground. I didn't. I just stood up. Didn't scare me. I've seen people get shot and everything . . . but that was the first time I ever been in the crossfire, but I still wasn't scared, [just from] hearing it and heard about it 'cause I lived right down the street from the projects.

Within this same year, due to the family's increasing financial problems, C-Tray moved into a housing project with his mother and three younger siblings. Although the single-family house they had been living in up to that point was also surrounded by immense crime and poverty, the change in his mother's socioeconomic status, however slight, was deeply distressing for C-Tray and he began to spend more and more time on the streets and at his friends' houses. The extreme material deprivation imposed by his family's dependent financial situation would, in fact, figure significantly in his eventual desire to become a gang member.

Now, at 16, C-Tray says that the worst experience of his life was his forced separation from his mother at age 11, an event which resulted last year in the permanent termination of both his mother's and father's parental rights. (He had been separated from

his mother once before, at the age of four, when she spent time in prison.) Although he refuses to discuss the situation in detail, the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) invasion into his family life enrages him:

> Her legal rights got took away, when she had a baby and stuff, whatever. Yeah, and the baby was drug addicted or whatever they call it, so they took the little girl and then took us. . . . I just ain't allowed to see her, or her or my dad. . . . They was saying he had such and such day to come to court, to show up to claim rights. He was staying in [another nearby city] then, and, you know, he couldn't get the message. So by then, when he came back . . . he said, "I didn't get no papers or nothing."

At 11, then, C-Tray moved in with his grandmother, at which time, he says, his life began to unravel--"'Cause ever since I got into [DCFS], I really been getting into trouble" (he received his first arrest, for theft, around that time). Since then, death has also been a continual aspect of his experience. One cousin was shot; another was hanged in prison on a "death violation" by his own gang; and another was killed in a car accident, an event which C-Tray, then 12 years old, witnessed firsthand.

At the age of 12, orphaned, materially impoverished, and increasingly targeted by neighborhood gangs, C-Tray decided to employ both the crime and violence in his community toward his own end. He became a Disciple.

The Disciples

Becoming a Disciple was, according to C-Tray, a direct outcome of the "hard pains" he had endured growing up--"You don't see somebody that got brought up right,

Christian and all that, just suddenly turn into a gang member." Faced with a seeming paucity of opportunity and his own fractured ability to rely on any caretaker, C-Tray saw the Disciples as his way of taking care of himself:

> When I was really living in [the ghetto], I wanted to struggle harder to get out of it. . . . When I was little, I used to love going to school and learning 'cause I felt like it was all up to me to get us out of there. After awhile, see, the way I tried to go, a lot of people were trying to stop me from going that way and I just let that get to me. [They were] pulling me into certain things. . . . Like selling drugs and making money. Before I even went in that direction, I went around filling out job applications . . . and I never got called in to get hired, so I figured, hey, they ain't wanting me to work. I got to make some money some way, to get the things I need.

He also felt, as he approached adolescence, that becoming a Disciple earned him protective backup when confronted by the various gangs in his neighborhood--"Four or five years ago, you know, BDs were going around saying, 'BD or Be Dead,' and they would shoot 'em right on the spot if they chose to." Joining the Disciples, therefore, was seen by C-Tray as a necessity of self-preservation:

> When you reach about that age where teenagers try to target you, even though you ain't in no organization, they gonna target you still. People come at you, and you gonna feel like you're left alone, 'cause if [your friends who are in gangs] get in and try to help a civilian, that just start a conflict with [other] gangs. . . . They stand back. Unless you join that gang, then they, all of them, are [not] going to help you.

Once in, C-Tray became enraptured with the benefits--money, knowledge, respect--of membership, and quickly became highly competent in contributing to the financial life of the organization. However, he has remained acutely aware of the pitfalls of being too flagrantly enmeshed in the power structure and has strategically avoided being perceived as a leader, despite his obvious capacity to be one.

Since the time of his entry into the Disciples, C-Tray has been arrested multiple times for a variety of offenses, most of which have been directly gang-related. He is currently serving six months in juvenile prison for burglary and is also being investigated in connection with an attempted murder in his home community.

Categories of Meaning

Action and posturing: The aversion of danger and the prevention of traumatization.

C-Tray has an uncanny knack for discerning threat, or to put it differently, a highly developed and sensitive capacity for signaling to himself the approach of danger:

> Sometimes my first instinct be right. Like, [I tell myself], leave from here, you know, something be telling me, you know . . . take off. Or I see this thing before it even happens. I be standing around and like, man, I could have sworn I done this before. Like deja vu or whatever. Like, man, I could have sworn I been in this position or something. Something gonna happen.

His anxiety regularly warns him of impending disaster and mobilizes him into psychological modes intended to protect him and thereby thwart the potential for traumatization. C-Tray, then, in contrast to the other subjects, seems less motivated by the need to achieve resolution of historical trauma (through repetition, for example) than he is to prevent himself from incurring a state of traumatic helplessness. He does this in essentially two ways: the donning of a particular attitude and appearance, intended to deflect threat, and the immediate conversion of anxiety into action.

C-Tray does not approach his mortality with the casual grandiosity typical of adolescents, but rather views death as an irreducible given--"We was born to die." He has always been acutely aware of the dangers in his milieu and has had many nightmares about his own violent death. Violence has inescapably permeated C-Tray's environment since he can remember and it makes no difference, he insists, what one's chosen vocation

is or on what side of the gun one is standing. Locating safety is a huge, seemingly insoluble, conundrum:

> What's gonna happen, happen. Probably if I'm a working man, somebody that be like me come and get me or something. Or I'm probably walking the street or driving my car and get carjacked or something. You're still a victim in society, so it doesn't matter. . . . Violent people are victims too, because of the police. So, it's a cycle. They'll beat you down or shoot you or probably take your money. . . . Violent people got to worry about other violent people or the police. Constantly probably looking over they shoulder. . . . [If you're in gang], you got to worry about which side you go on. Then again, you could be an ordinary person and if you got the wrong colors on and walk on the wrong side...

In C-Tray's experience, then, the potential for violent victimization is omnipresent, and it infuriates him when people suggest that his violent encounters might be prevented if he were willing to simply walk away:

> Man, they don't know. Yeah, let somebody threaten they life and see how much they can avoid. Nothing you can avoid if somebody threaten your life. If they gonna do it, they gonna do it. You can't avoid, unless that person avoids for you.

C-Tray has adapted to the relentless danger of his surround by actively altering his manner of interfacing with the outer world. Specifically, he represents himself as invincible and unaccommodating in the face of physical threat in order to diminish both the fear it arouses as well as the likelihood that he will be violently attacked. It is an

autoplastic, enormously adaptive effort to avert impending and catastrophic traumatization:

> I don't try to be scared of nothing. Don't do nothing to be scared. Probably get you more killed if you're scared. 'Cause if I get scared or panicked, it don't solve nothing, 'cause, like I said, if it's your time to go, it's your time to go. . . . Keep a calm head, you probably can get out of it without getting hit. . . . Somebody, you know, sticking you up or something--if you panic, he might kill you for panicking. . . . If you show fear, they kind of like that fear.

By utterly refusing to surrender himself to either his inner anxieties or to merciless outer forces, C-Tray conforms to a fundamental code of street life, namely, that respect is engendered by the presentation of oneself as unafraid of physical harm. In other words, his ongoing personification of the Disciple credo, "Death before Dishonor," paradoxically lessens the risk that he will die:

> If you walk away from a problem, all that do is show you retarded. They're gonna take your kindness for weakness and try to move in on you or whatever. They're gonna try to hit you. . . . Don't give them anything. But if you let them take it from you, they say, "Aw, he ain't nothing." To show they ain't gonna get it, they may probably give you more respect than if you let them take it.

C-Tray recalls one instance in which he was being held up for his chains, clothing, and money:

> I told them they have to kill me or whatever, you know. They didn't even do nothing. They just had a gun and I just stood there, "Man, I ain't giving nothing. Nothing. . . . You gonna have to kill me and take whatever you gonna get." By me standing up like that, he just ran away. . . . I didn't let my scared break out. Then he might would've shot me or took my stuff. And he's the one who had the strap. . . . Like if I give that guy my coat and my chain and my shoes, he probably would have tried to hit me again and again and again.

Like a soldier, with an acutely sensitive and vigilant watch on his environment, C-Tray lives in an ongoing state of preparedness for danger, consciously enlisting his entire demeanor towards averting it, towards camouflaging himself from the penetrating eyes of potential perpetrators--"Everything I do, I do it for a reason. The way I dress and probably the way I talk, I do it for a reason. To get less attention off me. . . . I don't get hassled."

C-Tray's willingness to violently act on behalf of his own self-preservation similarly functions to transform his feelings of fear and to alter the violent intent of his enemies. He is, he says, "never scared to fight. I'm scared *not* to fight, what it is. I take my feelings and just turn around to doing it.":

> When I'm scared, it makes me act more. Like if a big dude come, way big as me, ready to fight me, I might be scared but that ain't gonna do nothing but pump me up to hit him first. Take him out before he can hit me. Maybe I can get on top or whatever. Yep. I don't get, 'cause I'm scared, I don't want to fight you, 'cause what they gonna do? . . . That's just gonna make it easier for him to beat me up.

C-Tray has effectively aligned his capacity for violent action with his hyper-attuned radar for danger in the service of being prepared for anything, a readiness for battle which is intended to quell his anxieties about being violently blindsided. He is adaptively paranoid, so to speak.

Violence, then, for C-Tray, is felt to be a necessity of self-preservation. As previously stated, he seems neither propelled by a compulsive need to actively repeat an earlier, passively experienced trauma, but rather engaged in the *prevention* of traumatization, the potential for which, he feels, is ever-present.

Mastery: The thrill of gang life.

> [I] probably just like that fast life . . . the excitement you go through everyday, like, you know, see whether you can live for another 24 or whatever. . . . I don't see no interest in working. Go to work, come home. . . . It just gets boring after awhile.

The precariousness of gang life has an undeniable appeal to C-Tray. The constant provision of novel and challenging situations engages his psyche and lifts him out of bored stagnation. Even when he was quite young, he was aware of the strange allure of violence and the thrill provided by the need for vigilance. He remembers visiting a family member in a small California town--"I didn't really like it there. I got bored and tired of staying. I wanted to come back. There were no fights or nothing really."

C-Tray eventually loses interest in activities that become overly familiar to him, his mind continually roving for some new experience that he has yet to master. For this reason, he cannot envision a life for himself comprised of any semblance of routine--"I

tried. Just lost interest. . . . I don't like living the same life every day. . . . Boring. I don't know, I ain't no ordinary person. Everyday I try to do something I haven't done."

Gang life, by contrast, offers him a varied and ongoing supply of adrenaline-rushing, heart-pounding dilemmas from which to extricate himself. It is the perfect solution for a youth motivated by the need for challenge, novelty, and mastery:

> The excitement of it all. The suspense. Not really exciting, but scary. Sometimes scary is an excitement for some people. Just people shooting at you, you know, [you] probably like it. Not like it, but, you know, think [you] feel tough or whatever, you know.

Clearly preferring the dangers of gang life to the security of routinized living, C-Tray appears motivated to evoke in himself a particular set of anxieties in order to test his ability to transcend them. However, he says this evocation of thrill has declined as he has become increasingly familiar with the hazardous terrain of his community:

> Now it's boring to me since I know I been through everything, like I know front to back now. Nothing I don't know about it. I explored it, the whole where I stay, and been everything. So nothing new to me now, so it don't excite me as much as it did when I didn't know.

In sum, motivated by the excitement of vigilance, C-Tray repeatedly subjects himself to fear-arousing stimuli until he is sufficiently desensitized to it, or more dynamically, until it has been rendered ego-syntonic. It seems to be a form of practicing, a way of preparing himself for whatever noxious situation he might encounter in order

that he, as discussed in the prior section, might prevent himself from being caught unaware and descending into a irremediable state of psychic helplessness.

Self-sufficiency: The escape from deprivation and dependency.

Gang life provides, for C-Tray, a highly effective means for escaping the tyranny of dependency upon people from whom little, if anything, can be extracted, as well as the deprivation imposed by extreme financial destitution. As a Disciple, he is self-emancipated, neither bound up in the needs, requirements, and limitations of those around him nor at the mercy of larger, societal forces. Gang life is felt to offer him a way out, a liberation from the clutches of authority, racism, poverty, and above all, the helpless desperation he perceives in those around him. Through his involvement, he can move through the world a separate and free man, relying only upon his own wits and pursuing objectives that are his alone.

C-Tray's self-imposed and vigilant self-sufficiency seems to arise from his experience of others as profoundly authoritarian, unworthy of trust, or tantalizingly needful (qualities which likely characterized his experience of important early figures in his life), as well as his contempt for the compromised economic and social status of his family. Based on his mother's drug addiction, her reported lack of supervision over C-Tray, and his father's overall detachment from him, it appears that he had virtually no one upon whom he could depend as a young child, an experience whose residues have taken up permanent residency within his world view.

Becoming overly bound up with other people, C-Tray believes, is tantamount to getting buried amidst their psychic wreckage, forfeiting his self-control, and risking the derailment of his own aspirations. He seems to become easily enslaved by the emotional

requirements and agendas of others, his own clarity of mind jeopardized in the face of too intimate and desperate of human contact:

> I get confused when people have problems and they come to me. 'Cause I can't see nobody, person that I know, suffer, or see somebody get beat up. I can't see that, so I like to stick to myself, 'cause if I'm away from them problems, then I don't have to worry about nothing going down. . . . So it's less trouble for me.

Even with the Disciples, he feels he must remove himself from the sway of the mob, set himself apart, in order to prevent from becoming too swept away by the propulsive power of the group. It is, he says, his way of being cautious, of keeping hold of his conscious will, and of remaining clear about the nature of his own intentions and activities--"I hang with myself. . . . Because then if anything happens, I know why and what for and who to blame. . . . If you careless, and you don't know yourself [what happens], then you're gonna go in and take the blame for it."

Being a Disciple enables C-Tray to transcend both the general restrictions imposed by ghetto life and the specific economic limitations of his family. As a gangster, he is neither controlled by nor confined to the dearth of mainstream opportunities available to a poor, young, African American male. There is simply no place for him, he believes, in ordinary American life:

> Now I'm getting my GED, but still, GED ain't gonna help me no better than I was when I was out. 'Cause when I was in school and filled out an application, that should've helped me get a job. . . . I went to school all this time in my life and I don't see nothing it's done for me. Maybe I know how to read and write when I really need to, but I don't see what else. . . . It don't make any difference getting out

> of [the ghetto]. Gonna be problems wherever you go. The world's a dangerous place to live in, that's all. People don't know how to act. I guess, jealous. Not only jealousy, but racism too.

C-Tray has supplanted the gloomy oppressiveness of his childhood experience with a strategically created life he believes is brimming with opportunity, liberty, and hope. However, even as a Disciple, C-Tray is careful, as always, not to relinquish himself on behalf of the overall group, and towards that end, stays in close contact with only four other members. In this way, he seems able to enjoy the benefits of membership without feeling unduly controlled by the organization:

> In our organization, only us four really hang together. . . . What they might call "renegade," a club within. Not following the rules, exactly what they do. . . . If we feel like some of the rules aren't right, we ain't gonna follow 'em. Like if it endangering us, we won't follow 'em. . . . Like if he tells us to go do this, we don't do that. . . . It gives me more independence for myself.

Gang life affords C-Tray a route, albeit precariously achieved, to immense wealth and feelings of competence, and as such, gets him out from under the control, influence, and confinement he feels are forced upon him by the outside world. He navigates his ghetto streets unbounded by ordinary prohibition, armed with his own resourcefulness, his independence enhanced and protected by his association with the Disciples. Most significantly, he feels he can employ his innate talents towards his own success and power, transcending the outer obstacles facing many young, black, urban adolescents. The future feels possible now for C-Tray, and more importantly, to be under the sway of his own desire and competence.

Impelled by an intense profit motive, C-Tray finds within his gang a direct avenue to economic independence, and this seems to be one of his primary motivations for committing violence. He does not seem to enjoy violence, as do the other subjects, nor feel inexplicably driven to it--"Me, I think about the consequences. If I take his life, do I want to spend the rest of my life in jail? I say it ain't worth it"--but rather incorporates it as a necessary, rational means to preserving his self-sufficiency:

> Money is violent. If there wasn't no such thing as money, there might not be that much crime going on. If you take something from me, it costs some money so I'm gonna fight you for it 'cause you try to take it away from me. . . . You know, we call it C.R.E.A.M.: Cash Rule Everything Around Me.

Beyond its role in financing his independence, money seems to have, for C-Tray, a clear metaphorical status as well. In short, he frequently associates his drive to attain financial independence with his lack of "family support" and his effort to "get the things they ain't gonna give me." He seems to be talking not simply about material provisions here, but about his family's overall capacity to take care of him. In fact, C-Tray believes that the key distinction between himself and children who do not join gangs is that, in the case of the latter, "Maybe they had somebody on the side of them helping them through it. Yep, somebody constantly talking to them."

In sum, C-Tray's gang membership seems to represent his effort to rise above the deprivation and instability of his early life and to assert active and independent ownership over his own life. It reflects, furthermore, the launching of a personal protest, the impassioned refusal to be controlled or otherwise constrained by other peoples' notions of who, and what, he ought to be--"Just be myself. That's what I be doing. I'm being myself." Even if his means are dubious, one might admire the rebelliousness of his

spirit, his utter rejection of the normative opportunities available to someone of his race, class, and age:

> Can't live no ordinary life. Can't go to work, come home, sit down, go back and go to sleep, go home and go to work. That's why I can't work at no fast food restaurant. I don't like it. And, at my age, that's the only thing really available to me right now. So I don't. I chose not to do it. I chose to go the other route, 'cause now there ain't really nothing open.

He has taken his life in hand, and is, he feels, immensely stronger for it. He regards with scornful contempt those who began life with so much more than himself, and yet seem to buckle under the pressures of everyday living:

> Man, they break down when they lose they jobs and stuff. They want to kill theyself. You got to face that fact everyday; if it's worth living this life, you live it. Like when one of them boys, like when they lose they job, it seems like all you hear about them is that they commit suicides and stuff. On drugs and stuff now. And they just lost their job. We ain't even *getting* a job.

C-Tray will not sit idly back and wait for the world to provide something to him. He can neither afford this, nor does he believe that anyone can see beyond their own desperation enough to give him what he feels rightfully entitled to. He is a living example of the "antisocial tendency" (Winnicott, 1956), driven by the quest to recover what was lost in the massive deprivation of his youth--"I haven't been conquered yet, so I'm gonna keep on struggling. That show I haven't been conquered yet if I keep on struggling."

POSTSCRIPT: Although the self-sufficiency enabled by C-Tray's gang membership did not represent a sequela to early violent traumatization, it did appear to function as a highly adaptive solution to a series of chronic, subjectively preoccupying, developmental problems, namely, parental unreliability, poverty, and social marginalization. Therefore, even though these problems did not fall under the rubric of violent trauma, their profound impact on C-Tray, as well as the degree to which they seem to function as central organizers of his personality, invited the speculation that chronic deprivation is, for some children of the inner city, in itself psychologically traumatic. Furthermore, insofar as C-Tray's gang membership was dynamically linked to these experiences, the detailed exploration of this link was considered relevant to the research question and therefore included in his case analysis.

Within-Case Tables

Table 4 is a compilation of all of the meaning categories, broken down by individual case and divided according to action and aim. Every meaning category for each subject, as delineated by the investigator, was discovered to be comprised of both a psychological *action* enabled by the subject's violent gang membership and an *aim* in relation to his memories of traumatization. In other words, the subjects' gang memberships appeared to be linked to their historic experiences by sets of defensive operations (psychological actions) aimed at transforming their experiences of vulnerability, helplessness, fear, anxiety, and the like. For example, Li'l C's gang involvement provided him with a means for motoric action, which he then employed towards the titration of his traumatic inner states, specifically deadness and hyperarousal.

Li'l Mook found within gang life ongoing opportunities for the active re-experiencing of a specific, trauma-reminiscent anxiety, namely, persecution, which he then harnessed towards the mastery of this experience.

Table 5 depicts the psychological action components of the meaning categories in terms of their general psychological function in relation to traumatization. Although the subjects attributed different specific meanings to their gang involvement and seemed to be in pursuit of a range of idiomatically defined experiences, they had in common a concern with both the inhibition, or denial, of traumatic feelings and the revival of them in their contemporary lives. C-Tray, for instance, relied on action in order to thwart his anxieties (denial), and yet also actively and repetitively induced them as a form of excitement and a means of achieving prospective mastery (revival). Similarly, Li'l C denied his personal history by supplanting it with that of the Vice Lords, and yet memorialized it every time he pulled the trigger. Carl, by contrast, was invested in ridding himself of every traumatic vestige, seeming to have devoted his entire character to the erasure of passivity, powerlessness, and other forms of conscious anxiety. Other than his active arousal of disorientation in people around him, he neither granted his childhood experiences concrete expression in his current life nor permitted himself too close a proximity to their associated affect states (through thrill-seeking, for instance), but rather engaged the outer world, including his gang, in a relentless pursuit of omnipotent denial. In the case of Kujo, violence was simultaneously a means of staving off traumatic annihilation, and, via the creation of this state in his victims, a way of granting his inner experience a profound and concrete realness.

Table 4

Psychological Meanings of Violent Gang Membership In Relation To Childhood Trauma

	Categories of meaning (links)	
Subject	Psychological action enabled by gang membership	Aim in relation to childhood traumatic experience
Li'l C	Motor action Thrill-seeking Concretization Group merger Omnipotent resignation	Self-stimulation & self-soothing Mastery Telling & remembering Recreation of identity Transformation of death anxiety
Li'l Mook	Violent action Repetition Violent action Merger with gang law	Omnipotence/denial of fear Mastery Retrospective vengeance Transcendence
Kujo	Violence Re-narrativization Group ties	Self-revival Existential clarity Reparation of father-loss
Carl	Omnipotent rationality Re-rendering passivity Group ties Projection of affect	Denial of affect Mastery of death anxiety Transcendent purpose Disavowal/recreation of traumatic affect
C-Tray	Action & posturing Thrill-seeking Self-sufficiency	Prevention of traumatization Mastery Transcendence of deprivation & dependency

Table 5

Psychological Operation Enabled by Gang Membership According to Function of its Aim in Relation to Trauma

Subject	Psychological action enabled by gang membership	Function of aim in relation to trauma: Denial	Function of aim in relation to trauma: Revival
Li'l C	Motor action	X	
	Thrill-seeking		X
	Concretization		X
	Group merger	X	
	Omnipotent resignation	X	
Li'l Mook	Violent action	X	
	Repetition		X
	Violent action		X
	Merger with gang law	X	
Kujo	Violence	X	X
	Re-narrativization	X	
	Group ties	X	
Carl	Omnipotent rationality	X	
	Re-rendering passivity	X	
	Group ties	X	
	Projection of affect	X	X
C-Tray	Action & posturing	X	
	Thrill-seeking		X
	Self-sufficiency	X	

The Negative Case

In the case of C-Tray, his gang participation, while clearly adaptive and transformative, did not seem to contain the trauma-related meanings typical of the other subjects. For instance, he had, by and large, retained conscious memories of the affective components of his historic experiences and could utilize them in the form of warning signals to predict and prevent danger in his ongoing relationship to the environment. Furthermore, his ability to recall his childhood vulnerability enabled him to identify with the helplessness of others and to experience guilt in relation to his own criminal activity. Due to this ability to remember, he seemed less driven than the others to enact his past in action form.

Other than his enjoyment of violent thrill--which seemed to have a prospective, rather than retrospective aim--he did not appear to use violence or other aspects of his gang life in the service of repeating, inhibiting, or otherwise belatedly countering historic experiences of violent traumatization, but rather seemed preoccupied with the pursuit of his own safety and self-sufficiency within his current milieu. In other words, it was the *prevention* of traumatic helplessness, not its cure, that seemed to motivate him.

Given his anxieties in relation to impingement, it seemed likely that C-Tray's primary "trauma," rather than being essentially violent in nature, more likely occurred in the relational, i.e., caretaking, domain of his experience. Therefore, while the examination of his experience was useful for understanding certain functions of gang life in relation to chronically stressful, *nonviolent* childhood experiences, its relevance to the explication of the links between gang membership and violent traumatization was somewhat limited.

Validity and Reliability

In order to ascertain the degree to which the researcher's interpretations of the case material were not simply idiosyncratic, a second, psychodynamically informed examiner read several randomly chosen transcripts for each subject, with the purpose of arriving at his own interpretations about meaning. The meaning categories inferred by this examiner, as well as their referents (i.e., what the labels referred to), were very much in consonance with the researcher's.

In terms of checking validity, defined as the defensibility of the relationships between the constructs employed and the meaning of the data to which they refer, the researcher discussed the findings, both the narrative data and the meaning codes, with a psychoanalytically oriented consultant. In regard to its compliance with hermeneutic criteria for assessing validity (i.e., comprehensiveness, experience-nearness, coherence, and aesthetic quality [Atwood, et al., 1984]), the project was determined to be successful.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

It was the goal of this project to illuminate the psychological links between chronic childhood exposure to traumatic violence and subsequent hard-core gang membership in the lives of five urban adolescent males. Generally, these links, or defensive operations which account for the victim-to-perpetrator transformation, appeared to coalesce within the matrices of trauma reenactment and trauma inhibition, as theoretically predicted. The findings (summarized below) exposed the adaptive benefits afforded by the various components of gang membership, suggesting its powerful role in mitigating or otherwise transforming the experience of traumatic anxiety.

Summary of Cross-Case Findings: The Transformative Power of Violent Gang Life

See, if I didn't never know how to take care of myself, I probably be somewhere, you know what I'm saying, dead somewhere.

Kujo, Disciple, 1996

The steady onslaught of violence throughout early life requires that the developing child make extraordinary adaptations at all levels of his psychological functioning in order to preserve his sense of well-being. The violence experienced by the child of the inner city is, from early on, characterized primarily by its chronicity, its proximity, its human causation, and by the fact that it preexists him. His relationship to violence, therefore, does not necessarily produce eruptions within an already stable adaptation (like war veterans, for instance), but rather organizes his development from the beginning. There may be, as such, no acute traumatic moment in the life of such a child, but rather a host of developmental traumas requiring the ongoing, creative enlistment of the surround in order to maintain his psychic equilibrium and to render himself harmonious with experiences which are at once both foreign and yet utterly familiar.

The childhood traumas imposed by chronic inner city violence do not seem to result in discrete, ego-dystonic sets of sequelae, but instead are distilled within the child's ongoing identity where they are alternately, continuously both muted and kept alive. The "biphasic tendency" (van der Kolk & Ducey, 1989), or the "fight or flight" syndromes characteristic of the human trauma response as classically depicted, in other words, find their chronic equivalent in the formation of ego-syntonic character traits which are organized around the denial and revivification of the subject's traumatic life experiences.

This study focused on violent gang membership as one such characterological adaptation to the unremitting violence of the inner city. As gleaned from the detailed

examination of individual case material, violent gang life appears to provide a multiply determined solution to a range of psychological and developmental quandaries. Insofar as remembering and forgetting, repeating and transcending are overriding, conjoint purposes for the traumatized subject (Freud, 1939), gang membership seems to offer, in a myriad of ways, avenues for achieving both.

Action as Mediator of Experience

At the center of the subjects' psychological lives was action, the phenomenological medium through which they pursued their variety of aims in relation to traumatization--remembering, forgetting, mastering, self-resuscitating, avenging, preventing, and self-soothing. Comprised of meanings related to both *process* and *content*, action appeared to be instrumental in terms of both fundamentally altering self-feeling and symbolically narrativizing early experience. In terms of process, it seemed to function, by and large, as a measure against passivity, a way of overtaking and controlling the experience of inertia and otherwise unremitting states of boredom and/or deadness. It embodied the refusal to be enslaved by helplessness, the restitutive mobilization of defense against psychological surrender, as posited by Krystal (1978, 1988). (Kujo, for instance, recalled the impotence endured while watching his sister get beaten, citing this inner experience as a precipitant of his subsequent violence.) In some cases, as with Li'l C, the act of movement simply felt "good"--enlivening, masterful, even joyful--seeming to ward off the emergence of dangerous, potentially disabling affect into consciousness.

In regard to specific action content, the centrality of violence was hardly surprising given that this was the defining feature of the subjects' most deleterious early experiences. Their actions, insofar as they recapitulated, in stunning mimicry, the shootings, beatings, and killings witnessed and experienced as children, seemed to

contain linguistically untethered memories of violence. Although each subject could verbalize a singular "story" of childhood violence, based on the paucity of further recollections and the emphasis on the cruder, imagistic aspects of the experience, as well as the seeming deletion of attending affect, these memories appeared to be representational, prototypic, and to possibly contain a screen function (Kris, 1950). Their life experience, as such, with the possible exception of C-Tray, seemed riddled with gaps, the linkages between their early and contemporary lives obscured by the compromised status of their conscious, verbal memories. Several of them claimed to feel "evil," their very identities as though imprinted, marked by the slew of violence endured (what Kujo referred to as a "bad impression"). However, it was through the subjects' employment of violent action that these denied experiences were given their most flagrant representation, provided with a rich, intensely contoured presence which was felt to be at once both intimately their own creation and yet as though inexplicably in control of them. Action, therefore, seemed to be the central mediator of the subjects' lived experience, the overarching link between past and present, subjecthood and objecthood, the grand rubric under which fell the more specific psychological processes of repetition and omnipotent inhibition.

The Revisitation of Trauma: The Role of Repetition

Never content to leave well enough alone, the human subject returns, time and time again, to the domain of his suffering, dramatically resurrecting its most profound contents in the hope that the psychic fractures incurred might belatedly find repair. Within the passion of his repetition, he seeks to reconfigure his experience of the traumatic past, and in so doing, render it assimilable and thereby reclaim the lost particles of his own subjectivity. The hallmark of this endeavor is the pursuit of mastery, the subject's

attempt to instill in himself a confidence that he can now effectively manage anxieties which once threatened to paralyze him. Balint (1959) wrote:

> [O]ne, perhaps the most efficient, way of dealing with the consequences of a trauma is to produce it actively and intentionally, provided we can create circumstances in which we may feel certain that the skills we have acquired will be sufficient to prevent the recurrence of the shock caused by the original trauma. Perhaps the endless repetition . . . is an attempt at reassuring ourselves that our skill is definitely sufficient to undo any effect of a new trauma should it ever strike us again. (pp. 118-119)

All the subjects in this study, in some form or another, were engaged in the repetitive, active resuscitation of idiomatically experienced anxiety states. The motivational significance of thrill, risk, and other forms of self-exposure to danger emerged time and time again in their narratives and seemed to reflect a purposeful contemporary reconstruction of an original traumatic moment (or series of moments) in order to: 1) feel it again, 2) make it familiar, 3) actively oppose the perceived threat, and 4) survive. With the exception of Carl, they all claimed to feel abundantly invigorated, excited, and masterful in response to being endangered, endangering, or both. They neither felt victimized by nor avoidant of the perils of their environments, but rather appeared to both seek and precipitate them, insistently, actively, pleasurably embroiled in the creation and mastery of a specific inner tension. Embedded in this highly dangerous enterprise seemed an element of hope, an optimism that they had acquired sufficient skillfulness, primarily in the areas of mental strategy (e.g., Kujo--"I always stay one step ahead"), social sophistication, and motor action, to effectively contend with whatever hazardous situation might be encountered.

This finding provided direct evidence for the idea that violent gang members are not just self-defensively countering threats to their physical survival, but are, more complexly, motivated to initiate certain feeling states serving a range of adaptive purposes, including self-stimulation, remembering, traumatic mastery, and trauma prevention. By illustrating the centrality of personal agency in the lives of urban gangsters, this finding directly refuted the notion that they are simply reactors to imposing and potentially catastrophic circumstances as they arise in the here and now.

Behavioral reenactment has been documented as a primary form of traumatic sequela since the time of Freud (1920) and is, according to Terr (1990) the most viable indicator of chronic traumatization. Insofar as gang life contains as its most defining feature the repetitive execution of violence, that it reflects the active reenactment of passively endured childhood violence appears almost incontrovertible. The gang member's violent action seems to enable him to keep his trauma alive in the form of an existential remembrance which he repeatedly revisits, now at the helm, now protected by both his gang and his own controlled titration of the experience. It concretizes him, reconciles the gaps imposed by the repression of certain aspects of his experience by capturing them in behaviorally symbolic form. His violence is, in sum, a fervent effort to recover from the massive assaults of his childhood via the same modality in which he originally experienced them.

Repetition, then, was determined to be a predominant link between the subjects' childhood exposure to violence and their current gang violence. However, it must be added that the act of repeating, although immediately transformative, did not appear to result in any abiding sense of mastery for the subjects, but rather, like addicts, they seemed to require ongoing and increasingly intense supplies of violent stimulation (inviting the question of whether there is a physiological component which underlies repetition, namely, traumatically-induced alterations in the subject's capacity to modulate

acute hyperarousal, requiring the external activation of the body's analgesic system via the ongoing exposure to trauma-reminiscent stimuli [van der Kolk, 1988, 1989].) Moreover, the perpetration and exposure to violence seemed to virtually dominate their psychological lives, impeding the consideration of further alternatives for contending with stress, conflict, anger, and so on. They were as though enslaved, perseveratingly bound to the efficiency and pleasure of the violent solution, seemingly gripped by its power to transform them.

Beyond Trauma: The Role of Omnipotence

> Phallic imagery is obviously prominent in the ways of the badass, from the "hardness" of the tough posture . . . to the "cool" quality conferred on speech by random thrusts of "fuck," to the drama of "mind fucking." . . . Posed like a phallus, the badass threatens to dominate all experience. . . . [B]y threatening to penetrate others, the badass, this monstrous member of society, can absorb the whole world into himself. (Katz, 1988, p. 113)

Via the omnipotent reconfiguring of mental and interpersonal experience, the subjects were seemingly liberated of the anxieties arising from unrelenting childhood danger. Omnipotence, generally defined as the defensive expansion of the self relative to outer objects, was a primary feature of their psychological experience and seemed to reflect their efforts to inhibit feelings of vulnerability and fear. In all cases, the need to feel powerful--beyond fear, moral restraint, and the impact of societal expectation--was a consuming psychological imperative, frequently overriding ordinary concerns regarding physical safety and legal jeopardy. Carl, for instance, via the supremacy of rational thought, was aided in his denial of inner desire, impulse, and need, the recognition of which would force the awareness of his dependency on the environment. Li'l Mook, by replacing his own trepidation and persecutory confusion with ruthless domination, perceptual certitude, and moral unambivalence,
was effectively able to transfigure the experience of terror. And Kujo, supported by his fantasies of unbound personal capacity, conceived himself as having transcended both the limitations of his immediate surround and the constraints imposed by larger social conventions--"Maybe I want to be beyond. Maybe I want to be something you all have never created before." Each of them, in differing ways, experienced himself as larger,

smarter, faster, and more relentless than any force that might threaten to impede his forward advance.

The subjects were all extremely competent in the realms of sensory-perceptual and motor functioning, capabilities which had been seemingly hypercathected in response to environmental failures and which had allowed them to position themselves, vis a vis the outer world, as omnipotently skillful and self-sufficient. Schaer and Vasser (1995), in their psychoanalytic explication of "street smarts" among inner city youth, explained this form of precocity as the child's use of his own "mind as object" (Corrigan & Gordon, 1995) which he fervently, desperately embraces in order "to provide for himself the self-care and self-holding that the environment will not relinquish" (p. 142). From this viewpoint, the subjects' omnipotence was supremely adaptive in that it enabled them to withdraw from an invasive and unreliable outer world without being left with nothing.

Within the embrace of their respective gangs, the subjects' omnipotent illusions were granted collective, unbridled sanction, and in fact, were in seeming consonance with the ideological missions of the gangs themselves (e.g., economic power, violent supremacy, turf sovereignty). Confident in their navigational skills and protectively nestled within the confines of gang life, they all felt generally unafraid on the streets. Rather than their own fearfulness, their experiences of the ghetto were infused with the awareness of their powers to conjure dread in those around them. With the exception of C-Tray, who claimed to avoid the purposeful evocation of anxiety except in situations of acute danger, all of the subjects voiced a intense pleasure in manipulating terror in the minds of others. For all of them, the perpetration of violence was the central mechanism for achieving power and transcendence, their way of inserting themselves into the social milieu and forcing the recognition of their undeniable domination, as well as depositing their vulnerabilities onto the landscapes of other people's psyches.

The psychologically adaptive value of grandiosity in the bullet-strewn streets of the inner city cannot be underestimated. As Krystal (1988) explained, the persistence of terror within the psyche leads, if not countered by defensive action, to either psychogenic death or to arrest at the point of the catatonoid state. To remain in an ongoing state of traumatic vigilance, then, is tantamount to the literal disassembling of the subject's psychological, and possibly physical, cohesion. In milieus dominated by violence, omnipotence may be viewed as the autoplastic re-rendering of the self in the face of continual threats of annihilation, or, in other words, the accommodation to pervasive environmental danger and the anxieties produced by it. It is fundamentally a project of self-augmentation, comprised of the denial of one's fragility and smallness in the world in combination with illusions of tremendous power and safety.

On Death

Bettleheim (1943) suggested that ongoing life within "extreme situations" fundamentally alters the meaning of mortality in the mind of the subject, and this was indeed a cross-case finding of this project. The subjects, without exception, detailed imageries about death which simultaneously reflected a hyperawareness of its proximity within their respective milieus and an apathetic surrender to its seeming inevitability (this finding also paralleled Klein's [1974] observation of Holocaust children). Indeed, they had all forged some kind of adaptation to the pervasive presence of violent death within their communities, resulting in the enduring transformation of their personalities.

Of notable interest in this regard was the subjects' universal conviction that dying violently was not a matter of if, but when. The question with which they most wrestled had to do with *how* they would die, whether as the result of some act of nobility on behalf of their organization or over a "stupid" conflict devoid of personal meaning and heroics.

They all imagined that they would die as gang members and this seemed to somehow soften their worries about dying without purpose. Insofar as every gang action corresponds to an ideologically defined objective, they were able, unlike most people (other than combat soldiers), to envision a range of causes, modes, and meanings in relation to their own eventual deaths. Furthermore, these possible meanings all contained a certain degree of honor by virtue of their organizational ties. One could therefore surmise that gang membership partially functions to pre-narrativize one's own violent death, or, in other words, to affix a linear structure to an event which, in the life of an adolescent, is otherwise wretched in its senselessness.

By having resigned themselves to death's impending descension upon them, as well as by living chronically and dangerously close to their own extinctions, the subjects had seemingly removed the element of traumatic surprise from the act of dying, or, in other words, usurped the anticipatory tensions created by not knowing if and when it might occur. Shabad & Selinger (1995) termed this type of defensive surrender to the feared situation "the counterphobic leap into the future" and explained that it arises in response to the traumatic puncturing of childhood safety:

> To safeguard against the anticipated threat, the child attempts to protect his emotional nakedness so he is never caught off guard again. The anticipation of waiting to encounter the transferential afterimages of trauma infuses the child's developmental quest with a vigilant urgency. . . . Development, rather than resembling a graduated walking into the future, may now take the form of running ahead . . . as if it is not the immediate encounter with danger that is most dreaded, but rather the drawn-out wait for impending doom to descend. (p. 220)

Essentially aimed at trauma prevention, the subjects' dismissal of their own futures had the effect of countering the anxieties associated with vigilance, as well as protecting them from the traumatic insult of death. In other words, insofar as death was rendered as banal, expectable, and comprehensible, it lost its power to both evoke dread and to emerge--suddenly, frighteningly--from "out of the blue." Such an enterprise is, at bottom, a banishment of the cruel, evocative impact of hope, the refusal to long for something that may only be wrenched away. After all, to invest in anything is to be vulnerable, exposed to the trauma of its loss. The regularity with which violent death occurs in the urban ghetto, especially among young African American males, makes the wishful anticipation of the future a profoundly dangerous proposition.

Gang Merger

And lastly, there were the meanings attributed to the gang itself as a psychological entity. All of the subjects had become members of their organizations as the enactment of a longstanding childhood plan and not the result of an acute preadolescent decision, inviting the speculation that gang membership resides in the fantasy lives of many young inner city boys, where it is experienced as a redemptive, progressive, even transitional (Winnicott, 1971) psychological object long before it becomes a concrete reality in their lives.

For all of the subjects, there was an absolute, unequivocal faith in the *fact* of the gang as a social construct--assumed, omnipresent, a fundamental determinant of social reality inseparable from reality itself (as subjectively conceived). Unlike one's vocation, which people normatively view as comprising one aspect of life among many, the gang appeared to literally pervade the psychological lives of the subjects, serving as a reference point for behavior, identity, morality, and so on. Experienced by every subject

as an omnipotent object--protective, uniting, sacred--the meaning of the gang as a subjective, collective construction contained imageries similar to that found in nationalism and religious worship. Koenigsberg (1977), in regard to the meaning of "the nation" among its more vulnerable constituents, wrote:

> [W]hen the image of the omnipotent mother is projected into reality, the environment ceases to be experienced as a cold, "external" territory. Rather . . . under such circumstances, the environment becomes "transformed" and comes to be experienced as a "special place," a place which functions to provide *shelter and protection from the vicissitudes of reality*. (p.8)

Indeed, within the boundaries of the gang, the subjects were able to saturate their daily lives with power, purpose, and safety, however illusory, and to thereby overhaul their relationships to the outer world. They could generally neither remember themselves as children, nor could they envision themselves living outside the embrace of their respective organizations. None of them perceived the external environment as formidable, but rather as conquerable, familiar, and comprehensible. It was as though their perceptions of reality itself were substantively altered through their gang participation, granted a new set of ideological referents which were now experienced, by virtue of their concreteness and consensual validation, as unquestioningly, definitively true. The association with the gang, then, appeared to reflect a personal merger with an omnipotently-endowed community which, due to its collective roots, functioned as a shared solution, a "transformational object" promising deliverance "from the gamut of basic faults: personal, familial, economic, social and moral" (Bollas, 1987, p. 27).

Summation

Based on the findings, then, gang life appears to aid in the conversion of traumatically-induced anxiety states into modes of mental experience dominated by power, competence, and clarity, and, as such, seems to function as an effective psychological adaptation to overwhelming childhood experience. The psychological processes sponsored by gang life--specifically, the inhibition and mastery of traumatic vulnerability--seem to create an altered consciousness for the subject, a "brave new world" that is split off, in memory, affect, and self-experience, from his traumatic ontological beginnings. Hard-core gang membership, in other words, seems to enable a radical reinvention of the self which, ironically, is both utterly predetermined by individual history and yet consciously excised from it.

Central to the findings was the reparative aim of violent perpetration, or the degree to which it appears to arise organically and posttraumatically as an effort at self-cure. The violent orientation of the gang member, as such, seems to embody the literal concretization of the self, the refusal to become abstract or otherwise passively obliterated, and the frantic taking hold of an intolerable inner reality, pushing it onto the social battlefield, and rendering it into quiet submission. It orders and clarifies the mind of the subject, lifts it out of a moral and existential ambiguity which, if surrendered to, might potentiate psychological paralysis, the corrosion of vigilance, and the resurgence of traumatic affects. It represents the fervent wrestling with the environment as a restitutive object, within whose boundaries the subject can both find and lose himself with a stunningly efficient simultaneity.

If one considers the multiplicity of psychological functions performed by gang life, its seductiveness to the inner city adolescent become comprehensible and no longer need be the object of scornful confusion. The gang as an "envirosomatic transformer of the subject" (Bollas, 1987, p. 14), an object of personal deliverance so powerful that it is felt

to literally alter the subject's inner world, provides the traumatized child with immeasurable opportunities for psychological redemption. Even beyond the role of violence, the gang itself, replete with its ideological structure and relational opportunities, contains enormous possibility for the child actively seeking reparation.

This study, then, contained as its most essential finding the recuperative, transformative power of gang violence and membership. Winnicott (1967) wrote that delinquency indicates hope insofar as it reflects the adolescent's active pursuit of inner repair via his criminal engagement with the outer world. If one removes the question of morality from the determination of hope, as well as one's own personal definition of what constitutes proper social adjustment, and understands it instead as the continued attempt to secure an effective psychological adaptation, the hopefulness embedded in the behavior of the young urban gang member becomes clear. His relentless ongoingness in the face of overwhelming psychological odds and his active, retrospective penetration of his childhood perils in the confidence that they can now be readily mastered reveals an optimism which, despite the social and personal costs endured, lies at the very heart of what he does.

The Value of Psychoanalytic Theory

It was never the aim of this project to uncover "absolute truths" about the nature of gang delinquency, but rather to explore the psychological relationships between the subjects' personal histories with violence and their current lives as gang members as subjectively construed. It was also an effort to determine the relevance of psychoanalytic theory--not as a body of infallible dictums, but as a way of narrativizing

phenomenologies--to a psychosocial problem which has forever been cast in sociological and criminological terms.

Prior research in the area of urban violence has regularly neglected the inner world of the gang member, viewing him as a category, a mere constellation of behaviors, and relegating him to the role of "public enemy," a primary creator of social hardship within the American ghetto. In other words, urban gang members have conventionally been viewed as objects--"them," the "bad guys"-- hated and feared interlopers who imperialistically descend upon their communities in order to exploit the vulnerabilities of otherwise innocent people. While descriptively valid, this perspective fails to incorporate the developmental ancestry of the gang member within the very milieu he now tyrannizes, as well as the distinct experiences which occupy his subjectivity.

This study, by contrast, had as its starting point the gang member as an experiencing and developing subject, whose current behavior is a dynamically-configured representation, or signifier, of an historical subjective experience within a specific psychosocial context. It sought to preserve and illuminate the continuity of his ontology and to thereby render him, once again, as "one of us": comprehensible, complex, the offspring of his own unique developmental experience.

The use of psychoanalytic theory was central to this endeavor insofar as it enabled a shift in focus from a preoccupation with typology and the delineation of behavior patterns across subjects, aims which have largely characterized past gang research, to an analysis of the motivations and meanings which underlie these behaviors in the mind of the individual subject. Through its provision of an in-depth conceptual structure, the psychoanalytic theory employed by the researcher aided in the construction of compelling explanatory hypotheses about the dialectical interplay between behavior and meaning without sacrificing the phenomenological complexity of the individual gang member.

Research Implications

At the outset of this project, the investigator was repeatedly encouraged to bear in mind the awesome difficulty of entering into a research endeavor with extremely violent, African American, inner city adolescent males. Specifically, it was supposed that her status as a young white woman would impose an gap between herself and her subjects that would be nearly impossible to traverse. Although the significance of the project was well appreciated, it was also anticipated in the minds of some that the subjects would refuse to talk or otherwise spend their time flirting with, cajoling, or violently threatening the investigator. With the exception of Carl's premature departure from the project on the grounds of race, none of these predictions came to fruition. In fact, the subjects were remarkably straightforward in their disclosures, earnest, solemn, and not overtly reactive to any characteristic of the examiner. Whatever negative response they might have had did not seem to impede their willingness to participate cooperatively and openly in the interviews.

The investigator's positive experience with the subjects and the abundance of narrative data she was able to collect should be encouraging to other researchers who, though interested in this population, might feel pessimistic about the likelihood of generating useful data. If interviewed in an open, curious way, and given the time to familiarize themselves with the process, these adolescents can be engaged in fruitful discussions about their experiences.

The findings of this study suggested several compelling areas for future research. First, given the small sample size used in this study, the generalizability of the findings is extremely limited. It would seem a natural next step, therefore, to replicate the study

using a much larger sample and perhaps focusing on only one of the central components of gang life (violence, for instance) at a time.

Secondly, it is recommended that researchers more rigorously apply current trauma and memory methodologies to the study of urban violence. For several years now, researchers have sophisticatedly studied a whole range of populations exposed to traumatic violence, engendering a heightened societal and clinical sensitivity to its pathological sequelae. However, the children of the inner city have, by and large, remained untouched by these endeavors, despite their status as America's "children of war" (Dubrow, et al., 1989, Garbarino, et al., 1991, Garbarino, et al., 1992). Given the public's current preoccupation with gang crime, it is ironic that so little effort has been made to clarify its psychological, developmental, and environmental antecedents.

And lastly, this study's most central finding was the subjectively transformative nature of violent gang membership. Given the redemptive appeal of the gang to so many inner city youngsters, one is left to wonder: How and why do some urban children never become members of street gang organizations? What is different about their milieus, their constitutions, their ways of construing experience, their relationships to caretakers? Understanding the non-gang, competent, inner city child would seem to provide a key to understanding the nature of resiliency, as well as point to specific areas of vulnerability and propensity in the child who later becomes a member of a violent gang.

Policy Implications

It would seem that mainstream American society is largely impervious to the violence of the urban ghetto, having collectively, implicitly (and in some corners, quite flagrantly) colluded in a broad-sweeping, institutionalized denial of its plights. The fact

that its children are forced to live amidst continual gunfire and homicide with so little outer recognition of the corrosive developmental impact of such events is a travesty beyond measure. Perhaps the refusal to know too much is driven by a collective fantasy that knowing implies culpability, or worse, is tantamount to the unleashing of terrors that, for now, are safely segregated, colonized, within the boundaries of the inner city. Perhaps it reflects a large-scale numbing in response to the frequent and continuous reports of children violently dying there. Perhaps it is just sheer racism.

Knowing does potentiate action. In the working and suburban, largely white, communities surrounding the inner cities, violent crimes committed against and around children seem to mobilize an immediate set of helping responses, media coverage, and broad societal outrage. The traumatized child of the inner city, by contrast, simply goes home, or in the case of bodily injury, to the hospital where his physical wounds become the primary objects of attention. (It was reported by all the subjects in this study that they had never discussed with anyone their early encounters with violence, much less received any form of intervention.)

If gang violence arises from unresolved childhood trauma, its prevention would seem to hinge on the presence of early intervention programs within the inner city. What this means generally is that children's victimization by violence, whether as witnesses or direct targets, ought to be viewed as a crisis requiring the immediate, urgent provision of services.

It is a further recommendation that, for young boys in the inner city, there be communally supported alternatives to gang membership that can perform the same psychological functions as the gang (preventive versions of the substitutive role played by Black Muslimism in the lives of adolescents and men attempting to separate from their gangs). These alternatives must have some kind of organic relationship to the

environment, not be authoritatively sponsored, and inspire feelings of fidelity, passion, power, relatedness, and competence in the children who make use of them.

In terms of tertiary prevention, or modes of contending with the actively embroiled gang member, the answers are not so clear. The problem with chronic traumatization is that it obliterates from the personality any semblance of need, its presence rendered mute, distorted, obscured. The hard-core member of a street organization, as such, neither knows he requires help, desires it, nor appears to need it in the eyes of others, making the task of intervention extremely difficult. Understandably, it is his behavior, not his psyche, that is the object of societal fervor, specifically his violence, which has increasingly come to define him in the public mind (what Bollas [1995] described as the "allegorizing," or reducing down of the killer's psychological qualities, in both his own mind and that of others, to his identification with and passion for the criminal act).

The findings of this study called into question the efficacy of deterrence with this population, which ostensibly underlies the current trend of increasing the severity of penalties for violent crimes committed by juveniles. Methods of deterrence presume that the criminal act contains some form of cognitive deliberation in relation to personal or legal consequence. This idea leaves out a multitude of considerations, including the compulsivity of trauma-driven aggression, the idea that repetition and hyperarousal sorely undermine utilitarian and self-preservative concerns, and the degree to which violence functions as a mechanism for salvaging the felt psychological intactness of the subject. Whenever they fail to take into account both the acute and ongoing state of mind of the perpetrator, theories of deterrence and prevention are bound to fail.

In fact, based on the findings of this study, it is likely that street gangsterism will prevail until its *causes* have been substantively addressed, until the need for it has been reduced. Gangs, after all, are mirrors of the surround, concretizations of all that is both corruptibly vile in society's treatment of its children and splendidly resilient in the

children themselves. Until the lives of inner city children are altered, gang membership is likely to remain one of their most invaluable psychological commodities:

> Gangbanging will never be stopped from without. The notion of the "war on gangs" being successful is as realistic as the People's Republic of China telling Americans to stop being American. When gang members stop their wars and find that there is no longer a need for their sets to exist, banging will cease. But until then, all attempts by law enforcement to seriously curtail its forward motion will be in vain. (Scott, 1993, p. 79)

Clinical Implications

Given the rarity with which violent juvenile gang members, especially those residing in urban areas, avail themselves to any form of intervention, a discussion of the clinical implications of this project seems almost pointless. Be that as it may, there are several points worthy of comment. First, and perhaps most importantly, it would appear essential that the worker engaged in the formidable task of engaging with such a youth be capable of suspending her caretaking motives, and her wishes to alter his behavior or otherwise rescue him from the dangers of his everyday existence. Her overriding agenda ought simply to contain the desire to understand the psychological meaning and defensive necessity of his adaptation and to appreciate his gang affiliation, not as "the problem," but as a solution to one infinitely greater. Of equal importance in this regard is that the worker be someone who is unafraid of him, who does not implicitly thwart the emergence of violence-saturated affect, and who can preserve her own clarity of mind in the face of his morbidity, trauma, and execution of defense within the helping relationship.

Secondly, given the extent to which the urban gang member's personality structure is a derivative, not simply of his innate constitution in combination with early developmental events, but also of his residence within a milieu which provides a ready-made solution (i.e., gang life) to his psychological conundrums, the worker's use of a "three-person psychology" (Altman, 1995) is of paramount importance. Any clinical understanding of the inner city adolescent which fails to appreciate gang membership as a culturally mediated adaptation to a specific set of psychological experiences will inevitably leave out the social syntonicity of his behavior. Related to this imperative is the recommendation that, whenever possible, these adolescents be referred to agencies staffed with African American workers, preferably male.

And lastly, it is essential that the worker remain vigilantly open to the meanings of the gang member's subjective experience as revealed in his employment of action. In cases where verbal memory has been unduly compromised, as in trauma, action behavior must not be viewed as the object of therapeutic riddance, but rather as a vessel of unmediated psychological experience which is being memorialized, or granted concrete expression, in the here and now.

In youth centers and juvenile prisons across this country, gang members are the frequent targets of so-called "rehabilitative" programs designed to alter their criminality. Indeed, at the center of these initiatives is the impassioned quest to correct, reform, convert, or otherwise bring into mainstream compliance the violent behaviors of these adolescents. Although these programs are simply attempting fulfill their professional mandates, what seems flagrantly missing from their efforts is the cooperation of the youths themselves. To enter the rehabilitative enterprise with a fixed and predetermined agenda smacks of coercion (something the violent gangster can discern from miles away, no matter how many efforts are made to conceal it) and will predictably inspire his most vehement contempt and defiance. Programs which emphasize socialization, learning,

anger management, and behavior modification are, at bottom, efforts to disassemble the adaptations, the very identities, of the youngsters they are intended to save. These attempts repeatedly neglect the gang member's deep and abiding need to do what he does, as well as his fantasy that any alteration in his identity will most likely destroy him. Is it any wonder they do not work?

Despite their repeated intersections with a variety of public social, educational, and criminal systems, all of the subjects interviewed for this project claimed to have never before discussed with anyone their childhood or gang experiences because, they explained, no one had ever inquired about them. Society appears ahead of itself in regard to the issue of urban gangs, engaged in the resolution of a problem it has yet to comprehend. It would be wise, as such, to go back to the youths themselves, not with a punitive or rehabilitative agenda, but in order to generate a knowledge based on real people and real lives. Therapeutic zeal, programmatic maps, models, and tricks--all might be abandoned, for now, in favor of one elemental provision:

> . . . if they ever sit down there and talk to a person who's in a gang and want to know how they life is, listen to them. 'Cause whatever they telling you, it's true. 'Cause they'll never get a chance to tell how they really feel, you know, and how they live they life, what they been through. 'Cause there ain't nobody out there to listen to them. . . . Tell psychiatrists if they ever get a chance to talk to a young person like me, listen to them. (Kujo, 1996)

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Appendix A

Gang Affiliation Interview

I have been told that you are a member of a gang. I am interested in finding out more about your involvement. Please answer the following questions as honestly as you can. If you do not want to answer a question, that is O.K. None of your answers will be shared with anyone else here and your name will not appear on any forms.

Subject identification number:

Do you presently belong to a gang?:

For how long have you belonged?:

Gang name:

Gang Nation (i.e., Disciple Nation [Folks] or Vice Lord Nation [People]):

Gang colors:

Gang insignias:

Approximate number of members affiliated with the gang:

Gang territory:

Family members affiliated with the same gang:

Gang's most intense rivals:

Current or most recent position within gang hierarchy:

Gang-specific tattoos:

Modes of and motives for penalization within the gang:

Have you ever been internally sanctioned/penalized? If so, when and for what?

What do you think should happen to a member who violates the gang's rules?:

Have you ever taken part in punishing a fellow member for disobedience, and, if so, what was your role?:

Do you take part in the recruitment of new members?:

What are the most important rules of your organization, in your opinion?:

In your view, what are the signs of gang loyalty?:

Do you consider yourself loyal?:

Do you have any interest in getting out?:

Have you ever been assaulted by a rival gang and were you wounded? Please give an example:

Have you ever seen any gang member (fellow or rival) be killed? If so, please give an example:

How do you feel about [rival gang referred to above] and why?:

Have you ever owned or carried a weapon, and, if so, what type(s)?:

Have you ever used it (them) and for what purpose?:

Would you be willing to commit violence on behalf of your gang?:

Have you ever done so, and, if so, approximately how many times?:

Have you ever participated in a drive-by?

Please give me an example of violent activity you have engaged in as part of gang membership:

Have you ever been arrested for gang-related behavior, and, if so, what and how many times?:

Is your current incarceration in any way related to your gang involvement, and, if so, how?:

How important is it for you to be in a gang, in your opinion?:

Please describe your overall feelings about your gang:

Is there anything else you want to tell me right now about your gang involvement?:

Appendix B

Statement of Informed Consent

Dear Participant:

This research project is being conducted in order to fulfill the requirements for a doctorate in Social Work at Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts. The purpose of this study is to explore the personal meaning of gang membership and violence among adolescent males who have grown up in urban areas or the inner city.

As a participant in this study, you will be expected to meet alone with me, the researcher, for one hour, twice a week, for a total of about 5-6 weeks. During that time, I will ask you to talk to me as honestly as you can about your experiences, both as a child and as a gang member. I will tape record all of our meetings, yet none of the information you give me will be shared with the police, the courts, the media or used against you in any way. Throughout the six weeks, I will write two separate notes in your file at St. Charles stating that we have met for the purposes of this project. No matter what you tell me, your identity will not be revealed. Your name will never appear on the tapes or in my final report. My only purpose for recording our meetings is to help me to remember what you say to me.

If at any time during the study you feel uncomfortable or worried, I encourage you to discuss this with me. You are always free to withdraw from the project at any time with no negative consequences.

Jennifer Tolleson, L.C.S.W., Researcher

I have read the researcher's statement (or had it read to me) and understand what it says. I am willing to be a part of this research project.

Signature_____

Witness_____

Date_____

Appendix C

Demographic Interview

I need to get some basic information from you about your life. This information is only for my use and so that I can get to know you a little bit before we start talking about other things. Please answer the following questions as honestly and as briefly as you can. If there are answers you want to discuss in more detail, please tell me and I will leave myself a note so that we can get back to it next time.

Subject identification number:

Date of birth:

Age:

Ethnic background:

Birthplace:

Home neighborhood and housing project, if applicable:
- Past:
- Current:

Last grade of school completed:

Schools attended:
- Grade School:
- High School:

Learning disabilities and special school programs:

Marital status:

Children:

Family income (estimated):

Sources of family income:

Family-of-origin constellation (including ages, marital status's, and whereabouts):

Mother:
Father:
Other adults in home:
Siblings:
Other children:

Employment history:

Medical history (including major physical illnesses, developmental disabilities, accidents, and hospitalizations occurring since birth):

History of psychological treatment (including counseling, hospitalizations, and medication):

History of substance use (including past and current use and ages during maximum use:
Alcohol:
Drugs:
Other:

Psychological diagnoses received, if any:

Losses (due to death or separation):

Date of initial involvement in juvenile justice system:

First offense and outcome:

Subsequent offenses and outcomes (including probations, detentions, adjudications, incarcerations):

Waivers to Criminal Justice System, if any:

Beginning date of current incarceration:

Reason for current incarceration:

Sentence and anticipated release:

Is there anything else about you that you think I should know before we go on?:

Appendix D

Childhood Traumatic Violence Checklist

How frequently have you observed or personally experienced the following incidents during your childhood before or at age 11, to the best of your recollection? Please do not include violence you have personally committed and it is O.K. to say you cannot remember. Respond by saying "never", "once", or "more than once", and feel free to discuss your answer in more detail if you would like.

Incident	**Never**	**Once**	**More than once**
Heard gunshots			
Seen a gun			
Seen someone threaten to fire a gun at someone			
Seen someone fire a gun at someone			
Known someone who carried a gun regularly			
Seen someone get shot			
Been shot at yourself			
Seen someone stabbed			
Been stabbed yourself			
Known someone sexually assaulted			

Incident	**Never**	**Once**	**More than once**
Been sexually assaulted yourself			
Seen someone killed			

Seen someone dying

Known someone who was killed

Seen a fight where someone got hurt

Been in a fight yourself

Seen a family member get hurt by someone else

Seen a family member killed

Had a family member who was hurt by someone else

Seen a friend hurt or killed

Known a schoolmate who was hurt by someone

Known a schoolmate who was killed

Seen a drive-by shooting

Been to a funeral of an adult who was killed

Incident	**Never**	**Once**	**More than once**
Been to a funeral of a child or teenager who was killed			
Been physically hurt by an adult			
Been physically hurt by a child or teenager			

Been to the doctor
or hospital because of
injuries inflicted by
someone else

Seen violence

Known about violence
in your neighborhood

Experienced violence
where you were the
victim