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Formerly Gang-Involved Chicana Mothers Resisting Trails of Violence

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Sociology

by

Katherine Lucía Maldonado

June 2019

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University of California, Riverside

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Formerly Gang-Involved Chicana Mothers Resisting Trails of Violence in the Barrio

by

Katherine Lucía Maldonado

Masters of Arts, Graduate Program in Sociology

University of California, Riverside, June 2019

Dr. Tanya Nieri, Chairperson

While feminist and critical criminologists have studied the “war on girls,” little attention has been given to violence experienced by gang-involved Chicana mothers. To date, most empirical research has focused on the immediate correlates of gang membership, such as psychosocial risk, delinquency, and victimization, but little research has examined women’s experiences after they have ceased to be active gang members. Similarly, prior work has found that gang-affiliated women experience high rates of interpersonal and community violence, but it has not examined violence, especially institutional violence, after leaving a gang. Thus, it is crucial to understand the post-gang consequences of gang-involvement for mothers. This study addresses this gap by 1) focusing on the role of a former gang affiliation in the experience of institutional violence after gang involvement and 2) highlighting the trails of violence that result from that institutional violence. It draws from life course and intersectionality theories to

understand how race, gender, and class statuses relate to violence in the life trajectories of mothers after leaving the gang. The qualitative findings of this work are based on photo elicitation interviews of 13 formerly gang-involved Chicana mothers from Los Angeles, California. The findings indicate that gang-affiliated mothers employ survival strategies at the level of their individual and collective agency to resist and cope with violence from the criminal justice and child welfare systems. This study's findings include recommendations for prevention and intervention that can be used to interrupt trails of violence for formerly gang-affiliated Chicana mothers and their children.

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Years pass by, and you go through something [violent and painful] again and it's like, why? Why does this happen to me again? First, it happens as a child, then as a teenager, then it happens again as an adult. It's like, why? It's something you already experienced, but then you go through it again. It's a big ol' scar that I'm always gonna have, and I don't know if I will ever, ever, have an answer for that.... But honestly, nothing would hurt me more than getting separated from my kids. I would go crazy. It's something that not even rape did to me.

(Mayra, age 30, mother of 5)

As I learned about Mayra's story of gang-involvement and motherhood, I became increasingly shocked by her journey. Mayra did not fit many of the categories or frameworks I had studied in the social sciences. Her humor, conversation, and critical engagement with the public world is not what we read about in the social science literature that describes poor, immigrant, gang-affiliated, teenage mothers. Mayra lives in a small, one-bedroom house, adorned with elephant ornaments and other portraits that she buys in local yard sales. Her living room is furnished with a small, wooden kitchen table and an inflatable bed. On any given day, you can hear her five kids laughing with each other, crying, and asking eagerly, "What's for dinner?" as they did on the day I interviewed her. Like the other mothers in this study, Mayra's story concentrates on her

family; yet, it is filled with traumatic events, such as rampant contact with criminal justice bureaucrats as a distal consequence of her previous gang-affiliation.¹

Mayra's experiences with the streets, drugs, and gangs² began at age eight. Mayra shared narratives of interpersonal and psychological violence, such as the time she was chased and beaten by rival gang members in an alley and lost consciousness, and the trauma she experienced when she was beaten by her partner during the entirety of her second pregnancy and after giving birth. Her experiences with violence were breathtaking. I often felt like crying during the interview. I took multiple breaks to wipe my tears as she remained calm. Nothing I learned in methodological courses in sociology prepared me for what was to come. Mayra became visually upset, crying out-loud, as she talked about a form of violence typically overlooked by sociologists and criminologists: institutional violence. She discussed the termination of her public government assistance (CalWORKs) which left her with the inability to access food for three months in 2015. Mayra questioned why her contact with government-sponsored institutions shaped her life so dramatically. From the criminal justice system and law enforcement teams breaking into her home when she was just a child, to the lack of support she experienced after surviving rape as an adult, Mayra always felt alone, poorly supported, and

¹ Gang-affiliation and gang-involvement will be used interchangeably. Gang-involvement refers to being involved in a gang through formal participation. Gang-affiliation refers to direct and indirect affiliation with the gang (Valdez 2007).

² See Brotherton and Barrios' (2004) definition of "gang:" A group formed largely by youth and adults of marginalized social class [or racial and ethnic groups] which aims to provide its members with resistant identity, an opportunity to be individually and collectively empowered, a voice to speak back to and challenge the dominant culture, a refuge from the stresses and strains of barrio or ghetto life, and a spiritual enclave within its own sacred rituals can be generated and practiced.

discriminated by public institutions. In spite of her traumatic experiences with the state, she hustles daily, as she described. Mayra's interview revealed that although it had been twelve years since she had been involved with her neighborhood gang, the impact of her affiliation on her life trajectory persisted as she continued to experience violence from institutions that are supposed to support and nurture people like her. This study examines the trails of institutional violence experienced by Mayra and other formerly gang-affiliated Chicana³ mothers.

Public attention to issues of violence against women have increased, and legislators at the state and federal level have spent over six billion dollars addressing this critical social problem in the United States (Office on Violence Against Women, 2016). While feminist criminologists have labeled this problem the "war on girls" (DeKeseredy, 2000; Chesney-Lind & Jones, 2010), little scholarly attention has been given to violence experienced by gang-involved Chicana mothers, particularly after they have ceased to be active members of their respective gangs. Most longitudinal empirical research has focused on the immediate correlates of gang membership, such as risk factors, delinquency, and victimization (Laidler & Hunt 1997; Valdez & Cepeda 2003) and has found that gang-affiliated women experience high rates of interpersonal and community violence (Cambell 1984; Miller 2001; Valdez 2007; Chesney-Lind 2014).

³ I replaced Latina with Chicana as the ethnic identification of participants because it brings a political orientation to this study. I am also committed to contributing to Chicana Motherwork scholarship which focuses on issues pertaining to Chicana mothers which is a call to action for transformative labor and justice within and outside of academia (Cabellero et al., 2017).

Despite scholars' focus on investigating interpersonal forms of violence, we have limited understanding of institutional violence that gang involved women experience due to the stigma and criminalization⁴ that gang status brings. Institutionalized gang identifiers, such as tattoos and criminal records, become constant and persistent reminders of the women's former gang involvement (Katz, 2001; Katz & Webb, 2006; Pyrooz et al, 2011). Thus, it is crucial to identify and understand the post-gang consequences of gang-involvement for mothers and their children. This study is about the institutional violence that mothers like Mayra habitually experience over the life course when having continuous contacts with punitive institutions, despite their desistance from active gang-involvement.

Violence within gangs is the subject of contentious discourse in policy, media, legal, regulatory, and academic circles. Yet, discourse on the topic is largely speculative and lacking data, focusing on violence only during active involvement and not subsequent to it. Furthermore, little empirical research examines how the state perpetuates violence for gang-affiliated women, especially after gang involvement. This study addresses these gaps by focusing on experiences of institutional violence after gang involvement and the role of having a history of gang involvement in the experience of that violence. As such, it adds to the literature on the effects of gang involvement by describing long-term, post-gang consequences. This thesis is a case study of formerly gang-involved mothers from South Central Los Angeles, California, United States. It

⁴ Criminalization is the process by which an individuals' everyday style of dress and behaviors become ubiquitously treated as deviant or criminal in ways considered unremarkable outside of stigmatized neighborhoods and the status of gang-membership (Rios 2011; Plascencia 2018)

aims to better understand the long-term consequences of gang involvement in relation to institutions of power, specifically the child welfare and criminal justice systems. It investigates how the women respond to institutional violence, discusses implications for understanding social inequality among stigmatized groups, such as gangs, and proposes future research on institutional violence for other socially marginalized women.

To shed light on the everyday social dimensions of institutional violence in the age of hyper-criminalization and romanticization of gang-involved people, I draw on original photo elicitation life history interviews collected over the course of six months in South Central Los Angeles. As a city in the forefront of studies on gangs, South Central is a strategic site for understanding the interplay between gang involvement, violence, motherhood, legal and social relations. I provide one of the first visual accounts of how gang-affiliation for Chicanas in the gang capital of the world produces institutional violence, or what I call *trails of violence*, a form of violence that is not bounded to the period of gang-involvement but that is fluid and follows gang-involved women through their lives. I argue that gang-affiliation and direct and indirect associations with institutions – in particular, the criminal justice and child welfare systems – facilitate these *trails of violence*. The women responded to the violence with strategic resistance. Their experiences after exiting the gang and responses to violence have implications for inequality, law, and organizational practice in a range of institutional domains.

Rather than analyzing these stories as interpersonal acts of violence or linking them solely to societal oppression, I focus my analysis on the actions and inactions of the state that have amplified institutional violence in the lives of Chicanas. I distinguish

between the state institutions' acts of exclusion and practices of control in order to identify the institutional responsibility and failures that create a fertile ground for these life trajectories characterized by *trails of violence* (Nixon 2011). I reveal, using a systematic and humanizing approach, "how structural and institutional violence creates a context of violence that cannot be reduced to violent individuals; it is embedded in the broader social order, gender inequality, the perpetuation of violence, impunity, and women's diminished rights" (Menjívar and Walsh 2017: 223). Note that I do not argue that everything in these mothers' lives is violent because I would not be doing justice to the complexities of their lives. I, therefore, highlight the women's resistance, healing, and hope through spirituality. In the following sections I place this study within the existing research literature, beginning with what we know about women in gangs, following with the way I approach my investigation of violence and my theoretical lens—institutional violence in the life course of formerly gang-involved mothers.

SECTION I: LITERATURE REVIEW

Gangs, Violence and Blurred Boundaries

For almost a century sociologists and criminologists have produced scholarly work on gangs (Thrasher 1927; Moore 1991; Pyrooz et al., 2016), feminist analyses of gendered effects of gang involvement (Chesney Lind and Irwin 2008; Miller 2001), and structural and individual explanations for the labeling and marginalization of gang members (Vigil 1988; 2002). This research has influenced the development of interventions, laws, and policies (Muñiz 2015) that strive to end gangs and associated violence. The gang research agenda has focused on, among other things, how to prevent

girls from joining gangs (Chesney Lind 2014), how to reduce international gang violence (See Haucke and Pertercke 2010: organized crime and international crime), and how to implement comprehensive gang control (Wolf 2016). However, less is known about the consequences of gang involvement, including the experiences of women upon exiting gangs and throughout the rest of the life course. Research has focused on short-term effects – that is, effects during gang involvement. Few researchers have investigated the long-term effects “that cascade throughout the person’s later development” (Thornberry et al., 2003; O’Brien et al., 2012). Incorporating gang studies in the broader literature on crime desistance offers some conceptual guidance on this front, but one cannot simply assume that factors such as motherhood, which are associated with crime desistance generally, readily translate into exiting a gang (Pyrooz et al 2017) and ending the risk for violence in the lives of formerly gang-involved mothers.

Women in Gangs, Motherhood, and Desistance

Despite decades of research on males in gangs, national data shows that young women comprise about one third of gang members (Chesney-Lind 2014). The research on women in gangs began as one-dimensional and the interests for early gang researchers is captured in the title by Thrasher’s chapter “Sex in the Gang”, where women were simply “journalistic curiosities” and footnotes for studies on male gangs (Thrasher 1927). Therefore, for many decades female delinquency was about sex and not violence. Feminist criminologists pushed for the investigation of other dimensions of gang-involvement for young women in order to understand how to best respond to their participation and the violence they experienced. This move led to studies that highlighted

variations by ethnicity (Quicker 1983), victimization (Miller 2001) and gender and sexuality (Cambell 1987). Leading scholars like Chesney-Lind (2003) argued that because young women experience abuse in the home and victimization in the streets, their crime is a form of resistance, enabling them to better navigate and survive the violence they experience. When young women join gangs to resist violence, however, their efforts to escape and resist abuse are criminalized and punished. Little attention has been given to their experiences and responses to criminalization that gang-affiliated mothers face.

Studies that focus on the gendered dimension of women's gang-involvement show how women's definitions of respectability involve both the acceptance and rejection of some of the traditional roles of being a woman and show how they challenge gendered norms through their sexuality (Joe-Hadiler & Hunt 2001). In many of these works women are portrayed as maladjusted tomboys and sexual property of the boys in the gang (Chesney-Lind and Joe 1995). For the research on women in gangs, the street became an institution for analysis of gender relations, a place where coercion consistently occurred for women, from assault to rape (Miranda 2003). Little research has examined institutions, such as those in the criminal justice and child welfare systems.

The labeling of girls as either "good" or "bad" is related to race, ethnicity, class and gender (Lopez and Chesney-Lind, 2014). "While the good, innocent, virginal girl continues to be an idealized image of womanhood associated with white females, it remains largely unattainable for young women of color, who are often characterized as hypersexual, manipulative, violent and sexually dangerous" (Stephens and Phillips, 2003;

Garcia, 2009). Studies have not paid much attention to the ways that gang-involved women navigate stigma as gang-affiliated women of color as well as how they contend with the multiple layers of marginality that exist within their community context, such as South Central Los Angeles, a “mass incarcerated neighborhood,” and other identities, such as motherhood.

In order to understand how stigma plays out in the lives of the mothers, it is essential to understand it as a process. As Bruce Link and Phelan (2001:367) state: “Stigma exists when the following interrelated components converge. In the first component, people distinguish and label human differences. In the second, dominant cultural beliefs link labeled persons to undesirable characteristics—to negative stereotypes. In the third, labeled persons are placed in distinct categories so as to accomplish some degree of separation of “us” from “them.” In the fourth, labeled persons experience status loss and discrimination that lead to unequal outcomes. Finally, stigmatization is entirely contingent on access to social, economic, and political power that allows the identification of differentness, the construction of stereotypes, the separation of labeled persons into distinct categories, and the full execution of disapproval, rejection, exclusion, and discrimination.” For the gang-affiliated mothers in this study, incarceration involves fiscal and social costs and impacts their daily life, family, work, and community (Million Dollar Hoods 2016). Chicanas in the barrios⁵

⁵ Barrios (neighborhoods), “symbolized the cultural lineage of Chicana/o social and political history. [...] the *barrio* was transformed into both a spatially defined location and, just as importantly an essential resource of cultural memory, identity and pride” (Díaz 2005: 56).

remain grossly underrepresented in research and thus, are given a “minoritized” status (Laguerre 1999).

Studies of women involved in gangs have not captured diverse experiences with other dimensions of identity and contexts, such as motherhood in highly criminalized communities. Thus, gang-affiliated mothers comprise a hidden sub-group within gangs, and we lack statistical and qualitative knowledge of gang-involved mothers and their children. The existence of these mothers has been documented in gang research, but their experiences have not been investigated, even though studies consistently show that pregnancy by the age of 15 years is common for women in gangs (Moore 1988; Fleisher 2000 Campbell 1991; Vigil 2008; Valdez 2007). Despite subtitles in chapters of prominent books on gangs – such as “Having Children a Constant for Women” in *Female Gangs in America* (1999), and “Gang Girls, Gang Babies” in *Dead End Kids: Gang Girls and the Boys They Know* (2000) – little scholarly attention has been placed on these mothers. The few empirical studies attempting to understand the role of motherhood for gang-involved women found that mothers must negotiate how to construct new images of themselves and they must maintain respectability and aspirations, while navigating violence, stigma and poverty (Hunt et al., 2012). Fleisher (2000) argued that gang affiliated mothers need special attention because the children of gang mothers are likely to fall into cycles of victimization, poverty and self-defeating lifestyles. There is a desperate need to understand violence for this specific population of mothers because their children’s fate is at risk.

Other studies on gangs have identified parenthood as a reason to leave a gang (Pyrooz et al 2017; Fleisher and Krienert, 2004; Hagedorn, 1994; Moloney et al., 2009; O’Neal et al., 2014), but only a few studies have explored the transition from gang involvement to motherhood (Hunt et al 2012). Among these studies, motherhood is described as a “turning point” (Moore 1991; Vigil 2008) where young mothers find personal motivation to pursue school or work instead of gang involvement. Despite the documentation of parenthood as a ‘turning point’ and theoretical implementation of a life course framework by gang researchers to focus more attention on the process of and reasons for exiting gang life, empirical research has yet to provide a consistent answer to the question of whether changes in parental status promote gang exit (Pyrooz et al., 2017) or to address the consequences of gang involvement. The inconsistent findings in prior research may be due to their conceptualization of parenthood as a singular experience that produces systematic outcomes. Instead, parenthood can take on different meanings and foster different changes depending on the social context in which it is experienced (Umberson et al., 2010). We need research that acknowledges this reality to understand the substantive significance of gang membership in the grand scheme of a Chicana mother’s life.

(Re)Conceptualizing Violence in the Life Course

Scholars from various disciplines have studied violence in different areas of life (Menjívar 2011; Contreras 2013). Most studies focus on the physical and more visible aspects of violence, such as physical injuries among violence victims. Physical and sexual abuse by family members is common among women in gangs (Joe and Chesney-

Lind 1995, Miller 2001, Fleisher and Krienart 2004, Gosselin 2005, Valdez 2007).

Scholars have documented the economic, educational, familial, and social conditions of these women's lives (Chesney-Lind et al 1996; Chesney-Lind and Hagedorn 1999). Other scholars have documented how sociocultural and environmental contexts explain the relationship between gender and violent behavior (Baskin and Sommers 1993). Here violence has been examined as women's resistance to victimization, a protective measure in response to their vulnerability. Feminist scholars have adopted this view to explain women's violent behavior and involvement in other forms of street crime (Miller 2001: 8; Davis 2017). Despite examining reasons behind violent behavior for young women in gangs, the violence they experience outside of interpersonal and community forms of violence is not discussed in the scholarship.

Research on violence experienced by female gang members heavily focuses on physical and sexual violence perpetrated by male partners or other gang members (Hunt and Laidler 2001; Millet et al., 2011). It shows that such violence is extensive (Miller, 2000). For example, in their study of gang victimization, Miller and Decker (2001) found that half of their sample of 27 female gang members had been stabbed. Valdez (2007) found that 94% of his sample of gang-affiliated Mexican American girls engaged in physical fights. Another study found that almost all the women had experienced physical or sexual violence at the hands of at least one sexual partner (Miller et al., 2011).

Exposure to gang and community violence contributes to the risk of early pregnancy (Miller et al 2011) and negatively affects health (Barnes et al., 2012; Gover et al. 2008; Miller & Decker 2001; Taylor 2007; Varriale 2008). Research on violence shows that

millions of women and children who are exposed to or experience violence suffer a range of short and long-term consequences that include: mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, PTSD, and suicide (World Health Organization, 2016). That said, the heretofore narrow scholarly focus on mostly interpersonal violence provides only an incomplete illustration of the wide array of injuries that human beings find consequential (Jackman 2002). Hence, there is lack of comprehension about desistance processes for mothers involved in gangs and the continuity of or change in violence.

Scholarly examinations of violence have ignored violence that occurs gradually (rather than instantaneously), out of sight (i.e., delayed destruction), and across time and space (Nixon 2011). The present study expands how we think of violence and explores how different forms of violence coexist in specific contexts. Similar to James Gilligan (1996), the question of whether to disentangle different forms of violence to see which one is more dangerous is moot, as they are all related to one another. This study moves away from individual-focused explanations to reveal instead violence in institutions of power. Direct violence is an event, structural violence is a process, and cultural violence, which normalizes and makes possible structural violence, is invariable (Galtung 1990). The focus of this study is not direct violence, but rather structural violence – that is, violence as a process, one that is embedded in the everyday lives of gang-affiliated Chicana mothers through their interactions with institutions.

Women in this study navigate institutions that are meant to provide services and support but instead provide punishment. Institutional agents working with the women engage in criminalizing practices and perpetrate institutional violence.

In the presence of other forms of violence such as intimate partner violence and sexual abuse, what institutional violence do these mothers experience? I propose a reconceptualization of violence, one that includes the everyday subtle acts in institutions that amplify not only the various forms of (interpersonal and community) violence in people's lives but also the number of victims, as entire families across generations suffer at the hands of punitive institutions. In this context, these racial micro-aggressions (subtle insults, verbal, nonverbal and or visual directed towards people of color) include the cumulative nature of racial stereotypes and have damaging effects (Solorzano et al., 2000). For this reason, I define institutional violence as a multi-sided form of violence that encompasses interactions of institutions (in this case, specifically institutions of the criminal justice and child welfare systems) directly and indirectly over the life course to produce and maintain social marginalization. Institutional violence includes multiple forms of state violence and causes *trails of violence*.

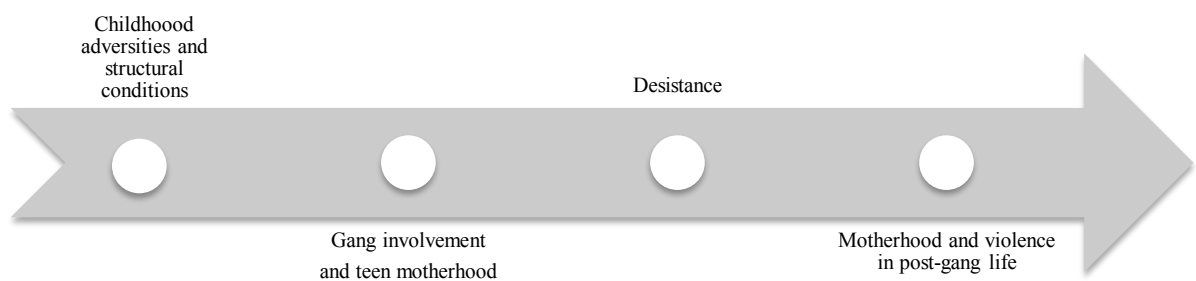
SECTION II: THEORY

Theoretical Framework: Approaching Violence in *Barrio South Central*

As a Chicana passionately engaged in a sociological paradigm shift that acknowledges the multidimensional struggles of other Chicanas, I am aware that no single theory captures the experiences of the participants. Because this study is a feminist project, I use a feminist approach, placing Chicanas at the center of this investigation. To understand the complex lives of formerly gang-involved Chicana mothers, I utilize two frameworks. I use life course theory to assess the fluidity and transformation of criminalized behaviors rather than criminal careers. I use intersectionality theory, which

provides a deeper understanding of the interlocking system of oppression mothers' experience when they have the added stigmatized label of gang affiliate and the complexity of navigating institutions with that label.

Figure 1: Life Course theoretical application on formerly gang-involved mothers



(Sampson and Laub 1992; Pyrooz 2012)

Life Course Theory

Stemming from Sampson and Laub's (1992) perspective on the ways that criminal behaviors facilitate detrimental outcomes, life course theory can help explain the ways in which formerly gang-involved Chicana mothers experience consequences after gang exit. Life course theory posits that criminal behaviors explain the life course outcomes of people involved crime. I build on this conceptualization and suggest a more critical approach. I argue that that criminal behaviors are best understood by situating people in their structural context. Rather than viewing the women as "criminals", which

suggests a choice, I view them as criminalized which acknowledges circumstances outside the women's control.

Life course theory looks at continuity and change in behavior as people age. It acknowledges multiple factors, like historical and geographical context, social networks (some networks overlap), agency, and timing, and examines how events shape future events. The theory has been utilized to understand the process of and reasons for exiting gang life (Pyrooz 2017). The life trajectories of mothers involve not only developmental changes associated with biological age, but also institutional changes that come from their experiences with formal and informal social control across the life span (Sampson and Laub 2016). Life course theory assumes that behaviors are not static; they can change. Multiple important pathways and contexts highlight the salience of social connections and social control (see, for example, Sampson and Laub 1992). This theory identifies events associated with alterations to the life-course, such as marriage, parenthood, and incarceration. In the present study, these alterations can be influenced by structures and markers of gang involvement, making institutional violence and mechanisms of resistance persistent. It is crucial to understand how scholars are moving away from the criminal career paradigm, the criminal trajectory of an offender studied by onset, continuity and desistance, because little has been done to advance explanations of persistent offending and desistance from criminalized behaviors across various stages of the life course.

Intersectionality Theory

My work on gang-affiliated Chicana mothers, a group of women stigmatized in both academic research and broader society, aims to show how intersectionality explains the women's experiences of violence. The women are not only marginalized by their race, class, and gender, but have other identities, such as gang affiliation, that push them beyond the margins of society. Intersectionality is inextricably linked to an analysis of power. Thus, we need to identify how power operates – the power of dominant structures of society (e.g., state institutions) and the power of subordinate structures (e.g., marginalized social groups). One that looks deeper at the intersections of oppression, and into the cracks of our society, our spirits, and our thoughts, where we can fully examine and acknowledge hybrid social/political practices, identities, and histories to gain a true intersectional perspective. How do the women's intersectional identities translate to power and explain their experiences of and responses to institutional violence, such as phenotype discrimination by social workers, classism through welfare sanctions, and gender discrimination based on motherhood status.

This theory exposes how single-axis (i.e., non-intersectional) thinking undermines legal thinking, disciplinary knowledge production, and struggles for social justice. “Structural intersectionality” delineates the “multilayered and routinized forms of domination” (Crenshaw 1991, 1245) in specific contexts. The analysis of overlapping structures of subordination reveals how certain groups of women are vulnerable to abuse by institutions and to inadequate interventions that fail to account for social structural inequalities (Crenshaw 1991; Richie 2012).

Connecting the theories: Intersections in Life Trajectories of Mothers

Bridging life course theory with intersectionality theory helps explain the violence that results from the interactions between institutions and people with marginal statuses. Combined, the two theories offer a perspective that acknowledges not only the complex interaction of identities and institutions, but also the changes that may occur for mothers across time. Next, I discuss my methodological approach of photo elicitation interviews.

SECTION III: Methods

Setting/Context

The study occurred in South Central Los Angeles, California. Walking with the homies and homegirls in what is known as the “3 corners” (See figure 3), where the neighborhoods of Compton, Watts, and South Central Los Angeles meet, my friends and I, when we were children, often hung out under beautiful palm trees, watching our neighbors play dice games, ducking down from bullets of drive-by shootings, and stopping at the local taco truck after “putting in work” for the hood. Our moms and *abuelitas* would scream, “*Qué andan haciendo en las calles tan tarde pintando las pinches paredes? Póngase hacer la tarea mejor.*” (what are you doing in the streets so late painting the dam walls? Start doing your homework instead) We would often respond, “*Ama, las calles necesitan arte, pero hecho por nosotros*” (mom, the streets need art work, but done by us” – hence the graffiti under the freeway tunnels that surround South Central, the 110 freeway, the 105 freeway where the *Mexicano* men selling flowers and fruits would often stare at everyone spray painting the walls (See Figure 4). In the streets of el “Sur de Los Angeles,” you find an ethnic mix of Blacks and

Chicanos/Latinos, often integrating styles of culture, like the *elotero* man selling corn to predominately Black students in Watts, or the Chicanos you hear say, “Ey, cuz, give me a ride to school,” adopting slang from the Black community, like “cuz,” originally short for “cousin” but now understood as short for “crip,” a member of the Crips gang. South Central has a history of resistance to poverty and criminalization, such as alternative governance by community members that regulates violence (Martinez 2016). Gangs there have been not only a site of sisterhood and brotherhood but also of violence, drugs, and death.

Colloquially known as the gang capital of the world, Los Angeles has been a traditional setting for gang research (Vigil 1988; 2002). Recent data shows that there are 30,700 gangs in the nation and 850,000 gang members (Department of Justice, 2014). Los Angeles is at the top of the list with about 8,000 gangs and 200,000 gang members; roughly 1 in 8 active gang members living in America is in Los Angeles (Vigil, 2002, Leap, 2012). Not surprisingly, Los Angeles operates the largest jail system on earth (Million Dollar Hoods 2016). South Central Los Angeles is a unique setting to study the immediate and long-term consequences of gang-involvement as street gangs dominate the social scene.

Gaining Entry

At the age of five, I became aware of barrio life in the Pico Union area of Los Angeles. My father, who knew many gang-involved, undocumented people from Central America, through conversations, informed me about M18 and MS13, some of the most dangerous gangs of the world, which resided in that neighborhood. My mother, who

opened a small business in the local swap meet, spoke to me about how hard it was to keep the business open because she had to pay double rent: one to the state and one to the gang who would protect her business. In this neighborhood I saw the struggles experienced by women like my mother, an undocumented migrant from Mexico, and how they navigated life in the midst of poverty and gang membership. My awareness of the world of gangs and the people in them was heightened growing up in South Central, where I learned about the tensions between Black and Latino/a gangs. I observed how women and mothers were not only heavily involved with local neighborhood gangs, but also involved in more subtle ways. I observed the overlapping experiences of mothers navigating gang affiliations alongside their children even after exiting the gang, which makes the focus of this study.

As a scholar who was formerly involved in a gang, I hope to create bridge between the streets and academia and raise societal awareness of the women who are hyper-visible when criminalized on the streets, but remain largely invisible in academic research. My status as a formerly gang-affiliated woman affords me crucial knowledge for recruiting and understanding my participants, a much-hidden population of Chicanas (Durán 2012; Atkinson & Flint, 2001). I was able to draw on my personal networks and experiences for this project. As other studies have found (Valdez & Kaplan 1999; Peterson and Valdez 2005), gangs represent a hidden population to researchers whose members are not readily distinguished nor found.

As a former gang-affiliated woman and resident of the *barrio* and a current mother, I used my insider status to employ a judgement sampling (Duran, 2012) and

snowball sampling techniques, to develop social networks to recruit participants. Three key partners (Duran, 2012), who were also participants, helped me gain access to the population. Once I identified initial participants through my personal network, I employed snowball sampling and judgment sampling (Duran 2012) to recruit additional participants. These methods enabled me to generate a more representative community sample (Peterson and Valdez 2005). With judgement sampling (Duran 2012), I individually selected each person for participation based on that individual's inside knowledge of gangs. I employed snowball sampling to help me identify and recruit suitable participants. In my initial contact with potential participants, I informed them about my academic knowledge about and personal experience with gangs and motherhood. Like other scholars conducting studies on gang-affiliated women (Valdez 2007), I maintained high visibility in the neighborhood and frequent social contacts with participants and potential participants to develop rapport and be part of the social world of the target population.

Sample

The sample included 13 participants. To be eligible to participate, participants had to 1) self-identify as formerly gang-involved, by stating they were previously a member of a gang in Los Angeles; 2) be aged 18 years or older; 3) self-identify as Latinas/Chicanas; and 4) be a biological mother of one or more children. Table 1 contains the sample characteristics. Participant ages ranged from 22 to 45 years, with an average age of 29.6 years. The average number children participants had was three. Participants had ceased active gang involvement, on average, 12 years prior to the interview.

Table 1. Sample Characteristics (N = 13)

PARTICIPANT	AGE	N OF CHILDREN	YEARS SINCE GANG EXIT
ESTEFANIA	21	3	2
MARIELA	22	1	6
MONICA	23	2	5
LORENA	24	3	7
BEATRIZ	25	2	8
CRISTAL	26	2	8
PATRICIA	27	3	7
LETICIA	29	4	10
MAYRA	31	5	12
JASMINE	32	2	14
SUSANA	40	4	24
MARGARITA	44	11	25
ROCIO	45	3	27

Research Process: Life Histories in Photographs

I conducted photo elicitation, life history interviews. Participatory photography and visual methods have existed in various research settings under different names: *portraiture* in Education (Chapman 2005), *photovoice* in Criminology (Fitzgibbon & Stengel 2017), and *photo elicitation* in Sociology (Clark-Ibanez 2004). All have the

collaborative process of using photos and images such as drawings and photographs (hereafter photos) to amplify the voices of marginalized members of society and encourage them to tell their life stories. The photos guide the interview and analysis. The method, which takes a grounded theoretical approach, challenges power relations because it gives the participant an opportunity to share what they believe is important; they decide the evidence that will be produced. I considered the women in this study to be experts of their lives and empowered them to decide for themselves which photos to share and/or take. Studies have found this approach to produce therapeutic benefits for study participants (e.g., Oliffe & Bottorff, 2007; Yi & Zebrack, 2010). As such, participation in the research process was viewed as beneficial to the participants and the investigator. This methodological approach not only documented the issues of inquiry through photographs, but also produced expertise and knowledge by women most intimately connected to the research topic.

I received approval from the university's Institutional Review Board to conduct this study in December of 2017. Data were collected between February and September in 2018. I interacted with participants on more than one occasion before and after data collection. The interviews occurred in either a single scheduled meeting or several meetings, usually two or three. Throughout the data collection period, I was invited to family gatherings, where the mothers shared important news with me, such as a job promotion, graduation, and familial hardship (e.g., hospitalization, incarceration). I often drove participants by car to help them with their errands. In some cases their children had play dates with my own children. There was intimacy and trust, despite the presence of

street politics, such as not being able to talk about specific gang violence. From my first conversations with participants, it was clear they would never have shared their stories with me if I did not actively cultivate trust and comfort and provide understanding and support. We often interacted via late night phone calls and messages, during which I provided logistical help with institutional bureaucracies, referrals to community resources, and aid in the form of money or food, advice, and most commonly, a sympathetic ear to hear their painful stories of struggle.

Scheduling interviews was difficult, and it took several attempts to get an interview completed. Given their busy schedules, many women rescheduled multiple times. Nevertheless, these mothers remained interested in participating in the study and talking with me about their motherhood and gang involvement. Before commencing each interview, I provided each participant with a consent form that explained the purpose of the research. I made sure to receive verbal agreements to participate in the project after providing consent form, and verbal not written consent was received. (see appendix A). Some of the women refused to be audiorecorded during the interview and instead, chose to be interviewed without audio recording, either in person or by phone. The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed by me on my personal computer. For the three participants who refused audio recording, I took handwritten notes of the interview and transcribed them along with the interviews. I translated Spanish portions into English and analyzed all together. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym and their files were stored under that name.

After gaining consent, I asked participants to gather and bring to the interview

photographs of their lives, anything meaningful to them as Chicana mothers, specifically after exiting the gang. The photo elicitation interview was “auto driven” (Clark 1999). Participants gathered as many or as few photos as they wanted, and they had the option to present the photos physically or electronically (Clark 1999). The average number of photos was 15 per participant. Some women presented photos of their children or family. Others showed locations, such as the streets on which they grew up and places they visited (e.g., car shows, prisons, and parks). Still others brought artwork, such as drawings by people who were incarcerated or by children; documents, such as from the courts; or books, such as poetry or the bible.

The participants usually sent the photos, where possible, via email to me prior to the interview⁶. Some shared both electronic and physical copies. When they had physical copies, I asked to take a picture of it with my camera to enable me to keep a record of all photos electronically. All photos were stored under participants’ pseudonyms. I received verbal consent from participants to share photographs in research reports, such as this thesis.

The interviews were conducted in a place of the participant’s choosing. Most interviews occurred in the participant’s home. The remainder were conducted by phone. The interviews lasted between 1 and 3 hours. I asked participants to explain each photo, why they chose it, and what it revealed about being a formerly gang-affiliated Chicana mother. Participants began by talking about the oldest photos and ended talking about the most recent ones. The goal was to understand the participants’ perceptions of the photos

⁶ For confidentiality purposes, all the images in this document have been blurred.

in terms of their life histories. Visual images can capture moments in life and specific events, and life history interviews can supplement details of experiences that the photos may not convey. Thus, while the mothers had conversations about the photos in the interviews, I also asked open-ended questions from an interview protocol on childhood, gang-affiliation, violence, and motherhood (see appendix B). My statuses as an insider to the population and as a gang scholar allowed me to probe the participants for details on their lives in relation to the people close to them, such as their family members, friends, and institutions. The use of photographs and life history interviews guaranteed that participants' stories were not looked at as separate from real life, but rather as part of real life because "the life history is experienced as migration, as a journey from another place to where one now is" (Maines et al., 2008).

The photographs triggered both painful memories, such as deaths, and beautiful memories, such as births, for the participants. I got to know these mothers beyond the labels applied to them by the state, the media, and even some community members. I saw them reminisce about their trauma associated with rape and drug use and worry about their children and court dates. I saw them laugh about the present and hope for the future. These mothers experienced an accumulation of violent experiences but never allowed those experiences to define their lives. Reflecting on their photographs in the interviews allowed them to talk about a past that shaped them, a present that strengthens them, and a future that includes hope. Although I was interested in the stories about violence, gang affiliation, and motherhood, participants' stories were largely connected to other people's private lives and the public worlds. After hearing their stories, I learned that life is

interpreted and reinterpreted, told and retold (Webster and Mertova 2007).

Data Analysis

Having participants reflect on their photos helped me to understand their lives at the micro level, while also helping me address broader questions related to violence, motherhood, and gangs. I gathered all photos and arranged them thematically. This methodological approach helped me comprehend from the inside how women run their lives and what they find meaningful. For instance, while a picture of a bus might be personally unimportant to a criminologist studying effects of gang involvement, to a woman it might signify daily mobility, welfare office visits, interactions with police, or traveling to drop off children at school.

I employed grounded theory for analytical purposes (Corbin & Strauss 1990). Grounded theory involves inductive analysis which means that the themes that emerge solely from the data (Patton 1980: 306). This process involved identification of recurrent patterns or themes, where I constructed a cohesive representation of data (Warren and Karnerb 2015). The interviews were coded for themes related to institutional violence, interactions with institutions, mothering practices, and strategies for resistance to institutional violence. I analyzed the photographs alongside the interviews. The coding was done manually. First, I analyzed photographs by repetitive photograph themes: family (i.e., pictures of children and partners), institutions/locations (i.e., pictures of prison visits, and streets), and violence (i.e., pictures of funerals and courts). Second, I analyzed the interview transcripts, identifying sub-themes of what was talked about in the

photographs under each theme. For example, under the theme Family, subthemes included Motherhood, Networks in the gang from family and friends, and How relationships with family and institutional agents were impacted by their gang affiliation and the stigma it brought. See Table 2 for an example of the coding system.

Table 2. Example of Coding System

Theme	Sub Theme	Category	Example Code
Family	Motherhood	Stigma	Stigma_labels
		Intergenerational	Intergen_impacts

Example code	Definition	Examples
Stigma	.. Gang-affiliate labels that influenced judgements ... of mothering practices.	“When I told her counselor what I had done she told me that was not the way because she thought she .. . would end up like me but what other way you know”
Intergenerational	The impacts former .. gang-involvement has on mothers and younger or older children.	“But he says that’s not an excuse and to be careful about how I talk to him because he can show up Anytime to see how all the kids are doing”

Insider and Outsider Status and Reflexivity. As I have indicated earlier, I am in insider to this population because I am a formerly gang-affiliated Chicana mother and I grew up in the area in which the participants reside. I am also an outsider in that I am

now a graduate student conducting research and I no longer reside in the study area.

On November 18, 2016, my childhood friend Daysi was shot and killed by her romantic partner in front of her three children. A few months ago, I visited her grave on what would have been her 23rd birthday. There, I was greeted by her sisters, her cousins, and other friends from the neighborhood where I grew up. After a moment of silence and the wiping of tears from our faces with blue bandannas we collectively sang “Happy Birthday” to her. I remembered all the moments I experienced with Daysi: when we were active members of a gang, when we each became pregnant, and when we attended two funerals in one year.

I had a long conversation with one of Daysi’s cousins, an “OG” (original gangster) from the barrio whom I have known for many years. We talked about Daysi’s unfortunate tragedy. He asked me about my current status as a student. I explained I was investigating lives that have been affected by gang involvement. He commented on how lucky I was to be living outside of the neighborhood. He was happy to hear that, unlike many of my childhood friends, I was a college graduate and a graduate student. My education set me apart from those friends, but my experiences growing up in South Central Los Angeles, as a young gang-affiliated teenage mother, also set me apart. Growing up, I took very seriously the advice from experts of the streets. Now, as a graduate student conducting research, I remain reflexive about those conversations. While I constantly reflect on the research that I do and the privilege I have in doing it, I must always remain reflexive, as Daysi’s cousin reminded me. Thus, as part of my reflexive praxis, I must not only consider my privilege relative to the participants but also

my responsibility in academia to bring awareness to an academic audience about the fine line between being an insider and an outsider. These types of interactions and constant conversations that I have with loved ones from the barrio remind me that while I am knowledgeable insider of the street life and barrio life, I am also an outsider because I am a researcher. Thus, I must make wise decisions about my research, such as choosing appropriate methods and theory and conducting rigorous analysis that can contribute to public sociology and policy-oriented work.

SECTION IV: FINDINGS

Institutional Violence and the Resulting Trails of Violence

On a Thursday night, I received a text message from Susana, a single mother of four who is known in the streets of South Central as “Prieta.” I never knew why Susana was baptized with this nickname, but I deduced that it had to do with her darker skin compared to that of her siblings. Prieta said in a worried, yet determined tone of voice, “Hey, Kat, can you help me do a flyer with this picture of a missing person, please? I will appreciate it. I can make more copies and put them up in liquor stores. I already contacted hospitals and jails and...nothing.” Though I had personally known Susana for many years, she and I had not spoken for quite some time prior to my interview of her. Interviewing her helped me get updated on her life. Susana desperately wanted support to find Sandy, her 24-year-old daughter and one of my closest friends growing up. At the time of her disappearance, Sandy had been dealing with methamphetamine, or “meth,” use and gang violence. Sandy’s disappearance hit me to the core. I was unable to sleep, and like a caged lion, I paced back and forth in my room for several hours, thinking about

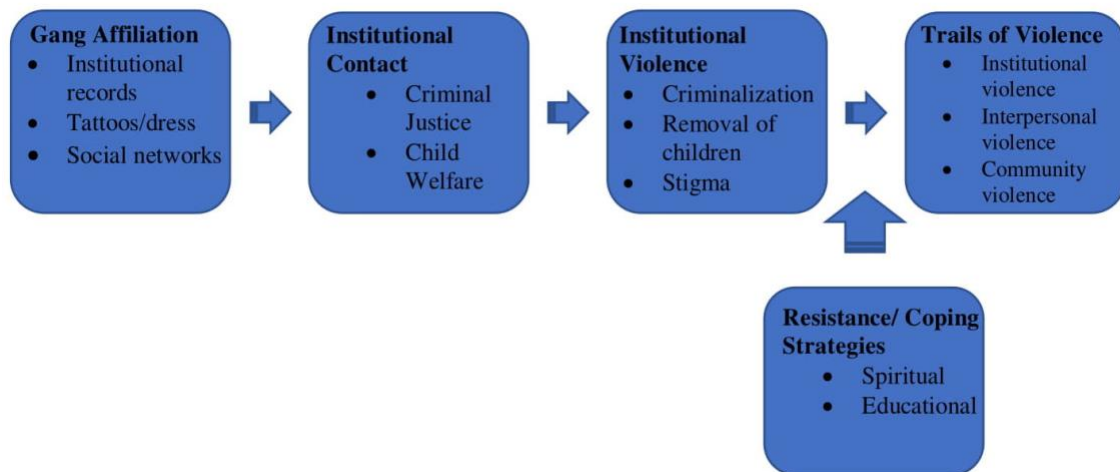
her situation. I had flashbacks of Sandy and I getting tattooed together and our many sleep overs. I paused to think about how to best respond to Susana's pain and worry. While I spent the night creating the flyer for Susana's daughter, I could not help but question how Susana's former gang affiliation was related to Sandy's disappearance, how it shaped her interactions with institutions which, in turn, had direct and indirect impacts on her and her children, including Sandy.

Mothering in South Central has been difficult for Susana. It has entailed enduring welfare sanctions, being on Section 8 housing waitlists, visiting Sandy in drug rehabilitation centers and prison, praying and hoping that her children do not suffer, and struggling with poverty and a lack of resources to parent under strained and violent conditions. Susana has experienced trails of violence. Her story, like the stories of the other mothers in this study, offers a new lens for understanding how institutions produce trails of violence, affecting the women and their children, long after the women cease gang involvement.

Figure 2 offers a conceptual model of the findings about how formerly gang-involved mothers experience and respond to institutional violence in their post-gang lives and how, through trails of violence, it affects their mothering. Remnants of gang affiliation, such as tattoos of gang symbols, relationships with active gang members, and criminal records, lead to greater contact with institutions in the criminal justice and child welfare systems. Despite having no current gang involvement, institutional agents criminalize the women and, in turn, exert control over them. Regulation of the women's space, time, daily activities, and behaviors makes the women feel that they live in a

“disciplinary society.” These interactions may entail the administration of punitive action, such as removal of a child from the home, the denial of supportive resources, such as mental health support for traumas, or interference with the women’s efforts to improve her lot, such as requiring attendance at institutional meetings that interfere with taking classes to continue one’s education. To avoid these outcomes, the women ultimately internalize the institutional rules and engage in self-regulation (Foucault 1977). These interactions and resulting conditions harm the women rather than help them. As such, they constitute a form of institutional violence. This form of violence makes them and their children vulnerable to other forms of violence, such as interpersonal and community violence as well as additional institutional violence.

Figure 2. Conceptual Model of Post-Gang Life, Institutional Violence, and Trails of Violence



Because social inequalities are normalized and institutionalized, states can ignore violence against women (Menjívar and Walsh 2015). Stigma against certain social groups

is embedded within various institutions and shapes the actions of state agents (a.k.a. institutional actors). These agents are sometimes called street-level bureaucrats (e.g., teachers, police officers and other law enforcement personnel, social workers, judges, public lawyers and court officials, health workers) (Lipsky 2010). They work for the institutions that run government programs that provide needed services and benefits and/or sanctions. Their decisions to provide services and benefits and/or sanctions to individuals powerfully determine people's life chances. This study found that institutional actors' direct and indirect control of, and failure to support, formerly gang-affiliated mothers constitutes institutional violence and produces *trails of violence*. Despite women's exit from gangs, they are still labeled as gang affiliated and stigmatized accordingly. The stigma associated with gang affiliation is multiplied by the women's other marginalized statuses – as teen mothers, welfare recipients, residents of crime-ridden neighborhoods, people with low education, women of color, and poor women. Their formal and informal interactions with criminal justice and child welfare institutions fail to protect them. As a result, they are exposed to ongoing threats of or actual interpersonal, community, and subsequent institutional violence. The trails of violence affect not only the women themselves but also their children. The women commonly resist their criminalization through ingenious strategies to avoid institutional contact. They also cope with the effects of the institutional violence by finding comfort in their spirituality.

The mothers in this study told stories about experiences of violence and the ways they resisted it. Violence was not linked solely to the period of their lives in which they

were active gang members. Participants experienced violence both before and after active gang membership. Institutional violence was persistent. However, after the women became inactive gang members, they experienced institutional violence specifically associated with having once been a gang member. Susana's narrative conveyed the trails of violence that affected her and her daughter. In the next section, I highlight how interactions with street bureaucrats associated child welfare institutions perpetrated institution violence and produced trails of violence, shaping the lives of the participants.

Catching a Child Welfare Case in the Hood

Participants reported experiencing institutional violence, after ceasing gang involvement, through contact with Child Protective Services (CPS) – that is, the child welfare system. In the United States the number of families involved with CPS with substantiated cases has increased in recent years. More than 427,000 children were in foster care in the United States in 2015, with only 55% having reunification as their permanency goal (United States 2016). Latino children represent a large percentage (about 20%) of children in foster care in states with a large Latino population, such as California (Ayon 2011), the site of the present study. Mothers of Color involved with child welfare face institutional racism that contributes to the removal of their children at disproportionately higher rates than White mothers (Hill 2004). While many scholars have shown that immigration status, race, and class contribute to “catching a case”⁷ and the removal of Latino children from families by the system (Lee 2016), my findings show

⁷ “Catching a case” refers to the condition of having a CPS case involving you opened. The expression derives from the book by Tina Lee, *Catching a Case: Inequality and Fear in New York City's Child Welfare System* (2016).

that gang affiliation is conducive to involvement in the child welfare system and removal of children from parents. As such, they show that gang affiliation has consequences long after it ceases.

In this study, ten out of thirteen mothers reported having some form of contact with CPS after exiting the gang. One mother reported that CPS removed her daughter from the home and the daughter was subsequently adopted by another family. Four mothers reported temporary removal of their children. Five mothers reported referrals to CPS but no removal of the children. The rest of the mothers were hyper-aware of the possibility that their children could be removed by CPS. They felt that even minor things could result in the removal of their children. For these mothers, the possibility or actual termination of parental rights undermined their mental health, causing feelings of “dying.”

Direct and indirect contact with CPS and the possibility of or actual removal of their children shaped how the participants navigated their everyday lives, including how they mothered. It also shaped how they responded to fear of continuous involvement in the system and trauma they had when they interacted with agents, such as social workers, that would threaten to place children into adoption. Concerns about CPS led the women to feel stress and, in turn, police themselves, such as by the way they dressed when they took their children to the doctor. They would wear long sleeves instead of clothing that showed their tattoos to hide their former gang affiliation and avoid interactions with CPS.

The case of Estefania, a 21-year-old mother of three children, illustrates the perpetration of institutional violence by CPS. Among the participants Estefania had the

most recent involvement with gangs. CPS removed her children after receiving allegations of neglect by her family and social workers in the period after her husband was shot and killed. She was no longer in the gang, but the affiliation with her partner who was killed produced this neglect allegation. She described experiencing heightened criminalization during this period and attributed the removal of her children to it.

Estefania, who has long black hair and tattoos on her chest and arms that tell a story of “agony and ecstasy,” had a hard time sharing her history in her interview. Months before our interview, she had several mental breakdowns. She said, “I don’t wanna’ talk about windows that I’m trying to close, but all this shit fuckin’ hurts a lot.” Estefania shared that her physical appearance, which conveys gang affiliation, affected her contact and interactions with police agents, social workers, medical doctors, teachers and other street bureaucrats. She felt that her relations with CPS disrupted her ability to pursue her life goals, including going to college. During our interview, she asked me for help with an application to the local community college. She then changed her mind and said, “Never mind. I don’t know why I ask. The parenting classes I have to go to will make it hard to do this.” CPS required that Estefania attend parenting classes to regain custody of her daughter who had been removed from the home.

Estefania shared a photograph of her older daughter Unique who had been removed from the home (see Figure 3). It showed the daughter at the cemetery where the girl’s father is buried, visiting his grave. Estefania’s facial expressions, when discussing the photo, communicated the guilt she felt for what CPS had put her daughter through – experiences that, she felt, a little girl should never go through.

“Damn ... It brings tears to my eyes because in that picture she was asking a lot of questions about her dad. ‘Til this day she wishes so much how she could hear his voice. It’s so sad that all I tried for her I am trying to do for her baby sister. It’s not the same because she (her elder daughter) should be with her mom and not adopted. This hurts so much. I feel like my story gets deeper and worst.”

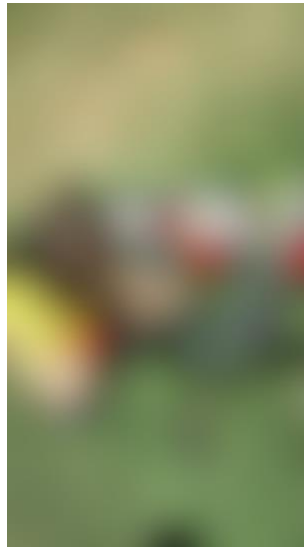


Figure 3. Estefania’s daughter who was removed by CPS.

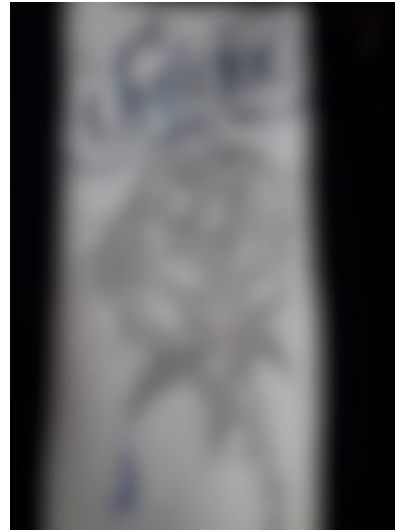


Figure 4. Estefania’s future tattoo (Unique is daughter’s name)

Estefania had a criminal record that noted her former gang affiliation and had a hospital record which documented a prior drug overdose. Although Estefania tried to stay sober, got drug tested weekly, took parenting classes, and abided by the rules ordered by the family court judge, it was not enough to regain custody of her daughter Unique. She lost permanent custody. While discussing Unique’s adoption by another family, Estefania

shared a drawing of a tattoo design from her current partner (see Figure 4). She talked about the psychological impact of her loss of custody of her daughter:

“I want to get this tatted on my neck. There’s nothing like the pain of not being able to raise your kid, not cuz their dead, but because they can just take them away like that. She will always know I’ve always loved her, even though we’re not gonna be as close. That’s my daughter, and I hope I can explain to her why all this fucked up mess happened.”

Estefania’s story was of pain and the trail of violence she lived through. She had difficulty talking about herself as a mother because she felt that she had failed, that her previous gang involvement would always follow her. Some gang scholars who employ life course theory refer to “criminal careers,” the longitudinal sequence of crimes by individual offenders (Piquero et al., 2003). However, Estefania’s narrative suggests that a more apt label would be life-course criminalization because although the behaviors associated with the gang career have ceased, the criminal label persists and shapes life outcomes as if the behaviors persisted too. The mothers in this study have to make decisions about the ways they respond to institutions within the contexts of poverty, substance use, violence, and institutional racism. This situation leaves mothers questioning how to prioritize when every decision is scrutinized by a system they experience as oppressive and hypercritical (Dunkerely 2017). Their efforts to comply with the system do not yield results because the institutions focus on the former gang affiliation rather than acknowledging and addressing the overall context. In the case of Estefania, she had just experienced a major trauma associated with community violence

(the loss of her husband through homicide). Her efforts to cope with the trauma led to substance abuse. These issues occurred in the context of other factors. Estefania is poor, not well educated, and living in a high-crime, low-resource neighborhood. Despite the existence of a complex array of challenges, Estefania's experience is that the system focused on her former gang affiliation, as if her multiple marginalizations did not contribute to the problems. As a result, the outcome of institutional intervention was another trauma: the loss of custody of her daughter.

Lorena, aged 24 years, is known as "Dimples," a nickname, given to her in the streets and reflecting her beautiful smile. Her story provides evidence of life-course criminalization – that is, criminalization that continued after exiting her gang. As she stated in a phone call on a Wednesday before midnight, "my fears started when I was 12 ... It's crazy to think that today, I am still having those same feelings of fear. I believe that one day, it won't be like that." As a teenager, Lorena walked down the streets of South Central and experienced interpersonal and community violence, such as physical fights and riots linked to her gang involvement. She also experienced institutional violence through her contact with CPS and the criminal justice system. When Lorena moved out of the *barrio* to disaffiliate with the gang and provide a safer life for her children, she continued to face multiple forms of violence.

During our interview, Lorena tied her experiences with violence as a teenager to her current life as a mother of three children. She described how her past experiences with interpersonal and community violence were similar to her current experiences with street-level bureaucrats. Lorena shared photographs and documents of her family court

paperwork (see Figures 5 and 6). Seven years ago, after exiting the gang she experienced direct contact with CPS. The father of her daughter, who was physically abusive to Lorena, reported Lorena to CPS for child abuse, and her child was temporarily removed from the home. Given this history with CPS and her prior gang involvement and drug use, Lorena feared CPS and the possibility of a repeat removal of her child. She described a picture of herself and children (Figure 5) and shared how she felt during the period in which her daughter was removed from her custody:

“Every time her father would abuse me, he would hit me, I would take it off on her. She was small, probably, like, 4 months, and I would take it off on her. So I mean I came to the point where I hurted her and she ended up in the hospital. They took her away from me probably for, like, 4 months, but it wasn’t because I wanted to do it. It’s something because he would do it to me. So I would do it to her. I mean I wasn’t on drugs regardless, but they came to the conclusion that it was probably because of that, because they didn’t know that I was the one going through it. So I was taking it off on her. I had to fight through a lot to and I had to go through it by myself because I ended up getting out of the relationship that I was in. I ended leaving her father. I ended up leaving that place. I ended up being homeless for a little bit. And you know, all those 4 months I ended up being homeless.”

Lorena explained that the intimate partner violence she experienced as a teenage mother was intense. She reflected, with tears in her eyes, that she wished that instead of

having her daughter removed, she would have gotten counseling to address the intimate partner violence. However, although Lorena has since addressed the intimate partner violence and is no longer experiencing it, she still worries that her prior life as a gang member with a CPS history could be used against her. She fears that a judge or social worker would view her as a “bad mother,” despite the fact that she is now away from the barrio, working full time, and successfully raising 3 children.

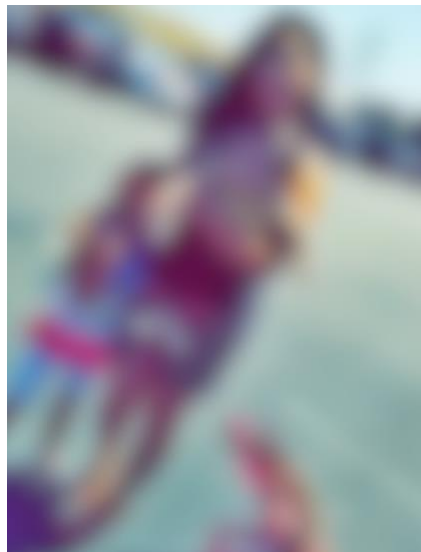


Figure 5. Lorena with her children

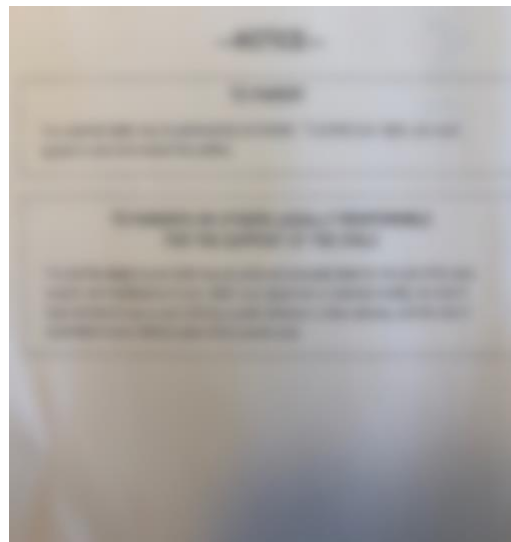


Figure 6. Lorena's CPS paperwork

The child welfare system assumed that Lorena used drugs because of her previous gang affiliation and they failed to respond to intimate partner violence because of this.

The institutional violence Lorena experienced not only caused trauma when her daughter was removed but also exacerbated her fear of her partner. This institutional violence she experienced is a failure of the state, one that shows what occurs when a mother is mistreated and exposed to trauma when already subjected to other forms of violence.

Given the state's subjective understanding of parenting, specifically for gang-involved

mothers, it was not uncommon for street-level bureaucrats, such as teachers and police officers, to look down on Estefania and Lorena, and how they parent.

Latina and Latino children are disproportionately represented in and highly victimized by public service agencies like the child welfare system (Church et al., 2005). The coercive organizational controls required by street bureaucrats in the child welfare system, such as frequent doctor appointments and regular parenting classes, reflect how these settings enforce lifestyle guidelines and daily routines for mothers under surveillance, a practice commonplace among organizations and institutions that aim to reform or “fix” people (Oselin 2014). For example, for a mother like Margarita, arranging mandated doctor appointments for her 11 kids while being surveilled by police officers constitutes coercive control. Formal controls within CPS generate changes among mothers by the use of coercion, including restricting of physical movement with children outside the state, the provision of resources and aid, and institutionalized rewards, such as free clothes and home furniture, and punishments, such as delayed dates for court hearings involving child custody matters. As Lorena stated, “I hope my past doesn’t creep back, they[CPS] already took my daughter away once, and now I have three it would be worst.” The impacts for mothers with CPS contact were consequential in many ways and on many levels. Findings on how participants’ contacts with the criminal justice system produced trails of violence will be described next.

“They have us like criminals in front of our kids”

Participants reported experiencing institutional violence, after ceasing gang involvement, through contact with the criminal justice system. All the participants reported that they experience what Flores (2016) calls “wraparound incarceration,” a multidimensional surveillance of behavior that works outside of formal institutions of confinement with the constant presence of police officers. The wraparound surveillance directly and indirectly affected the participants. For instance, when participants had a criminal record, it was difficult for them to access resources. Some of them experienced a direct impact.

Patricia is a 27-year-old mother who has three children and is nicknamed “Kutie.” Her soft voice, light skin and thin body would not reflect a typical gang-involved woman, but her style of dress, tattoos, criminal record, and social networks with gang members made her vulnerable to surveillance. Her gang involvement began when she was thirteen years old. Most of her family was gang involved (uncles, aunts, cousins, partner); so she was always familiar with the lifestyle. Patricia was, at one point, a leader of a female gang in South Central. This gang involvement led her to have a criminal record as a juvenile. Immediately after exiting the gang, Patricia struggled to get housing. She was not able to live in her father’s home because her partner was gang involved and her father feared that her partner’s presence would get the father in trouble with CPS or CJS since he had younger children in addition to his daughter. She rented a room in her mother-in-law’s home where two of her brother-in-laws and their wives lived. Other members of the household were active gang members and kept drugs and weapons in the home. Within

some time after moving in to her mother-in-law's home, Patricia was arrested and investigated for her brother-in-laws' crimes. She was also charged with neglect for choosing to raise her daughter in that home, and her daughter was temporarily adopted by a foster mom. Despite her positive move to exit the gang when she got pregnant with her daughter, the state overlooked this change of behavior and failed to recognize her limited housing options. The consequence of her exiting the gang was punitive because her current gang affiliation was enough to label her and place her in trouble with the law.

Currently, there are 4.6 million persons under criminal justice supervision, and many of them will return to prison within three years (NIJ 2018). In this study, all of the mothers had some form of contact with the criminal justice system during and after gang involvement. They described that the contact with the system was due to the involvement of their romantic partners, family members, children and themselves. Contact with the system that continued after gang involvement shows persistent effects and criminalizing consequences for mothers with a former gang affiliation. For example, Mayra, 31 years old and an undocumented mother of 5 children, described how stressful mothering can be when it involves state surveillance, specifically police contact. She identified a dimension of institutional violence with her interactions with criminal justice agents. To illustrate her experience, she shared two photographs (Figures 7 and 8) documenting her experience of criminalization in her day-to-day life. Mayra described the photo in Figure 7 which depicts an incident that occurred long after her gang exit:

“I was at the bus stop waiting for them (the school bus) to pick up my son, J'shawn, and then the P.O. (probation officer) pulls up in the alley. He's

all asking me why my oldest daughter (Aliyah) wasn't at school, and I explained she was having a lot of knee pain and she was being referred to orthopedic. But he says that's not an excuse and to be careful about how I talk to him because he can show up anytime to see how all the kids are doing. And I'm like, 'Hold up. Like, what do you mean? All my kids, they have nothing to do with Aliyah's issues'."

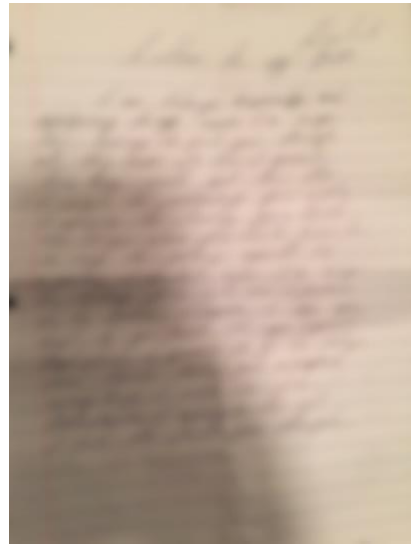
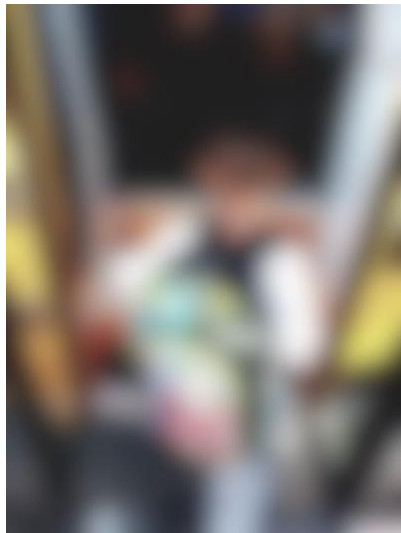


Figure 7. Mayra's bus stop contact with probation Figure 8. Letter to Mom or the system?

Mayra's interaction with Aliyah's probation officer at the bus stop involved institutional violence. Rather than simply asking Mayra to document her claims about the child's medical status, the probation officer exploited his power over Mayra and her family. His comments conveyed a distrust of Mayra and were designed to instill fear in her. They were not supportive; they did not convey a genuine interest in the welfare of the child in question or confidence in Mayra's ability to be a good mother. As a result of

this contact, in which the probation officer criminalized Mayra knowing about her former gang affiliation, Mayra experienced heightened fear of “being a bad mom” due to having a daughter on probation. She felt she needed to always be cautious of state institutions and agents.

Figure 8 involves a letter by Aliyah, Mayra’s daughter about whom the probation officer inquired. Aliyah’s probation officer required Aliyah to write the letter to her mother as part of an assignment for being on probation. It exemplified for Mayra the extent to which her former gang affiliation and undocumented status exposed her to extensive questioning and visitations in her home by probation officers, police officers, and social workers.

“When we (Mayra, school administrators, and police officers) had that meeting at the office before she (Aliyah) started school, they asked me if I was a gang member when they already knew I was an ex-gang member. ‘You already have it in record. Why are you asking me?’ I don’t like that. It irritated me. But I did tell them, if it wasn’t for me getting pregnant with her, I would have been out there doing stuff. But since I had her, I changed my life.”

Mayra’s quote reveals the disrespect she experienced in the contact with the school administrators and police officers. These actors perpetrated institutional violence by focusing on her past and doing so as if it were indicative of the present. They overlooked her successful gang exit, even when she explicitly discusses it in the conversation, and her current attentiveness to her child, as evident in her willing participation in the meeting. These contacts with institutions make Mayra feel that she

cannot parent freely the way most parents can. Instead, she is judged for her past and is “always on check” – that is, she is always under surveillance by law enforcement. She experiences an intense fear that her children, her reason for leaving the gang, will be removed from her custody.

Leticia, also known as Morena, is a mother of four children. At the time of the interview, she was pregnant with her fifth child. She described experiencing institutional violence perpetrated by criminal justice systems agents. Concerned about repercussions from the gang with which she formerly affiliated, she initially did not want to have her photographs publicly shared or her interview to be audio recorded. Furthermore, CPS had temporarily removed her children in the past and she wanted to prevent that from happening again. “Being pregnant and having all my court dates extended was stressful. The drug testing with this (pregnant) stomach was enough for me.” This institutional violence she experienced when she was pregnant and having to get drug tested was an effect of the criminalization that CPS caused due to her gang affiliation. Leticia spoke about the lack of support received when she was pregnant, such as the extension of court dates even though all her drug tests came out clear. Leticia worries that her children will end up in the child welfare system because of her former gang affiliation, indicated by a criminal record and her ongoing strong ties to gang-affiliated family members. She described contacts with law enforcement, since her gang exit, that criminalized her and, she felt, threatened her and her children. Leticia described the stress she experienced when dealing with agents of the criminal justice system. She commented, “Especially when all your family has been gang banging, they got a lot on us, even years after.”

A series of these criminalizing law enforcement contacts occurred when Leticia's sister, Daysi, was murdered. Leticia discussed a photo of her younger sister Gaby mourning at her Daysi's grave on the day of her funeral (see Figure 9). Leticia shared how tough it was for her family to cope with Daysi's passing, specifically given the cause of death: homicide by her romantic partner who then shot himself, but did not die, and is now incarcerated for Daysi's murder. She described her interaction with law enforcement on the day they removed her niece, Daysi's daughter, from the home and put her in the custody of CPS.

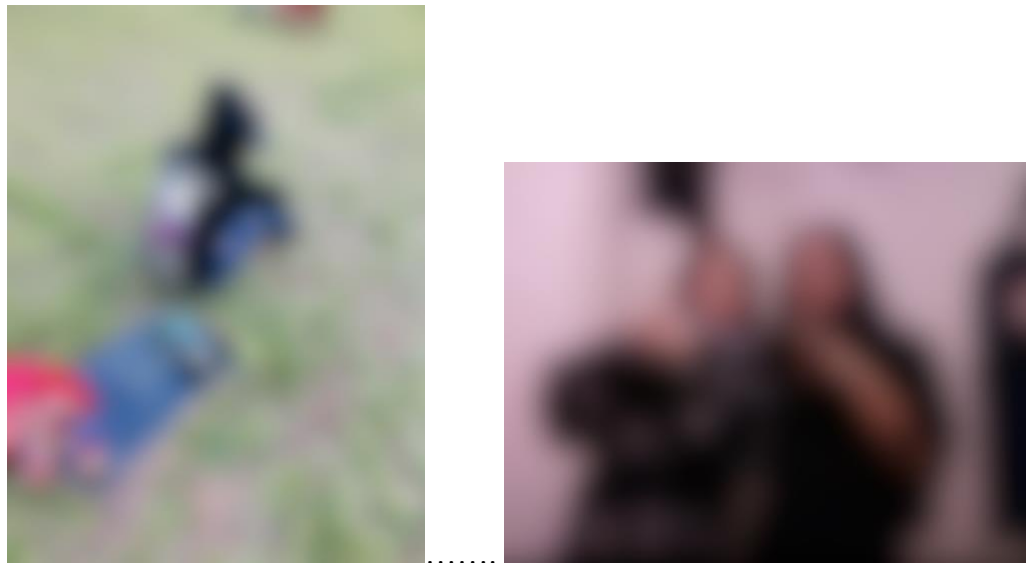


Figure 9. Leticia's sister Gaby at Daysi's funeral Figure 10. Leticia (right) back in the hood days

“When my sis died, they wanted to know about all our family. They asked my kids questions. My brother's kids, they went to visit them in their house. It was fuckin' painful. After what we were already going through, all the funeral stuff, they did not want to stop the investigation.”

Leticia's quote reveals the institutional violence perpetrated by the law enforcement officers. In focusing exclusively on solving crime of Daysi's death, the officers overlooked the trauma experienced by the family members, including Leticia. She felt as if their pain did not matter to the officers because the family had criminal histories and despite Leticia herself having ceased gang involvement. These interactions negatively affected Leticia's ability to cope with Daysi's death.

Leticia also shared a photo of herself from "back in the day" when she was actively involved in the gang (see Figure 10). It shows her wearing clothing characteristic of gang members and wielding a gun which was used for gang activity.

"I left the 'hood long time ago, but they (law enforcement) never stop seeing you like this picture. They think we stay doing this all our lives or something. You think I'm gonna carry guns like this nowadays? Hell no! Pero this follow you all the time. That's why I keep it away. I've had many times where I have to deal with them, when they use to raid the house because they were looking for my brother and for drugs. They use to line us up outside in front of our kids like we were criminals, and there was no reason because it had nothing to do with us."

In the above quote Leticia described another contact with law enforcement when the police raided her house in pursuit of her brother who is gang affiliated. Leticia experienced being lined up by police in front of her children as a form of institutional violence, designed not to solve whatever crime was being investigated or to protect her and her family from crime but rather to humiliate Leticia and her family, communicate

their devalued status as criminals (despite Leticia's inactive gang status), and highlight the police's greater power over the family. The symbolic message was, once a criminal always a criminal, or associate with a criminal and you are a criminal. Furthermore, the officers exhibited little concern for how criminalizing the parents might negatively affect the children, something they should care about if their goal is crime prevention. Lopez Aguado (2018) discusses the collateral consequences of family members' criminal justice involvement, such as incarceration. In the case of Leticia, her family members' gang affiliation served as a marker of her own, albeit former, gang affiliation. Therefore, she experienced "secondary prisonization" and was "imprisoned" by ongoing criminalization (Comfort 2014).

In addition to Mayra and Leticia, other participants shared photographs of their former gang lifestyle. When they did, they always made sure to highlight how the image was from the past, not the present, reflecting their concern that I as the interviewer understand who they are today. Because the mothers' past operates as "a past that always seems to creep back," as Leticia said, the mothers experience institutional violence and trails of violence.

Stigmatized Mothering

Participants' past – their former gang affiliation – also affected how the mothers parent their children and how agents of the state viewed their parenting. This section describes institutional violence in the form of stigmatization of the mothers' parenting by agents from child welfare and criminal justice institutions, as well as other institutions, such as public schools.

The contemporary stereotype of the “bad mother” includes the teenage mother, welfare mother, drug-using mother, gang-affiliated mother, and to a lesser extent, the single mother and working mother (Hunt et al., 2005), all of which applied to this study’s participants. After years of ceasing active membership in gangs, the mothers experienced stigmatization for their various identities by teachers and other agents of the state with whom they interacted with daily. Previous research has shown that gang-involved women find motherhood to be a “hook for change” and a reason to leave gangs (Fleisher and Krienert 2004; Pyrooz et al. 2017). While many participants identified motherhood as a motivation for their gang exit, the stigma they experienced as gang-involved people continued after their gang involvement and affected the way they raise their children. For the women, the long-term effects of stigma often resulted in an internalization of prejudice and development of a hyper-awareness of the ways they mothered.

“Me and my dozen, we roll together ... everywhere together,” Margarita says. Margarita, also known as Güera, is 40 years old and mother of 11 children. She is a well-respected mother in the neighborhood. She had put in work for her gang, enough to have landed her in juvenile detention centers at age twelve, where she was tried and convicted for possession of a deadly weapon. The homegirls in the neighborhood see her as a role model, commonly saying things like, “Damn, I want to be just like the homegirl, Güera.” Her green eyes and blonde hair make her stand out among her 11 kids, which she proudly refers to as her “*dozena*.” (dozen)

Güera and I discussed her parenting. She began her involvement in gangs at the age of 10, and by 12 years old, she was pregnant with her first child, a daughter. She

witnessed the death of several romantic partners who were shot and killed in the neighborhood by rival gangs, and she had to move several times to protect her and her children's lives. As a result, Güera never had much certainty about her future. Despite her hardships, she said, "I've enjoyed being a mom more than anything in this world." Parenting queer, autistic, mixed race, and third generation Chicano children is not an easy task for her. Yet, Güera parents in ways that draw on her own life experience and is designed to protect her children from the hardships she experienced, including those related to her former gang affiliation. Yet, her way of parenting was not always in line with mainstream, middle class parenting. As a result, Güera's parenting subjects her to increased contacts with state institutions and institutional violence.

Güera shared a picture of her children (see Figure 11). It brought to mind for her an incident in which her daughter's school counselor (mis)judged her parenting.

"When I found out that she (her daughter) was claiming the barrio in her school, hell no, girl, I flipped out. I sent my 3 older homegirls from another clika (aka gang) to regulate her ass. They drove in a black car with tinted windows and followed her afterschool. They got off, did what they had to do, and screamed to her in her face she better stopped claiming the hood. And that day, she came home crying. I told her que *A ver si asi aprendes a no andar en pendejadas*. (let's see if you learn not to be fucking around) And thankfully she never got caught up in the hood life. When I told her counselor what I had done, she told me that was not the way (to parent)

because she thought she would end up like me. But what other way, you know?”

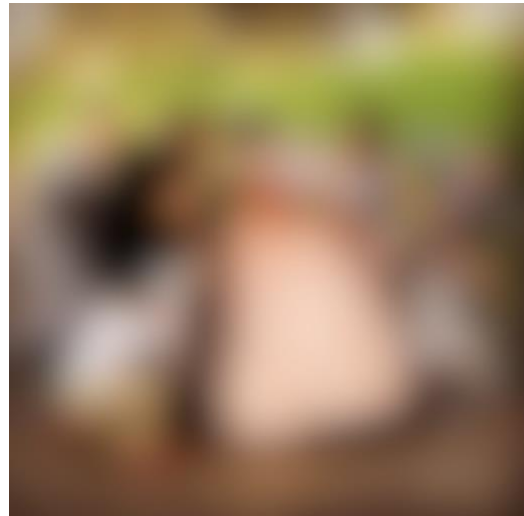


Figure 11. OG Güera mother of 11 (center). Figure 12. “My babies are my riders”

Güera shared a story of successful parenting. To prevent her daughter from getting involved in a neighborhood gang, she called on her own friends to scare her daughter out of involvement. The counselor, who is likely not from the neighborhood and perhaps has no personal experience with gangs, viewed this method as wrong, perhaps even as abusive under child welfare policy. However, Güera, who has great familiarity with the neighborhood and intimate personal experience with gangs, felt that this method would be effective, given the context. In fact, the method worked; Güera’s daughter was sufficiently scared as to avoid involvement. The counselor’s dismissal of the mother’s method ignored Güera’s valuable expertise about gangs and how to navigate them. It also conveyed a lack of faith in the mother and her mothering skills, despite her actual success in this case. Such interactions with street bureaucrats leave mothers feelings that no

matter what they do, even succeeding in protecting their children, they are not viewed as good mothers.

Previous literature on formerly incarcerated mothers shows that very often, the legal, practical, and emotional challenges are so overwhelming that women and their children never resolve the damage caused by the ruptured relationships (Richie 2001; 34). While this is true in some cases for formerly gang-involved mothers in the study, Güera has, in many ways, overcome her past by leaving behind the gang life and as a single mother, cultivating strong relationships with her 11 children whom she manages to raise, despite not having many financial resources. Her strong commitment to give her children a better life using methods that Güera views as appropriate to the very challenging circumstances in which she is raising her children (low income, low resource neighborhood, hyper-policed neighborhood), however, does not necessarily protect her from institutional violence. When mothers' parenting practices are discordant with those the state deems as acceptable, despite their evident success, the mothers are criminalized.

Güera has had nine Child Protective Services cases opened on her. She described how her children's teachers reported her to CPS, causing her and her children to have frequent contacts with CPS. Güera experiences the contact with CPS as indications of the system's lack of faith in her parenting. She views their involvement as an attack on her and her children rather than an effort to protect her family. She said:

"I've had nine different cases with them. Many times it's been teachers. And the cops, they think they know how I should be with my kids. Every time they come home to check if we got food, if it's clean, if the kids are

okay, they see they are, and they kick their own selves out my fuckin' house. My kids are all some little clowns and they do get on my nerves, but they know I don't fuck around, you know? The same way I talk to them at home with my loud ass voice, I talk to them in front of their teachers and anywhere.”

None of the CPS cases have resulted in the removal of Güera's children.

Furthermore, as the above quote reveals, CPS representatives “kick themselves out” of Güera's house because they do not find evidence of abuse. Güera would probably prefer to do the kicking out herself but, criminalized as she is, she is denied that power.

However, CPS's failure to find fault, despite its many contacts with Güera, is evidence for her that she is not the bad mother the state would have her believe she is.

She presented a second photo of her children (see Figure 12). In it her children appear happy together at a celebration of her daughter's Quinceañera. The photo captures the children doing the dab, a dance move. Describing her children, Güera said, their behavior “is no joke at times.” The children sometimes make mistakes and get into trouble at home or school. However, she takes their behavior seriously and, as the above quote indicates, responds to their behavior with the goal of promoting positive behavior change. Because her parenting methods are constantly questioned by the state, however, Güera has developed strategies to avoid institutional violence, including removal of her children.

“One time, I spanked my son because he threw a glass at my face. He didn't have a mark or anything, but he went and told his teacher. And his teacher

reported it, and they made me go through that. I had my 11 kids lined up at the doctor to get checked, and they were all good. I ended up telling the social worker she was just creating trauma for my kids, and they closed that case.”

Anticipating that her parenting would be judged inadequate, Güera preemptively took her children to the doctor to be examined, knowing the doctor would find her children healthy and well. As in the case of the other CPS contacts, this case was closed without substantiating the claim of abuse. Güera’s great relief was evident in her statement, “Thank God they (her children) never were removed from me!” Despite the success of Güera’s strategy, as the above quote indicates, the children are still subjected to trauma – a trail of violence – due to criminalization and constant surveillance.

Güera’s experiences reveal how institutions regularly respond to formerly gang-affiliated mothers as bad mothers. Despite whatever shortcomings the mothers may have as mothers (e.g., perhaps Güera should not have spanked her son), the institutions fail to acknowledge mothers’ current status as gang free, overlook the mothers’ love for and commitment to their children, and discount their experience-informed parenting, such as Güera using her street knowledge to prevent her daughter from joining gangs. The result is that the mothers and their children endure the trauma of repeated institutional contacts.

As Cynthia Dewi Oka (2016, 52) shared in *Revolutionary Mothering*:

“The ethos of mothering involves valuing in and of itself a commitment to the survival and thriving of other bodies... Women of color have been violently

punished and stigmatized for mothering...neither have women of color produced equally valued members of the labor force under the global capitalist regime: where white children are celebrated as increased human capital, Black, indigenous, and Third World children are lamented as drains on state resources, prospective criminals and more recently with the (racist) overpopulation discourse.”

Trails of Violence

The institutional violence that the mothers experience, due to being formerly gang affiliated, results in exposure to further violence (institutional, interpersonal, and community violence) against the mothers and additional victims (primarily the mothers’ children). In this study, 45 children and young adults ranging from newborn to 25 years of age are being raised by the mothers I interviewed. Young mothers are labeled as guilty, blamed, and held responsible for making “bad choices,” rather than being labeled as innocent and excused because they did what they could under “bad circumstances” (Hunt et al., 2012, p. 2). The stigma they carried as mothers with former gang affiliations was also applied to their children, and the resulting negative effects on children appear over time as mothers and children age. This study highlights how institutional violence involves stigma (Kent 2006).

Susana, introduced on page 28, described how she connected her former gang affiliation and the resulting institutional violence with her eldest daughter Sandy’s involvement in gangs and drugs and current incarceration. Susana exited the gang when, as a teenager, she got pregnant with Sandy. Despite ceasing her gang involvement, Susana’s continued affiliation with her husband, a gang member, exposed her and her

daughter to criminalizing contacts with law enforcement and social workers. In addition, as a teenage mother, Susana was abused by her husband who was a drug user. In her efforts to deal with these problems, Susana sought institutional support but reported having generally negative experiences. She described experiencing institutional violence in the ways that were described in earlier sections.

Meanwhile, Susana's daughter Sandy began to experience her own problems, including gang involvement. Susana described a picture of Sandy when she was 6 years old, wearing a Cinco de Mayo dress made for her by grandmother. She came to tears because she was reminded of the innocence displayed in Sandy's young face (see Figure 13). She stated:

“When she hit middle school, she changed a lot. She hated how in school they made her take off her Dodgers blue jacket. She became so *rebelled*. And when she started getting tattoos, I knew she was in the gang already. I tried searching for help, and a lot of her teachers sometimes helped me, but not the juvy halls she ended up in. Not the rehab centers and ...(cries). Nothing has helped me with her.”

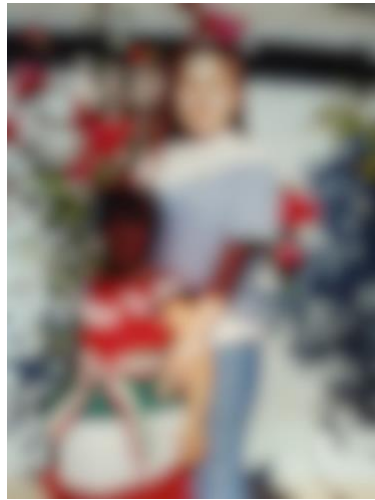


Figure 13. Susana and daughter Sandy, 1998
Sandy, 2016

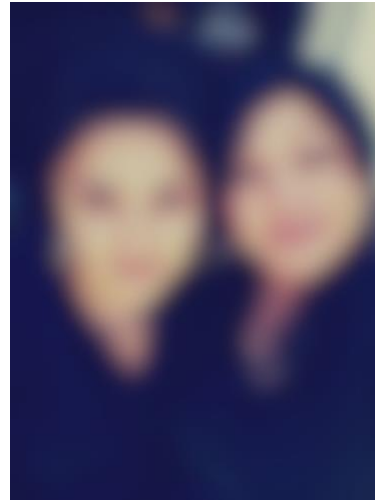


Figure 14. Susana and daughter

As institutions got involved to respond to Sandy, Susana's former gang affiliation became salient. Susana felt that she was blamed for her daughter's problems. Susana actively sought to support her daughter in resolving her problems: "I tried everything. God knows I did." Yet, institutional actors focused on her as a bad mother, making her fearful that they would take Sandy and her other children away. Susana shared a recent picture of herself and Sandy, taken in 2016, on their way to church to support their grandparents who were serving that day (see Figure 14). She described how hard it was to obtain institutional support for Sandy, who, by then, struggled with drug addiction, and how that support seemed to be withheld because Susana was a former gang member.

For Susana and other participants, it was harder to move past their gang affiliation, after exiting the gang, when entire families were involved, when physical appearances or settings did not change, and when behaviors like drug use increased. The mothers could not disassociate with families in gangs or move out of their

neighborhoods. This finding highlights a dilemma in Life Course Theory. “Leaving the gang” is not a simple, unidimensional concept; both identity *and* behavior needs to be accounted for in order to offer a more complete sense of whether motherhood truly prompts meaningful changes in gang members’ lives (see Pyrooz and Decker, 2011: 423). When the mothers change both identity and behavior, institutions do not recognize it because they focus on the past and label them criminal. To recognize positive behavior and identity change when exiting gangs, as mothers seek better lives, institutions need to consider the context in which the women live, where multiple marginalizations are at play. Like the literature on formerly incarcerated mothers, which finds that their children suffer even after mothers are released (Richie 2001), the findings here show that children of formerly gang-affiliated mothers suffer even after the mothers exit the gang. Just as institutions fail to help mothers by perpetrating institutional violence, they fail to help the mothers’ children. As a result, both mothers and children are exposed to trails of violence.

“You gotta find ways to resist:” Dodging Criminalization

The mothers in this study did not remain passive in the face of institutional violence. They described ways in which they resist criminalization and avoid contact with institutions to prevent experiencing institutional violence. This process was strategic and had practical and material consequences. Over time, they added to their toolbox of navigational skills. One of the ways mothers did this was to present to institutional agents evidence of the family’s love and commitment to each other. Monica is 23 years old, a mother of two children, and married to a gang member. “I was born into gangs,” she said.

At three years old, Monica knew how to throw up gang signs with her hands. By 13 years of age, she was claiming her father's neighborhood gang. When I met her family, I saw how close they were with each other. They kissed and hugged. Her father, a former gang member, would comment, "*Cómo las quiero, cabronas.*" (I love you girls). She shared a picture of her father and her sisters, describing how close she and her sisters have always been with each other and their father, and how they have always been "Daddy's girls" (see Figure 15).

Despite being born into gangs, Monica showed a strong desire to reject a pathway involving gangs, violence, drugs, and incarceration for her children. She said, "...my kids won't be part of the (gang) lifestyle." Every day, she wakes up at five in the morning to get her children ready for school. She makes sure they wear beautiful outfits, like coats in the winter and butterfly headbands in the summer. According to Monica, the children's teachers always comment on how clean and nice the children look. Monica works as a pharmacy technician, often in charge of the entire pharmacy. She is continuing her education as a pharmacist's assistant, hoping to become a pharmacist herself one day. Her home is decorated nicely, with many of her son's baseball plaques on the wall. She spends a lot of time maintaining the home (e.g., doing chores, making sure the candles are always on and smell good) and spending time with her children (e.g., watching movies with them).

Criminological research on gangs generally does not explore the love in gang families, such as Monica's family, or the methods by which gang-involved parents raise gang-involved children. The mothers in the study commonly shared with me what they

learned from their parents, including what they learned about how to avoid involvement with state institutions and intervene in the trails of violence. Monica was born to gang-involved teenage parents. Due to their involvement, she has experienced contact with state institutions, such as police and parole officers, since the age of 10 years old. She remembered vividly how parole officers and other institutional agents would ask her questions about her parents' parenting. Her parents had trained her to provide answers to visiting social workers' questions in such a way as to avoid having her and her siblings removed from the home by CPS. Monica willingly performed as her parents trained her because she loved her family and did not want to be separated from them. She recalled a time when a social worker visited her house:

“My mom had already told us, when they come, not to say nothing about my dad's homies coming to kick it in the backyard because that meant he was violating parole. So she told us to basically say we were the perfect family. And I didn't really understand, you know. All I knew was that I could not be away from them. So I listened (laughs). And the social worker asked me to draw, and I did a drawing of all of us holding hands, hearts and shit. They never took us away.”

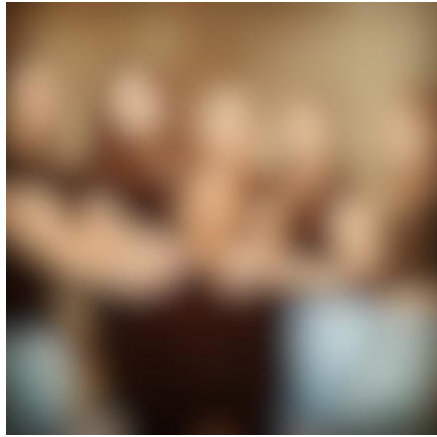


Figure 15. Daddy's Girls



Figure 16. Pulled Over

Monica's interaction with the social worker is evidence of "system avoidance," "the practice of individuals avoiding institutions that keep formal records (i.e., put them 'in the system') and therefore, heighten the risk of surveillance and apprehension by authorities" (Brayne 2014, 368). In addition to the above avoidance technique, which Monica used as a child, she described using various other techniques as an adult in her everyday life. Though she visits prisons, visits her husband in hospitals after he is shot, and has contact with police officers because of her former gang affiliation and her husband's current gang affiliation, she has methods for avoiding system engagement. For example, to avoid police traffic stops, she pretends to be an Uber driver.

"I had to place an Uber sign in my car. He (her husband) was getting stopped on the daily, and I didn't want them to continue taking us all out of the car and questioning me just because of how crazy he looks. You know? He's all tatted up, and they see me next to him. *Pues, qué van a pensar?* Those handcuffs weren't cool, especially when you already scared as shit because

of parole. Thankfully, we don't get stopped anymore. It's been 2 months without any police stops.”

Other examples of system avoidance, described by the participants, included investigating how to expunge criminal records and avoiding visits to doctors by employing home remedies. For instance, Cristal, age 26 and mother of 2, described investigating how to expunge her husband's criminal record in order to avoid arrests when getting stopped by police. Once she expunged the record, the arrests and police stops decreased.

Patricia, introduced on page 39, spoke about the ways she avoided too many doctor visits by asking the children's grandmother to tend to her children's health needs. She feared being accused by medical staff of child neglect or abuse if her children had any form of scratch or bruise from playing outside. Patricia would have the grandmother take care of the children when Patricia went to work if the children needed to stay home from school. She would have the grandmother administer her natural remedies to the children to avoid going to the doctor for an exam or prescription. In doing these things, Patricia avoided contact with institutions that might lead to the removal of her children from her custody.

As the above evidence indicates, mothers in this study actively avoided the system through use of various clever strategies. They felt they had to avoid institutions because contact with them would likely entail experiencing institutional violence.

Coping, Healing, and Hope through Spirituality and Education

“When you become a spiritually active person (a spiritual activist—if you

treat it as a political issue and do outer work as well as inner work), you start conceiving or reconfiguring reality in a different way. You begin looking at reality in a way that is different from the official way of looking at reality. To do this is seen as alien, deviant, especially to people in the University where theory is supposed to be very objective, verified and legitimated with objective research, which, of course, disqualifies spirituality other than as an anthropological study done by outsiders. (Anzaldúa 1996: 2)

In addition to resisting and avoiding institutional violence, the participants described strategies for coping with and healing from it. They described how they sustained religious and spiritual practices to overcome the traumatizing experiences through which they lived. These practices developed after their gang involvement. They emphasized the importance of faith and God in order to resist the consequences of their own and their loved ones' gang involvement. The women became closer to their spirituality every time they experienced institutional violence during which they felt "no type of control to change things." In most research on gang-involved women, spirituality is unseen force by researchers otherwise not taken as a serious source for understanding, transforming, and healing the world (Keating 2015). In this study, the mother's resistance through spirituality was a visible strategy for surviving institutional violence.

Mariela, age 22 and mother of one child, described how her faith helped her navigate school, a professional career as a social worker, and teenage motherhood, after

she exited her gang. Mariela's father, who was in and out her life, introduced her to gangs when she was a teenager. Mariela grew up in a neighborhood with a high presence of gangs. Every time she stepped out of her neighborhood, she entered another gang's territory. She lived in the middle of different Black and Latino gangs where she learned to duck down from bullets as well as negotiate protection from other gangs. In high school, after giving birth to her son, she decided that she did not want to provide that life for him. After having negative interactions with social workers, seeing her friends die in gang altercations, and experiencing incarceration, she chose education as an alternative to gangs. She viewed education as a way to shed the criminal label.

Mariela described the struggles associated with her gang involvement – having to change schools, intimate partner abuse, and fear of removal of her son by CPS – and how she overcame these struggles. When describing a picture of herself and her son at her college graduation (Figure 17), she shared how she disclosed her history of intimate partner violence with people at college:

“I prayed to God a lot for a long time to help me get through so much and graduate. I was doing good in school, you know, getting my grades, but at the same time I was able to disclose, even though it wasn't too many people, it was like to my professors and, like, even them writing little comments.... It wasn't that I was a victim. It was more that I was a survivor. And just that change of words and actions, I think that like empowered me so much more.”

Mariela’s spirituality helped her deal with her past victimization and move forward by obtaining her Bachelor of Arts degree. Mariela’s resistance through prayer helped her through the process of obtaining her BA. Her spirituality positively impacted on her motivation to complete her education. Now, as a social worker, she helps other people navigate the criminal justice and child welfare systems and deal with their own past negative experiences. Spirituality is “both a source of strength and hope and is the inner knowing tied to the body and experience” (Facio & Lara, 2014: #). Mariela used her spirituality-informed strength and commitment to move beyond her gang involvement and provide a different life for her son and herself.



Figure 17. Mariela, social worker in the hood

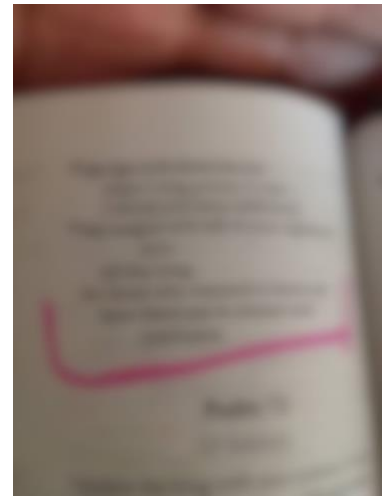


Figure 18. A mother’s faith

Rocío, age 45 and mother of 3 children, said, “*Dios nunca nos abandona. Eso déjales saber a todos, los que leen tus estudios de pandillas*” (“God never abandons us. This, tell it to everybody, everyone who reads your study of gangs”). Rocío was abandoned by her mother when she was a young child, and her father raised her. Rocío

migrated to the United States when she was 14. She became involved with gangs through her husband, who was part of one of the most dangerous gangs of Los Angeles at that time. She became pregnant at the age of 16 but left the gang life soon after her son was born.

After she had been out of the gang for approximately five years, Rocío, her husband, and her son were driving home in their car one day and someone shot at their car. Fortunately, no one in the car was hit. The police investigators assumed that either Rocío and her husband had done something criminal to prompt a retaliatory hit in the form of a drive-by shooting. They did not consider that the shooting was unprompted or that she and her family were victims of a crime. Her husband was cited for violating probation, and his driver's license was taken away. This event triggered Rocío's spirituality. She would pray every morning before walking her son to school (since she could not drive), risking her life and her son's life. Due to her gang affiliation, it was not safe to be walking in the streets because she could be threatened by rival gangs despite her exit from the gang.

Today, Rocío wakes up and prays daily for her son, a former gang member, who is now incarcerated. She often takes her three grandchildren to her Catholic church and guides them to pray for their father to come out of prison. Rocío feels that her prayers and service to the church will help her heal from her past and current suffering and help her son and daughters step away from a life of fear and trauma associated with gang involvement. During the interview, after becoming emotionally distraught when talking about her son's health and how he was maltreated in prison when they did not provide his

medicine for epilepsy, she walked to her daughter's room and grabbed her bible. She asked to use the image of the bible (see Figure 18) for the study. In tears, she explained:

“I have been a teacher in the church for over 10 years, and it has helped me stay close to God and to teach young children every week about the bible and faith. My prayers are what help me in the hardest times. I know that He is with us no matter what, and I have never doubted my faith, even today...that my son is in prison and dying slowly because they don't give him his medicines in there. My son isn't guilty, and I know God will touch the judge's heart and he will be out soon.”

Research on women in gangs argues that they resist victimization through violence (Chesney Lind 1995; Miller 2001). It has not addressed how women might resist victimization through spiritual practices. This study found that formerly gang-affiliated mothers also resist through spirituality which provides a way for them to cope with and heal from the institutional and other violence they experience. It also found that, informed and emboldened by their spirituality, the women engage in spiritual activism (Anzaldúa 2002): a spirituality that deals with the way they change themselves and change the collective (Saavedra and Perez 2017). They engage in knowledge production through motherhood teachings (i.e., lessons they teach their children) and institutional teachings (i.e., lessons they teach other people, such as in Mariela's social work and Rocío's church work).

Discussion and Conclusions

Although researchers and policy makers have highlighted the impact of gang membership and worked for decades strategizing gang interventions worldwide (Pyrooz et al., 2017), very few empirical studies have investigated experiences and effects of gang affiliation for mothers and their children (Hunt et al., 2012). This study examined the role of a former gang affiliation in the experience of and responses to institutional violence among Chicana mothers. It found that formerly gang-affiliated Chicana mothers experience institutional violence perpetrated by actors in the child welfare and criminal justice systems. This violence subjects the women and their children to trails of violence. The data show that institutional violence occurs for years after women exited the gang. Similar to the collateral consequences of mass incarceration and the “sorting individuals into criminalized collective identities” (Lopez-Aguado 2018), this study found that the consequences of a former gang affiliation include unanticipated forms of violence that harm mothers and affect their mothering. The mothers resist criminalization by institutional actors by employing strategies that reduce contact with institutions and cope with the institutional violence through spiritual practices.

This study addressed the gap in knowledge about women’s post-gang experience. It showed that this experience is not struggle free, despite “doing the right thing” by exiting the gang. Despite desistance from gang activity, stigma of gang affiliation had consequences for mothers, affecting their life chances and their mothering. Researchers heretofore have been unable to gauge the substantive significance of gang membership in the grand scheme of a gang-involved mother’s life trajectory, thus ignoring the impacts of

gang-affiliation-related stigma on themselves and their children. Consistent with prior stigma research showing that stigma affects life chances, low self-esteem (Wright et al 2000), unemployment and income loss (Link 1982; 1987), this study showed that stigma due to former gang involvement can produce negative consequences. It showed that a former gang affiliation results in heightened criminalization because the mothers are seen as violating normative conceptualizations of “a fit mother.”

This study adds to the understanding of the relations between motherhood, gang affiliation, and life outcomes, particularly after gang exit. Mothers are in a unique position to influence a shift in their children’s lives, and for formerly gang-involved mothers in the gang capital where this study occurred, it is in their hands to make this shift happen and in the hands of researchers and policy makers to support this highly criminalized population of mothers in doing so. If institutions continue perpetuating institutional violence for mothers, they will experience these trails of violence that harm not only themselves but their children as well. This study shows how mothering in a criminalized context can be a difficult journey. Similar to migrant families, family separation, fear, and trauma is built into legal policies (Abrego 2014) and for families embedded in gang-affiliated networks, institutions and policies can shape the outcomes of their lives. Participants showed how motherhood is impacted by the experiences with institutional violence. Yet, it is important to note how “children allow mothers to transcend psychologically and symbolically the limitations of economic and social disadvantage” (Edin and Kefalas 2005: 185). Unarguably, better understanding of the

experiences of motherhood after gang-involvement can inform gang prevention and intervention.

The study findings highlight the limitations of current life course theory and suggest a modified conceptualization that accounts for the role of institutions in an individual's life course. Thus, a life course intersectional approach highlights the consequences of gang involvement for gang-involved Chicana mothers and their children. Life course criminalization challenges the life course criminal career paradigm to be extended in a way that acknowledges individuals' positive turning points and institutions' failure to provide adequate support to remain out of the system. Individuals can desist from involvement in crime (i.e. gang involvement), but institutions must recognize that desistance for the consequences of gang affiliation to really end. Thus, the turning point cannot always just be the individual's behavior or identity change. In this case the turning point may depend on the joint shift in institutional perception of the individuals as having changed.

The findings regarding the ways that women resist criminalization and cope with institutional violence expand the understanding of how marginalized women respond to their victimization. These mothers show that in the context of institutional violence, they find ways to avoid institutional engagement and ensuing social control. Through this avoidance they can reduce negative contacts, such as decreased interaction with police. This avoidance, while positive in the short term, may have long-term consequences for inequality, when "there is a lack of attachment to important institutions such as hospitals, banks, schools, and the labor market leads to marginalization and impedes opportunities

for financial security and upward mobility” (Brayne 2014). The responses to violence were strategic in ways they avoided institutions, and coped through spiritual ways. Rather than resisting to victimization with violence (Chesney Lind 1995) the mothers responded with their spirituality and system avoidance, thus, well-crafted social programs should embrace these practices to support mothers.

This study shows that visual methods can effectively capture valuable information while at the same time, engaging the research participants as co-creators of knowledge that prioritized the voices of Chicana mothers. Participants’ photographs depicted a number of themes and provided an accessible visual translation of issues of concern at the time of participation in the study. Consequently, they demonstrate the utility of using photographs to identify important aspects of the lives of the participants. The methodological approach can be utilized for other marginalized populations of women, particularly criminalized ones that carry stigmatized labels such as undocumented, sex workers, drug users, and formerly incarcerated women.

While this study focused on public institutions, private institutions might also produce trails of violence such as nonprofits that reproduce marginality (Davis 2017) and perpetrate institutional violence. Future research can explore formerly gang affiliated mothers experience with private institutions. A honed in comparison of younger mothers vs older mothers can yield clearer results of outcomes for children. While this was not a study about children, future studies should investigate the children’s life trajectories when parents are gang involved or have desisted gang involvement. A future study would incorporate a honed in analysis of the impacts of being undocumented and gang affiliated

while mothering in the U.S. Additionally, an exploration of mental health outcomes of women who have been gang involved is essential and should be placed in the public health agenda.

This study is a call to acknowledge how institutions that are meant to nurture and protect can do harm. The findings indicate that institutions take a punitive rather than supportive approach to the Chicana mothers, failing to acknowledge their brave gang exit and the complexities of their post-gang life. Leaving a gang does not necessarily mean leaving relationships with family and friends who may be gang members, leaving high-crime and under-resourced neighborhoods, or leaving poverty. Similar to survivors of intimate partner violence, leaving abusive relationships does not mean they can automatically reach out to or access resources because of constraints on mental, physical, and fiscal health (Shoener 2017). When I place these significant institutional barriers within the context of data about women in gangs and Chicana mothers, it is disturbing that mothers can experience continuous impact for a past they left behind. The life course criminalization that occurs for mothers, a criminalization that follows in life trajectories after exiting the gang is one that needs to be furthered explored by researchers, where practitioners and institutional agents collaborate to gain a deeper understanding of women's changed behavior. This is all imperative because social justice must involve collaboration between communities, researchers, policy makers and practitioners.

While most research on gangs focuses on highlighting interventions for active gang members, policy makers and government funding should aim at supporting formerly gang involved people. "Through everyday acts or tactics of collective resistance against

institutional violence, we are establishing an ethos of collective resistance. These acts over time can help produce change that supplements the policy changes for which institutions should be held accountable” (Caballero et al., 2017: 61). As a scholar, mother, and former gang affiliate, and member of the Chicana Motherwork project, I urge for attention to the issues of formerly gang involved mothers undergo. Social scientists should identify the needs of mothers and find new ways to meet them. If we do not place attention to the violence they experience, specifically those that institutions are meant to prevent who will protect the next generation of children from falling into cycles of gang-involvement and trails of violence?

Appendix A: Consent to Participate in a Research Project (to be read verbally)



Principal Investigator: Katherine Maldonado
Institution: University of California, Riverside
Department: Sociology
Faculty Advisor: Tanya Nieri, PhD

What is the purpose of this research? This research project aims to understand how gang-affiliated, Latina young mothers resist and cope with violence. You are being invited to participate in this study because you self-identify as a Latina who became a mother before the age of 20 and been involved with a gang either through yourself, family, a romantic partner, or friends.

What is involved in being in the research study? Participation will involve a single meeting, lasting about 2 hours, with the researcher, at a location of your choosing and scheduled at your convenience. You will bring to the meeting photographs and/or images that tell about your life and experiences, excluding, for your safety, any photos/images that explicitly identify gangs. These photos/images will be scanned for later analysis and may be used in research dissemination efforts, such as a publication or photo/image exhibit, in which other people might be able to identify you. If you wish, you may distinguish the images/photos you share, permitting some to be scanned for later analysis and others only to be discussed in the meeting. During the interview you will tell the researcher why you chose those photos/images and what they tell about your life. In addition, you will be interviewed about your experiences with violence and responses to it. With your permission, the interview will be tape-recorded. You can still take part in the study without the audio recording. In that case, the investigator will record brief notes by hand. Finally, you will complete a short paper-and-pencil survey.

Are there any risks involved in participating in this study? Participation in this study involves potential risk. There can be a physical risk if someone else learns of the content of your interview, but the investigator will take procedures to ensure that everything you share remains confidential. To minimize this risk, you should avoid using names of people or gangs in the interviews. In case you do use names, the investigator will replace them with fictitious names. Some interview questions may make you feel uncomfortable or experience some emotion. You do not have to answer questions that you do not want to answer. If you need to speak to someone concerning any emotional responses triggered by your participation in the study, you may contact the Los Angeles County mental health/crisis line at 1-800- 854-7771, the Riverside County crisis/suicide intervention line at 951-686-4357, or the national crisis call center 1-800-723-8255 for assistance. The researcher has procedures in place to maintain confidentiality and protect the sensitive information you share. However, a breach of confidentiality is possible, and in that event, there may be legal and social consequences for you. To reduce this risk, the research team will use the data you provide solely for research purposes, use a pseudonym instead of your name in data files and research reports, and restrict access to

identifying information to the investigator alone. You are advised that any information that shows any of the persons, places, or things relevant to a criminal prosecution, such as a photograph or video, might be obtained by a prosecutor by means of a subpoena; and, in addition, under certain circumstances, membership in a gang might be evidence of a crime or might be evidence that can be used to increase a sentence in a criminal case.

Are there any benefits or costs from participating in this study? For your participation in the study, you will receive a \$25-dollar gift card. The only potential cost would involve transportation to the meeting and these expenses will not be reimbursed. However, to collect data the researcher can come to you or transport you to the meeting location of your choosing. Little research has been conducted on gang-affiliated Latina women who became mothers as teens. This study will produce needed scientific knowledge about your experiences. Knowledge of your experiences of violence, coping, and resistance will help us understand the individual and collective resilience of gang-affiliated Latina mothers. This can have implications for institutions that work directly with young mothers and gang members, as well as institutions that construct policies directly for these groups.

Can you decide not to participate? Your participation is voluntary; you can choose not to participate. If you choose to participate, there will be no consequences or penalties if you decide to withdraw from the study at any point. You will be compensated for your time even if you chose to withdraw from the study, either during and after it.

Who will see my study information and how will confidentiality of the information collected for the research be protected? Your study information will be stored securely by the research team. When the researcher presents or discusses research results, only pseudonyms will be used to refer to study participants like you or any other name you share, such as that of your child(ren). Your name will not be used to identify you in research reports. I will make every effort to keep confidential your information and to keep your information from being used for any purpose other than research. However, I am legally required to report abuse of minor children, abuse of vulnerable or elderly adults, or serious threat of harm to self or others. Interview audio-recordings, if collected, will be destroyed immediately after transcription, approximately 2 months after collecting interviews and transcription is done. Your photos will be stored securely and kept only for future publications and/or displaying purposes. We can discuss your concerns about photographs that you would like to be retained. It is your decision to choose the photos/visuals you would like for me to keep; we can discuss them only for analysis if you would like. There may be consequences of having your image(s) exposed during the dissemination process. For example, your future employment or other life situations may be affected or you may experience stigma associated with gang affiliation. You have the opportunity to thoroughly consider the risks and benefits and decide whether you want your images displayed or if you want them analyzed only.

Who should be contacted for more information about the research? If you have any questions, you may ask them now or at any time by contacting Katherine Maldonado, the researcher, by e-mail at kmald004@ucr.edu or phone at 323-534-0337. You can also contact Professor Tanya Nieri, the researcher's faculty advisor, by e-mail at

tanyan@ucr.edu or phone at 951 827 5854. If you have questions about your rights or concerns as a research participant, please contact the Institutional Review Board Chairperson at the University of California at Riverside by phone at 951-827-4802 during business hours, or by email at irb@ucr.edu.

Verbal Consent I (Pseudonym) agree to participate in the study and agree to be audio recorded. OR

I (Pseudonym) agree to participate in the study and do not agree to be audio recorded.

Appendix B: Interview Guides

Photo Elicitation Interview

Tell me about the photos you decided to share in this interview.

What do they mean to you?

What do they tell about you?

Why are they important to you?

Semi-Structured In-depth Life History Interview

1. Let's talk about your childhood family experiences.
 - What was it like growing up in Los Angeles as a Latina? Can you describe some of your favorite memories?
 - What was your family like? (single parent household?, stable home/residence?)
 - While growing up, were you exposed to violence in your family? If so, how?
 - While growing up, were you exposed to drug use in your family? If so, how?
2. Let's talk about your early experiences as a mother.
 - What was it like to become a mother as a teenager?
 - What was it like to be a teen mother in school?

- What was it like to be a teen mother at home?
 - What was it like to be a teen mother in your community?
3. Let's talk about your current family.
- Can you describe your relationship with the father of your child (children)?
 - Can you describe your relationship with your child(ren)?
 - What kind of support systems do you rely on to support your family?
4. Let's talk about your experience with institutions, agencies, and organizations.
- What have your experiences been with criminal justice institutions?
 - What have your experiences been with child welfare agencies?
 - What have your experiences been with social services organizations?
 - Have you had experiences with any other entities that have significantly affected your life as a gang-affiliated mother?
5. Let's talk about your experiences with gangs.
- How did you first become involved with a gang?
 - What activities did you engage in as a gang-affiliated teenager?
 - What is/was it like to be gang affiliated? Are there differences men and women who are gang affiliated? Can you give an example?
 - Have you had any direct contact with police or judicial system due to your affiliation with a gang? What were those experiences like (Positive or negative)?
 - What relation, if any, did your gang affiliation have to your education? Specific examples?
6. Let's talk about your experience of violence (institutional, community, interpersonal).
- Have you had experiences with violence in your life (as a child, mother, and gang affiliate). Describe them.
 - How have you dealt with the violence you experience? Are there any specific strategies you use to overcome it?

- Do you disclose your violence experiences to anyone (e.g., family, friends, counselor)? Why or why not?
 - What are the biggest challenges you face when you experience violence?
 - In what ways, if any, did your experiences with violence change you? (e.g., your mindset)
 - What advice would you give to a gang-affiliated mother who is experiencing violence?
7. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about to understand your life as a gang-affiliated mother or your experiences with violence?

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