Street Gangs in Indian Country:
a Clash of Cultures

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Abstract

Although street gangs have been a part of the urban landscape for decades, the appearance of gangs in Indian Country (reservations) is a fairly recent phenomenon. This paper explores specific aspects of the decision making paradigm that influence Native American youth to become involved in the gang subculture. Specifically, this research is directed at: 1. Identifying factors that contribute significantly to the decision by Native American youth becoming involved in gang activity, and 2. Determining the extent to which Native American culture may discourage youths from becoming involved in the gang subculture. Information for this paper was gathered through surveys and interviews of Native American gang members and non-members the majority of whom were in custody. In this paper we explore the impact of high unemployment rates, poverty, alcohol and drug abuse, school drop-out rates, and violence on gang affiliation decisions. The positive influences of culture, heritage, family, and peers on decisions not to join gangs are also examined.

INTRODUCTION

The consistent growth of the gang subculture as a national phenomenon has touched communities of every size across the country. While still perceived by some observers to be an urban-based social problem, gang activity has steadily affected parts of the country that were once believed to be immune from this behavior. Such is the case in Indian Country where the emergence of the gang subculture is not only found on reservations, but among certain urban-based Native Americans as well.

The development of the "gangster mentality" within the Native American population began in the early to mid-1990s and has grown steadily since then. It was not until the latter part of the 1990's, however, that serious research into this aspect of gang behavior started to occur, with a growing

recognition of the impact that gang activity was having in Indian Country. Even today, less is known about the degree and scope of Native American gangs compared to their gang groups. A clearer picture, however, is beginning to emerge, revealing that the extent of gang activity in Indian Country is more pronounced than previously thought.

The growth of gang activity among Native American youth can be traced to many of the social problems that historically plague Indian country. Extremely high unemployment rates, poverty rates, alcohol and drug abuse rates, school drop-out rates, violence rates, and associated social factors found on many reservations and other tribal lands all significantly contribute to the gang problem. These are, indeed, core factors that contribute to the growth of most all criminal subcultures. Although many of these same socio-economic issues are faced by juveniles and young adults in other parts of the country, the lack of resources to deal with these problems in Indian Country tends to perpetuate destructive behavior such as gang activity. Added to this mix is the popular image of the "successful gangster," an image projected by some elements of the mainstream media. Unfortunately, it is this flawed image of gang life that certain Native American youth seek to emulate as a means to cope with their status or as a means to compensate for their social condition.

Aside from the endemic social problems that exist in many parts of Indian Country, one of the primary reasons for the growth of gang activity among Native Americans over the past decade has been due to the barriers of non-recognition, minimization, and denial of the problem among tribal leaders, parents, and other reservation stake-holders. The reasons for the existence of these barriers range from the tendency to compare reservation gangs with urban-based gangs to the lack of an adequate knowledge base from which to recognize the problem when it emerges, to a sense of helplessness in how to deal with the problem.

The primary focus of this study is to examine specific aspects of the decision making paradigm that influence Native American youth to become involved in the gang subculture. Specifically, we are concerned with:

1. *Identifying factors that contribute significantly to the decision by Native American youth becoming involved in gang activity, either through forming their own gangs, or through joining existing gang structures; and*

2. *Determining the extent to which Native American culture may discourage youths from becoming involved in the gang subculture.*

This second aspect of the study seeks to determine whether Native American youth who are more closely involved in their own culture tend to

either ignore or abandon the influence of gang behavior.

Some of What We Know About Street Gangs

Although we do not know with certainty why gangs seem to flourish in some communities and not in others, contemporary research suggests there are a variety of common denominators among communities with gang problems. These factors include heightened levels of poverty, racism, a critical lack of employment opportunities, marginal family support, insufficient educational opportunities, and limited access to services. All of these components are abundantly present on many Indian Reservations.

Karen Kinnear (1996) in her work entitled "Gangs" suggests that young people join gangs in order to hang out with their friends, distinguish themselves from their parents, develop their own identities, or make money selling drugs or stolen property. Debra Goldentyer (1994) states that peer pressure is probably the biggest reason teenagers join gangs: "Pressure from peers to join a gang is not unique to poor or minority neighborhoods…it's all over America." Psychologists Edwin Megargee and Ray Golden (1973) conclude that psychopathic delinquent youth, with some level of gang involvement, have significantly poorer relationships with their parents than non-delinquents.

Gang researcher Martin Sanchez Jankowski (1991) describes gang members as individuals who are competitive, mistrustful, self-reliant, socially isolated, and defiant. Certain of these individuals are also extremely violent, or at least display a proclivity towards violence that manifests itself through gang affiliation or through the guise of gang involvement.

Lewis Yablonsky (1997) finds youth who are physically, sexually, or emotionally abused or abandoned by their parents are more likely to engage in acts of violence.
These youth also tend to denigrate themselves, suffer from feelings of worthlessness, and tend to care little about their own well-being. Yablonsky suggests these negative socio-psychological forces tend to contribute to the self-destructive behavior typically found within the gang subculture: "Their sense of boredom, and the feeling of an underlying insecurity about their masculinity, requires increasingly heavier dosages of bizarre and extreme violent behavior to validate the fact that they really exist and that they have some power in their life" (Yablonsky, 1997).

One of the truisms of gang activity in America today concerns the number of youth who are becoming involved as "first time" members within their own families. Here, their motivations are not based upon the need to emulate previously observed behavior in their family structure, but rather

some other need or desire to become involved in the gang lifestyle. Sandra Gardner's research (1994) suggests there are a number of reasons why certain young people join and remain with a street gang structure. According to Gardner, "Many of the same basic needs that motivated yesterday's youth gang recruits propel young people into gang life today: The need for identity and self-esteem, alienation from society, poor social conditions. Today, there are some new, deadly ingredients that have been added to the breeding ground for violent gangs. These new ingredients are a lack of jobs, an increase in poverty, the proliferation of drugs, and violence in our society" (Gardner, 1994).

Stan Haggart (1994) discusses the role of the family as it relates to gang influences by saying "(Another) reason that (gang involved subjects) place more value on peer acceptance may be related to the level of functionality of the family unit. The adolescents may have discovered that the family does not provide the needed level of acceptance. Therefore, the respondents may feel less attached to family, or down play their desire for acceptance by the family. They might also be seeking acceptance from peers as they realize that the family is not dependable or has abused them in some way." Haggart goes on to state that although the family belief system is an important component in the growth of an adolescent, the emerging adult is constantly develops individual values and a distinctive, separate, self-identity: "As individuals develop a separate value system, they also seek acceptance from others who share many of their beliefs. Most often, these persons with similar beliefs are people of the same peer group" (Haggart, 1994).

Added to the already tragic consequences of lack of socialization in dysfunctional families is the influence of substance abuse within the parental structure, particularly when one or both parents are drug or alcohol addicted. Substance abusers tend to focus on their own problems, which affects the parent/child relationship. Additionally, substance abusing parents tend to engage in ineffectual, sporadic or overly strict disciplinary practices toward their child. One of the consequences of this form of discipline is the tendency for children who are subjected to these forms of discipline to develop a convoluted view of justice in their own life and in society in general.

Another interesting viewpoint concerning youth involvement in the gang subculture is reflected in the periodical "School Safety" and involves an article which discussed the issue of youth boredom. The author of the article, S. Harper, suggests young people see gang activity as exciting and challenging, a means to "live on the edge" and experience the notoriety and mystique often associated with the gang subculture. "Many youths initially

join (gangs) to alleviate their boredom, an affliction that is as common for suburban teenagers as for inner city youth" (Harper, 1989).

Stan Haggart (1994) in, "Gang Inquiry: Possible Solutions in School," found that the top five reasons given, collectively, for joining a gang are (1) To belong to a group to have fun; (2) My friends are in a gang; (3) To feel accepted by others; (4) To have friends; (5) My family doesn't care about me. The top five reasons given, collectively, for not joining a gang were: (1) I already have friends; (2) I feel accepted by others; (3) My family cares about me; (4) I have other things to do; (5) I'm happy with my life.

The literature clearly indicates that many of the young people drawn into gang activity are seeking to meet acceptance needs that are not being met any other way. This aspect of involvement, combined with the need to belong, and the desire for recognition, result in a powerful influencing force in terms of heightened participation in the subculture. However, as gang researcher Al Valdez points out, there are no easy answers to the questions surrounding why youth become involved in gang activity. According to Valdez, "In reality the answer to the question (why young people join gangs) is complicated. Gang members join gangs for a number of reasons...safety, friendship, status, recognition, curiosity, excitement, to hide from authorities, out of a sense of tradition (parents and family), drug abuse and peer pressure...it appears that belonging to a gang gives members many positive feelings, including a sense of belonging, a sense of being wanted, a sense of contributing, a sense of honor and pride, and status among both gang and non-gang members...the gang becomes the source of survival and positive and powerful feelings for the gang member" (Valdez, 1997).

It is clear from literature on gang subculture that any one or combination of the aforementioned factors might influence a person's decision to join a gang. Two important questions for this study are: 1.Which factor or combination of factors is most important for explaining Native American involvement in gang activity? 2. What role, if any, does Native American culture play in the decision process?

Gangs in Indian Country

Although most Native American youth are not involved in gang activity, those who are gang-involved tend to be young, primarily between the ages of 12 and 24 years. In many cases, they either become involved through connecting to existing gang structures or through starting their own gang sets. These individuals often come from abusive, broken, or dysfunctional homes, are typically poor academic achievers, often have substance abuse problems, and are usually disconnected from their culture,

therefore their cultural foundation in the gang world instead of in their own heritage

Findings from the National Youth Gang Center's Survey of Youth Gangs in Indian Country, conducted in 2000 and 2001, suggests the majority (80 percent) of gang members in Indian Country are males, and most (75 percent) are under the age of 18, indicating strong involvement at the juvenile level. Many of these juvenile gang members are active in reservation schools, resulting not only in student safety issues, but also the opportunity to actively engage in gang recruitment activity. Previous studies of gang activity on Indian Reservations support this finding; in fact, one recent study reveals that half of all known gang members on the Navajo Reservations are currently enrolled in school. While education is a strong component in deterring gang behavior, the presence of gang activity in school is also conducive to gang growth, as many educational facilities do not have policies in place to either deal with gang issues or educate their youth about the dangers of gang involvement.

The National Youth Gang Center's survey also reveals that although most gang crimes occurring in Indian Country are property-based (graffiti and vandalism), the extent of violent crime connected to gang activity is increasing. Over the past decade, Indian Reservations across the country have increasingly reported escalating levels of gang violence, as well as drug usage and distribution.

An example of this rising tide of gang-based violence in Indian Country can be found in Northern Minnesota, where the Red Lake Indian Reservation experienced five gang or drug-related homicides in an 8-month period in 2001 and 2002. This statistic parallels general violent crime trends in Indian Country, which tends to experience a murder rate of 29 murders per 100,000 people, compared to the national rate of 5.6 murders per 100,000 people. Although not all of the violence is connected to gang activity, gangs are considered one of the factors in this escalating spiral of violence.

The illegal drug issue is also of increasing importance when considering the growth of gangs in Indian Country. The remote nature of many reservations is conducive to the proliferation of methamphetamine labs, as well as growing marijuana and the distribution and use of a wide variety of illegal substances, including diverted pharmaceutical drugs. The geographic proximity of many reservations to the Mexican border also provides easy access to these drugs, and given the extent of alcohol and drug abuse already occurring in many parts of Indian Country, this factor serves to exacerbate the gang problem.

Native American Gang Profile

Native American gangs will often take on the characteristics of urban street gangs, in terms of signs, symbols, and other forms of gang representation. While certain of these gang structures will identify themselves by names that are unique to the Indian culture or a specific area (Shanob Mob, Nomadz, Wild Boyz, Native Mob, Native Outlawz, Dark Side Family), others will assume a hybrid stance and align themselves with a nationally recognized gang structure (e.g., Native Gangster Bloods, Native Gangster Disciples, Indian Gangster Disciples, Native Mob Vice Lords, Igloo Housing Crips, Insane Cobra Folk Nation). The claiming of affiliation with nationally known gang structures is an example of the "hybrid" development of the gang culture. While many Native American gangs do not directly align themselves with national gangs some do adopt elements of national gang structures. Native American gang members will also often use nationally recognized body markings to symbolize their gang affiliation, although in some parts of the country, such as the upper Midwest, branding and burning of gang symbols into the body is a unique form of gang behavior.

Due to the general influence of gang activity in correctional facilities, and the tendency for some Native American gang members to feel a sense of pride in serving time, gang activity in prison among Native Americans is increasing as well. Native Americans, per capita, have a prison incarceration rate that is approximately 38 percent higher than the national rate, and the number of youth in custody in the Federal Bureau of Prisons has increased 50 percent since 1994. This trend may account for the emergence of Native American prison gangs such as Indian Brotherhood, Red Brotherhood, Indian Posse, Warlords, Bear Paw Warrior Society, Native Mob Family and similar structures. Native American gang members released from these facilities often return to their communities and bring the gang lifestyle with them, contributing to the growth of the gang problem.

Most gang structures in Indian Country are small and autonomous. Leadership tends to be de-centralized, with collective decision-making as a common theme. For most Native American youth involved in gang activity, the behavior is more about group cohesiveness, predatory activities, and a party atmosphere, rather than organized criminal behavior with a profit motive. Although some Native American gangs will claim turf, usually in terms of a particular neighborhood, area of the reservation, or housing project, gang alignment tends to revolve around which gang is perceived to be the most influential at any given time. The pressure to become involved in gang activity can be significant for many Native American youth, especially when that pressure is embedded in both the nucleus and extended

families or entrenched within the community itself.

Female involvement in Native American gangs is yet another important consideration. The 2001 National Youth Gang Survey of gangs in Indian Country revealed that a substantial number of Native American females (20 percent) are engaged in some level of gang activity, compared to the national rate of 6 percent for female gang involvement. The significance of female involvement should not be underestimated, particularly since Native American gang-involved females are allowing themselves to be physically and sexually abused. When this happens, females will sometimes escalate their own behavior to prove they can be as violent or anti-social as their male counterparts.

Many Native American youth involved in gangs, crime, and drugs feel little anxiety about the criminal justice system in Indian Country. In fact, many gang members maintain the perception that little or no retribution for criminal behavior will occur at the tribal court level. This attitude, together the lack of a comprehensive and sustained law enforcement model that emphasizes identification of active gang members allows gang activity to flourish and grow. Lack of knowledge of gang trends, membership numbers, and alliances and rivalries place law enforcement at a disadvantage because they are unable to have a clear understanding of the depth of the problem they are dealing with. This, too, is illustrated in the National Youth Gang Center's 2000 survey, when it was revealed that 41 percent of the Indian communities reporting gang activity indicated they did not know how many gang members were involved.

Native American Culture and Youth Gangs in the Great Sioux Nation

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, there are just over 4.1 million persons, or about 1.5% of the total population, who identify themselves as Native American or Alaska Native alone or in combination with one or more races. The most recent data, published in 2002, indicates there are approximately 562 federally recognized tribes in the United States. Of this number only 39% of Native Americans live on reservation areas, with 61% living outside designated Indian reservations (Census 2000). While acknowledging that each of these separate tribal structures embodies their own distinctive nuances in terms of culture, religion, and tradition, this research focuses on the culture and tradition of the Great Sioux Indian Nation, located in North and South Dakota, as well as western Minnesota.

The Sioux Tribe as traditionally been represented by three major geographically based tribal structures: the Santee, located mainly in Minnesota, the Yankton Sioux, located mainly on the prairies of western

Minnesota, as well as eastern North and South Dakota, and the Teton, located west of the Missouri river on the plains of North and South Dakota, and to a lesser extent, Nebraska.

Historically, there has always been extensive mobility among these tribes, therefore, the previously mentioned geographic locations is only an approximation. Because of this mobility, it was common for individual bands from any of the three major tribes to be represented within any of the major tribal groups. Each of the three primary tribal groups possessed a specific and distinctive dialect of the Sioux language, yet each tribal group could understand and communicate in the other's language. Among the three major tribal groups, the Santee are generally referred to as "Dakota Sioux," while those tribes located west of the Missouri River are generally referred to as "Lakota Sioux." A third Nakota Sioux exists for those tribes located generally upon the Missouri River's eastern or western banks. For purposes of this research, we use the term "Lakota" to include all three tribal entities, as well as referring to the Great Sioux Nation generally.

Perhaps the most unique aspect of Native American involvement in the gang subculture has to do with the paradox of the gang subculture versus the Native American culture. While every culture inherently possesses individual and unique characteristics, the Native American culture is steeped in traditional values primarily connected to family, respect for one another, wisdom, fortitude, generosity, and bravery. The paradox becomes evident when one considers the deleterious nature of gang activity, with its attendant emphasis upon violence, criminal activity, and self-destructive behavior. Although the argument can be made that the gang subculture is the antithesis of any mainstream culture, it is especially true when the gang subculture and the Native American culture collide.

The Lakota culture has long embodied the elements of four primary cultural values, of bravery, fortitude, generosity, and wisdom. Although Native American culture embodies much more than these four elements as the culture is steeped in tradition, custom, and ritual, it is these four core cultural values have long been the cornerstone in the development of individuals within the Lakota culture.

In "The Sioux," Royal Hassrick discusses these four cultural values as being "virtues which all men were expected to seek (within the Lakota culture)." While it was understood that no man could achieve excellence in all of these qualities, it was believed that every man should endeavor to attain something of each…that the Sioux should set forth virtues toward which the people should strive…gives a clue concerning what they considered essential to national well-being. These were their golden rules, and by them men lived

and prospered. However, the virtues also show what the Sioux believed most deleterious; the opposing qualities of fear, selfishness, and ignorance" (Hassrick, 1964).

Bob Bennett (Wambli Wanji – One Eagle) is a Lakota Sioux who provides insight into this aspect of the Lakota culture by stating, "In the olden days, mothers, fathers, uncles, aunts, grandmothers, grandfathers, and every other person within the community would instill within their children four virtues that served as pillars of the society. Wisdom, fortitude, bravery, and generosity were the four virtues given precedence over others. It is difficult to put them in an order where one would take priority over another. The importance of each virtue would be dictated by the person who passed the knowledge. Aspects of each of these virtues were necessary to be a Lakota, which means, literally, human being" (Bennett, 2000). These four values deserve closer scrutiny, due to the power and influence they exert within the culture. Indeed, these four values literally define a way of life among the Lakota people.

On Bravery within the Lakota Culture

According to historian Royal Hassrick, of the great virtues, "bravery was foremost for both men and women. To be considered full of courage, to have a strong heart, was an honor of extreme importance and worth great effort…bravery was inculcated on the mind from earliest childhood…bravery was not something heard about but never seen; bravery was a way of being, of acting, of doing" (Hassrick, 1964).

Bennett describes bravery within the Lakota culture as involving acts done for the good of the people: "A camp's warriors were the epitome of bravery. They earned the right to give their lives for their way of life. Anything difficult or dangerous was theirs to do. Brave acts included riding bareback into a herd of buffalo in order to obtain meat to feed the people, or before the advent of horses, crawling into a herd of buffalo with a wolf hide on your back and engaging an enemy in combat for the protection of the people in the camp who could not fight. The ultimate act of bravery would be to give one's life for the protection of the people. Acts done for selfish personal gain were not permitted. Everything about being brave had to be done for the good of the people. Anyone who repeatedly made bad choices was banished from the band. Short of being executed by your own camp, this is about the worst punishment that could happen" (Bennett, 2000).

Consider the paradox of the gang subculture in relation to these statements. Gang members tend to distort the concept of bravery, disassociating the core meaning of being

Brave as facing or enduring adversity with courage. Within the gang subculture, adversity is often presented in the form of intra-gang or inter-gang violence, the resolution of this conflict often revolving around an escalation of violence predicated upon fear, anger, or status seeking purposes.

On Fortitude within the Lakota Culture

The virtue of fortitude within the Lakota culture implies not only the endurance of physical discomfort and pain, but also the ability to remain calm and reasoned during periods of emotional discomfort and stress. According to Hassrick, "The importance of the quality of fortitude was demonstrated again and again in the social conventions of the Sioux. Men…were noted for their ability to suffer wounds unflinchingly, to experience long periods of hunger and exposure…to voluntarily accept physical pain during burial ceremonies, when the mourners were required to subject themselves to self-inflicted slashings on arm and legs, or to endure the agony of tiny skewers inserted beneath their skin, or to cut of the first joint of their little finger-all in order to show respect for the dead…these dramatic expressions of fortitude had their counterparts in day-to-day behavior. Here, fortitude might well be equated with reserve, might be described as a quality of dignity" (Hassrick, 1964).

Bennett describes fortitude within Lakota society as "the power to respectfully endure any encounter, good or bad, with humility. Humble endurance of anything was highly valued. Fortitude is a strong sign of respect for all positive and negative aspects of human existence on earth. Lakota people knew all good things come to an eventual end. Fortitude included showing humble endurance during times of plenty, as well as times of pain and strife" (Bennett, 2000).

Again, contrasting the Lakota value of fortitude with the values found within the gang subculture, the paradox is evident. The term "fortitude" invokes an image of "strength of mind," including the mental strength to recognize self-destructive behavior, such as that found within the gang subculture, and "strength of body," including the ability to endure physical pain and discomfort. Among Native American gang-involved individuals, the process of burning and branding gang symbolism into one's body has become commonplace. Although enduring the pain and discomfort associated with this behavior may be considered a warped form of fortitude, it is a drastic departure from the traditional value of fortitude held in such high esteem by Lakota elders.

On Generosity within the Lakota Culture

Another important virtue within the Lakota culture is that of generosity. According to Hassrick, "Generosity, as one of the four virtues, (gives) the individual an understanding of the meaning of wealth…the Sioux evolved a system which ensured the well-being of all the people by the voluntary and highly rewarding dispersal of property" (Hassrick, 1964).

Bennett discusses generosity by saying "Generosity within Lakota culture was extremely important. The Lakota were taught that all possessions were gifts. Life was a gift. Every morsel of food was a gift from the animal or plant nations. The Lakota believed any animal killed for food allowed itself to be taken for the good of the people. The Lakota were always told to give something back in return for what they received. The accumulation of material items was not acceptable. The amount of things given away was a sign of wealth more than the accumulation of items" (Bennett, 2000).

Within the gang sub-culture, generosity is essentially a non-consideration. Gang members tend to think, act and behave in a self-serving manner, with individual interests far outweighing collective interests. Although there are gang-involved individuals who espouse a concept of unity, loyalty, and family within the gang structure, these elements tend to pale beside the more consuming concept of self.

As an example, when considering the types of crimes gang members commit, most crimes are not committed for the furtherance of the gang, but rather for personal gain. Generally speaking, the most common type of crimes committed for furtherance of the gang structure are assault-based crimes, and even when this sort of event occurs, individual gang members are seeking status, approval and recognition for themselves, with little consideration given to the gang structure itself.

On Wisdom within the Lakota Culture

For the Sioux Indians, the virtue of wisdom implied much more than heightened intellect. It is recognized, within the Lakota culture, that of the four virtues, the virtue of wisdom is the most difficult to attain, since it is dependent upon variables beyond the control of the individual. Bennett addresses the cultural value of wisdom by stating, "One could say wisdom in Lakota culture embodied three principal areas; self-wisdom, physical wisdom and spiritual wisdom. The wisdom of self-awareness was perhaps the most important. If a Lakota person knew their own personal place in the universe, then they were ready to live with all others. Lakota people believed that wherever they stood was the center of the universe and that standing in the center of everything was humbling because the eye of every being was

upon them." Fellow Lakota, other tribal members, animals, plants, and rocks all looked at them and expected them to possess wisdom. Self-wisdom incorporated knowledge of one's customs. A true sense of respect for others and recognition of personal actions affected others results from inner wisdom. A Lakota would always seek to improve self-knowledge in a humble way.

Physical wisdom was knowledge of the earth and how her parts moved. This wisdom would require a person to know their own body's physical limits; to know the seasons, to watch the animals; to make tools; to know how to make medicines from plants; to track and hunt down buffalo, to know what plants are edible and to simply survive as a human being.

Spiritual wisdom was to acknowledge Tunkasila Wakan Tanka (Grandfather's Great Mystery) for the gift of life. This wisdom allowed people to know they were related to everything through the Creator. Lakota men and women were given certain pathways into the spirit world and all were to know them" (Bennett, 2000). Additionally, according to Hassrick, achieving the virtue of wisdom involves developing the ability "to advise others, to arbitrate disputes, to instill confidence as a leader of a war party or as a mentor for young men. Wisdom (means) in part, getting on well with people and, as a leader, inspiring others" (Hassrick, 1964).

Lakota elders undoubtedly did not intend for their youth to take on the role of a leader within a structure that advocates and promotes criminal, anti-social and self-destructive behavior. Involvement in gang activity, whether as a leader of a follower, is not about arbitrating disputes, since one of the premises of the gangster mentality is that all conflict is expected to be resolved through violence, as opposed to mediation. Gang involvement is also not about mentoring young men in a positive fashion, getting along well with people, or inspiring others in a constructive manner. In fact, research has shown that there is actually more conflict that occurs within gang structures than between gang structures, further illustrating the paradox between the Lakota culture and the gang subculture.

On the Rule of Law within the Lakota Culture

The Lakota culture has also traditionally been about obedience to the laws of man, and adherence to the tenets of social order. Native American laws were intended to provide an atmosphere of safety and security in key areas of social existence. As Hassrick observes, "these laws primarily centered on protection of property, marital fidelity, communal housing rights, and the guarantee of life itself." Breaking these laws resulted in severe penalties. "Thievery was recognized as a heinous offense, and apparently

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personal property was exposed to view almost continually since it was inviolate. Property included not only food and clothing, but tools and paraphernalia, dogs and horses. The codes against stealing were so completely inculcated, so much an internalized sanction, that offenses were extremely rare, almost non-existent. Thieving was something that children might do in naiveté' or that the incorrigible misfit might attempt in utter stupidity. But no one in his right mind, no one capable of thinking, would ever imagine theft" (Hassrick, 1964-p.47).

The rule of law, within the gang subculture, is a thing to be mocked and ignored. In fact, one of the belief systems within the gang subculture addresses the concept of material acquisitions defining success in American society. The logic of the gang culture states that one may use any means available to achieve this success, whether that means be through robbery, burglary, or thievery. The gangster mentality is about engaging in behavior that satisfies and serves the individual over the greater social structure, and this belief is completely paradoxical to the concept of laws maintaining social order.

On the Concept of Family within the Lakota Culture

One of the absolute cornerstones of the Lakota culture is the family, both nuclear and extended. Children have always been considered sacred beings, and women were always considered to be the keepers of sacred knowledge and social skills. According to historian Luther Standing Bear, "The home was the center of Lakota society…the place where good social members were formed and the place whence flowed the strength of the tribe. Here it was that offspring learned duty to parents, to lodge, to band, to tribe and to self. There took root their virtues and cultural attributes. Forces, sensed but not seen, called. Good went into the deep consciousness of these young minds, planted there by the Indian mother who taught her boy honesty, fearlessness and duty, and her girl industry, loyalty and fidelity…Every son was taught to be generous to the point of sacrifice, truthful no matter what the cost, and brave to the point of death. These impulses…generosity, truthfulness, and bravery…may be dressed and polished in schools and universities, but their fundamental nature is never touched" (Standing Bear, 1933).

Over the past fifteen years, there has been a shift among certain Native American youth, who have turned away from their culture, and from their biological families. Instead of embracing their traditional family, they are instead taking up the instead the gang family. Those involved in gang activity argue the gang is, in fact, a family structure, offering love,

recognition, acceptance and belonging, elements not always present in certain of today's Native American families. These youth present a powerful argument for their involvement in the "gang family," yet not all of these individuals emerge from dysfunctional biological family structures. Some individuals willingly choose to abrogate their responsibility to their parents, grandparents and elders and immerse themselves in the gang subculture.

In a general sense, it seems many of the Native American youth who turn to gang activity struggle with families that experience a high degree of alcoholism, unemployment, and abuse. In these instances, it becomes readily understandable why several of these youth will look elsewhere for needs that are not being met in traditional family structures. According to Valdez, "it appears that belonging to a gang gives members many positive feelings, including a sense of belonging, a sense of being wanted, a sense of contributing, a sense of honor and pride, and status among both gang and non-gang members...the gang becomes the source of survival and positive and powerful feelings for the gang member" (Valdez, 1997).

Contributing Factors to the Emergence of Gang Activity in Indian Country

According to a March 18th, 1995 article in the New York Times, gang activity is an "urban" affliction that has begun to make itself felt on dozens of scattered Indian reservations in the west. The article reflects that reservations are the "new frontier" of gang activity, where some young Native Americans have imported a "whole (gang) culture" that has nothing in common with Indian traditions.

Given the strength of the Native American culture, one must consider what factors exist that may contribute to Native American youth turning to gang behavior. The fact of the matter is that in American society today, contributing factors abound, not only for Native American youth, but also for youth of all races and ethnicities, to become involved in this behavior. Directing attention specifically toward Native American involvement in gangs, however, the contributing factors are readily evident.

Media and the Gang Culture

It would be a significant oversight to dismiss the impact of the media on gang lifestyle. The gangster image has been marketed and portrayed in numerous motion pictures, television programs, and within the music industry. While we are not suggesting that the media causes young Native Americans to become gang members, it is not unreasonable to suspect that the media does exert some influence on youth behavior. This is especially

true for young Native Americans who live in a state of anomie, in which they see their desired goals, but don't see the means to achieve those goals, especially when they're surrounded by abject poverty, unemployment, alcohol and drug abuse, and a host of other social issues.

The media portrayal of the "successful gangster" (i.e., Public Enemy, 50-Cent, N.W.A.) may be a catalyst for certain vulnerable young people, who may see the gang lifestyle as the path to success. The same dynamic holds true in terms of violence as a preferred means of conflict resolution. Many young Native Americans have been socialized through the media to believe that resolving conflict through violence is a natural method of behavior, and this attitude is borne out in the statistical evidence of higher than average rates of violence in Indian Country. Whether these higher rates can be attributable to the media is unknown, although clearly the media is one of the contributing to the proliferation of Native American gangs.

Unemployment as a Contributing Factor to Native American Gang Involvement

According to the 1980 census, the Native American unemployment rate was 13 percent, while the 1990 census Native American unemployment rate was 25.6 percent. Consequently, in recent years, Native American unemployment rates were 4 to 5 times higher than national rates for the early 1990s, a rate at least double Depression-era level unemployment. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported the 1991 unemployment rate among Native Americans was 45 percent; the nation's highest, while the overall American population experienced an 8 percent rate. It has been suggested that the 45 percent figure is artificially low, as that number is based upon people actively seeking work. According to William N. Thompson, writing in American Indian Issues - A Reference Handbook, "Many of the Native Americans have accepted a status of permanent unemployment and have stopped seeking work. On some reservations, the number of unemployed adults may exceed 80 percent" (Thompson, 1996). Another source, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, reports "unemployment on Indian reservations averages about 37%. Unemployment rates as high as 65% to 85% have been estimated for certain regions of Indian Country" (see: National Sexual Violence Report: Sexual Assault in Indian County, 2000). Unemployment typically results in poverty, and Thompson also states that the general poverty conditions of Native Americans are related to education characteristics.

While unemployment rates on reservations are indeed high, some relief in unemployment has been realized as a result of the Indian Gaming Act that allows for casino gaming on some reservations. In addition to increasing

per capita income for many Native Americans, community infrastructure has improved as a result of earmarked funding. While gaming provides tribes with the benefits of employment opportunities and increased revenues, there is also a "downside" to this newly found revenue stream. For some Native American tribes, gaming revenue entitlements have attracted gang members and criminals who once lived as "inner city" Native Americans. Some have moved back to the reservations only to take advantage of the per capita payments tribal members receive while others see casino gaming as an opportunity to open new channels of drug distribution.

Lack of Education as a Contributing Factor to Native Americans Gang Involvement

Thompson asserts that Native American educational levels are much lower than national averages. According to 1990 Update Census figures, less than two-thirds (66 percent) of Native American adults over 25 were high school graduates. In the general population, 75 percent of adults over age 25 have this level of education or higher. For Native Americans living on reservations, the portion of high school (or higher) graduates was only 54 percent" (Thompson, 1996).

David Beaulieu (2000) suggests schools with predominantly Indian student populations experience, in fact, extremely high student and staff mobility. These schools also tend to serve student populations disproportionately affected by violence and substance abuse that negatively impact school readiness and individual capacity to learn. These problems are also compounded by the fact that schools serving Native students also lack the appropriate knowledge base for accomplishing the professional development and curricular development objectives necessary for sustained improvement while also meeting unique social linguistic and cultural needs.

Historically, schools for Native learners, including large numbers of isolated rural schools, have defined success by their ability to enable students to leave their communities either for employment or post-secondary educational opportunities far from home. For many Native learners, this particular purpose of education not only alienates the students from their homes and communities, but also causes the students to drop out of school— backstabbing the pursuit of education. Tribal governments and Indian communities have sought to reform schools to be culturally appropriate and consequently more effective. They have also attempted to recast the mission and purposes of schools to meet their unique and distinctive social, cultural, and economic needs.

American Indian students have made some progress in recent decades but continue to be disproportionately affected by poverty, low educational attainment, and access to fewer educational opportunities than other students. Current conditions seem to have changed little from similar conditions noted 30 years ago:

      • Indian students often start school unprepared to learn, especially children who are bilingual or developmentally delayed.

      • The achievement rate of Indian students is often lower. American Indianstudents, on average, score lower on the NAEP test than other students.

      • The dropout rate for Indian students is significantly and consistently higher than the national average.

      • Schools with high enrollments of Indian students are often geographically isolated in small communities and rural areas. Transportation of students to school is often difficult and time consuming, with many students, daily, traveling long distances over unpaved roads.

      • There is often a high rate of unemployment and poverty in Indian communities and on Indian reservations. In 1990, 36.2% of American Indian children ages 5-17 were living below the federal poverty level ($16,400 for a family of four), compared with 17% of all other children. Significant numbers of Indian children live in families with incomes below 50% of the federal poverty level.

      • Few Indian students enter and finish college. In 1990, 9.3% of American Indian persons 25 years old and over had attained a bachelor's degree or higher, as compared to 20.3% of the total population (Beaulieu, 2000).

Schools are only part of a much larger landscape from which Native American youth draw their formative experiences. In order to diminish the influence of gangs, schools must expanded their own positive influence directed toward student retention, increasing academic achievement standards, and advancing more students into higher education.

Familial Considerations as a Contributing Factor to Native American Gang Involvement

According to 1993 U.S. Census figures, Native American families were less likely than other American families to be two-parent household families (64 percent versus 79 percent). More than 27 percent of the Native American families were maintained by a single female parent, while only 17 percent of other American families had such a structure. This statistic is important to consider in terms of its connection with the lack of effective

male role models within many Native American families. This lack of effective male parenting leaves male youth in the position of determining, on their own, who they will emulate in terms of male behavioral patterns.

This is not to say that positive male role models cannot be found outside the home. However, in too many cases the role model chosen is less than desirable, resulting in problems associated with gang, criminal and deviant behavior. For example, even though many gang-involved youth become adults and turn away from their gang behavior, their influence remains a factor. Gang researcher C. Ronald Huff observes that as some older gang members change their behavior, they tend to leave a mold behind for younger siblings to emulate. As certain of these "former" gang members become parents themselves, they raise their children in a manner that tends to perpetuate gang behavior (Huff, 1990).

Former Native American gang member DeLaney Apple, a Lakota Sioux, turned away from gang activity after accidentally shooting and killing his best friend. In a story entitled Lakota Culture Combats Gangs in the newspaper Indian Country Today, Apple states, "Living a gang lifestyle is easy when the people around you accept it…When our generation was growing up, we saw our uncles and older adults fighting each other, and we learned the violent activities from seeing it. Our parents knew we were in gangs, and they protected us because they knew no different."

Serious consideration must also be given to the historical perspective that has contributed to the condition of many Native American families today. During the most aggressive period of forced assimilation of Native American people, the late 1800's and early 1900's, many Native American families were torn apart, with children sent to boarding schools to learn the ways of the dominant (white) culture, effectively causing many traditions and customs, as well as cultural knowledge and identity, to be lost. According to a paper entitled The Case for Indigenous Concepts for Indigenous Gang Members , V. Tawney White Calf, argues "Today there is a crisis in Indigenous territory among our youth, specifically in the area of self-identity, which has not been prevalent since the implementation of Government and Christian boarding schools. What is referred to as 'Boarding School Mentality' includes some of the parents and grandparents of today's youth. This mentality includes denial, lack of parenting skills, and ultimately the loss, to some degree; of indigenous cultural norms. We are now witnessing what the Boarding School Era has created; dysfunctional families and a hostile community environment. A dysfunctional environment leads to chaos, the opportunity for illegal activity, and deviant behavior." (White Calf, 1998)

Additionally, according to Dean Chavez, writing in Indian Country Today, "Instead of learning how to be truthful and strong from their parents, our children are learning how to be gangsters and drug users…Instead of learning the wisdom of the ages and respect from their grandparents, these children are learning to respect basketball players, football players, and rock musicians…Instead of learning their Native songs from the reservations, they are learning rap songs from the ghettos…Instead of being taught the difference between right and wrong by parents and an extended family, too many Indian students are learning how to cut class, skip school, and party" (Chavez, 1998).

Loss of Cultural Identity and other Sociological Issues as Contributing Factors to Native American Gang Involvement

Gang research suggests that marginalization is a motivating factor behind the formation of gangs, and individual gang involvement. Marginalization, with any given population, tends to produce anti-social attitudes and behavior, as well as a sense of rejection. These feelings of rejection will become magnified if those marginalized individuals attempt to "fit in" to the larger society, but are rebuffed. This, in turn, results in attitudes of negativity that naturally contributes to gang and criminal behavior.

Dean Chavez also addresses the issue of cultural identity stating that, "The thing that worries me is that we are raising a generation of lost Indian children. They are not being taught their Native ways at all, in too many cases. Twenty years ago, almost all of the Navajo elementary school children spoke Navajo, for instance. Today, fewer than half of Navajo children do. In some areas of the reservation the percentages who do is under 25 percent. If this were an isolated phenomenon, I would say not to worry about it. But it is not isolated. It is happening to Navajos, Apaches, Kiowas, Sioux, and Kumeyyay. It is happening almost everywhere" (Chavez, 1998).

Poverty as a Contributing Factor to Native American Gang Involvement

It is a well-known and documented fact that Native Americans are among the poorest of the poor when compared with other ethnic and racial groups in the United States. In 1990, median household income for Native Americans was $20,025, down from $20,542 in the 1980 census, indicating that Native Americans lost ground in household income during the 1980s. Only Blacks with a 1990 median household income of $19,758 ranked lower than Native Americans, while Whites ($31,435), Asians ($36,784), and Hispanics ($24,156) ranked higher. The 1990 census clearly shows that Native Americans were greatly impoverished, with 30.9 percent living below

the poverty line, compared with 9.8 percent of Whites, 14.1 percent of Asians, 25.3 percent of Hispanics, and 29.5 percent of Blacks.

Even higher percentages of Native American children were living below the poverty line, 37.6%, while 12.3 percent of White children, 38.8 percent of Black children, 16.6 percent of Asian children, and 31.0 percent of Hispanic children were living below the poverty line. In 1980, 32.5 percent of Native American children were living in poverty, and so the decade of the 1980s indicates a deteriorating economic position for Native American people and children (www.aisc.ucla.edu/ca/tribes).

According to the 1993 (Update) U.S. Census Bureau report, and in research conducted by William Thompson, Native American female single-parent families had a median income of only $10,742, compared to $17,414 for non-Native female single-parent families. Additionally, 27 percent of the two-parent Native American families were living below the "poverty line" in 1990. This percentage contrasts with 10 percent of all families in the United States. While these figures include Native Americans live off reservation, the economic reality of life on reservations is much worse: 51 percent of Native American lived below the poverty line in 1990. Two-thirds of the people living on the Pine Ridge Reservation of South Dakota lived in poverty. Among two-parent Native American families, the median family income in 1990 was $21,750, compared to $32,225 for the total population. National statistics clearly indicate that the poverty rate on Native American Reservations is more than twice the national average.

METHOD and SAMPLES

One of the great challenges for researchers involved with Native American issues is finding a sufficient amount of reliable, valid, data for conducting quantitative analysis. The fact is that many Native Americans jurisdictions do not have the organization, capacity, or interest to collecting and maintaining machine readable data. Still, there is the need to go beyond an anecdotal description of a criminal justice issue such as gangs in Indian county. In this research, we attempted to systematically gather information by way of surveys and personal interviews.

Our sample included both males and females between the ages of 18 and 27 years who were either an enrolled member of one of the Sioux Tribes (Lakota, Nakota, and Dakota) or related by birth to an enrolled member of one of the aforementioned tribes. The research presented here was compiled from 50 interviews of Native Americans known to the researchers. Because it is difficult to identify a sample of gang members who would be willing to

come forward and talk about their gang activity, we chose to interview Native American arrestees who were already incarcerated at the Pennington County Jail in Rapid City, South Dakota. Researchers did not know whether or not the arrestee was a gang member at the time of their incarceration; this information was established once the arrestee agreed to participate in the research project.

The objective of the survey was to determine primary motivators behind the involvement of Native American adolescents and young adults in the gang subculture. In order to facilitate a more complete exchange and understanding of the information discussed, the survey instrument was designed to allow for personal interaction between the interviewer and interviewee. The survey was a combination of objective and open-ended questions designed to capture information from both gang-involved and non-gang involved Native American subjects. Respondents were afforded the opportunity to express general attitudes and opinions toward their personal family life, involvement in their culture and heritage, and their reasoning for either become involved or not becoming involved in gang activity. In the end, a total of 50 interviews (25 past or present gang members and 25 non-gang members) were conducted over a 12 month period.

SURVEY RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Analysis of the data indicated that respondents fell into three rather distinct groups, current gang members (n=11), former gang members (n=14), and persons with no gang affiliation (n=25). In terms of demographics, the average age of non-gang members was only slightly higher 22.1 years compared to 21.8 for gang members. As one might expect, the majority of subjects were male 86% (n=43) whereas 14% (n=7) were female. Forty-three (86%) of the respondents are themselves enrolled members of one of the three aforementioned tribes, with seven respondents indicating that they are not enrolled in any of the three tribes. However, the non-enrolled individuals were all related by birth to an enrolled tribal member, making them viable candidates for this study. Of the enrolled respondents, thirty-four were Lakota Sioux, eight were Dakota Sioux and one was Nakota Sioux.

When considering family background we found that 26% (n=13) respondents indicated their parents are married, another 26% (n=13) indicated their parents are divorced, 16% (n=8) indicated their parents are separated, 28% (n=14) indicated their parents did not marry, and two respondents had at least one deceased parent. The review of our family background indicated that 74% (n=37) of respondents did not come from a two-parent household. Furthermore, family configuration for gang members

was not significantly different than that of non-gang members.

In terms of educational level (last grade completed), respondents indicated a range from a low of 7 years (middle school) to a high of 16 years (Bachelor's degree). The average number of years of schooling was 11.02. When gang affiliated and non-gang members were analyzed separately results showed that non-gang members averaged 11.5 years of school compared to an average of 10.5 years for the gang members.

Next, respondents were asked a series of questions related to their reasons for joining a gang, their family life, and knowledge of Native American culture. It is interesting to note that 20 respondents selected the positive response to the question of family support while 25 respondents selected the negative response with more non-gang respondents selecting the positive statement (Table 1). In terms of parental support, the majority of respondents (80% n=36) indicated their parents were supportive while only 20% (n=9) of respondents felt their parents were not supportive. A slightly larger portion of the non-gang respondents indicated the positive, when compared to gang involved respondents. A majority of respondents (75.6% n=34) indicated that they felt loved and provided for as a child compared to (24.4% n=11) respondents who indicated that they felt neglected by their parents (Table 2).

Table 1: Family Life vs. Gang Involvement

Family Life	Non-Gang	Gang	*Total*
Positive	13	7	20
Difficult	10	15	25
Total	23	22	45

Table 2: Provided with Good Family Life vs. Gang Involvement

Good Life	Non-Gang	Gang	*Total*
Provided	23	18	41
Not Provided	1	6	7
Total	24	24	48

In conducting further analysis in conjunction with this question and its responses, the responses to the four pairs of statements were summed into an overall "Family Life" variable. Each positive response was scored with a value of "1", and a negative response a value of "0". Respondents indicating both conditions in a pair of a statement were scored "0.5" for that pair. The sum of these scores produced a range, which was then analyzed as a Likert-scale. Overall, a mean of 2.79 positive responses was given. The means for

gang and non-gang groups were compared using a t-test, and a significant difference was found to exist (t (df = 48) = 2.050, p = 0.023; Table 3).

Table 3: Sum of Four Family Conditions vs. Gang Involvement

Sum of Four Family Conditions	Non-Gang	Gang
Mean	3.16	2.42
Variance	1.328	1.931
Observations	25	25
Pooled Variance	1.629	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
Df	48	
t Stat	2.050	
(P<=t) one tail	0.023	
t Critical one tail	1.677	

QUESTION: *How would you characterize your knowledge of the American Indian culture and your heritage?*
ANSWER OPTIONS: *A. I have a strong foundation and knowledge of the Native American culture and my heritage.*
B. I know some things about the Native American culture and my heritage.
C. I know very little about the Native American culture and my heritage.
D. I know nothing about the Native American culture and my heritage.

When asked to characterize their knowledge of their Native American culture and heritage, 38% (n=19) indicated a strong knowledge, another 38% indicated some knowledge, 24% (n=12) indicated little knowledge, and none of the respondents indicated that they knew nothing of their culture and heritage. We found no appreciable difference between gang and non-gang members relative to their claimed knowledge of Native American culture and heritage.

QUESTION: *How important do you think a positive family life is to preventing gang activity among Native American youth?*
ANSWER OPTIONS*:   A. Very important*

> *B. Somewhat important*
> *C. Not very important*
> *D. Not at all important*

The majority 84% of respondents (n=42) indicated that a positive family life is very important to preventing gang activity while 14% (n=7) indicated that a positive family life is somewhat important and one person indicated that a positive family life is not at all important to preventing gang activity.

QUESTION: *How important do you think knowledge of the Native American culture and heritage is to preventing gang activity among Native American youth?*
ANSWER OPTIONS:*A. Very important*
> *B. Somewhat important*
> *C. Not very important*
> *D. Not at all important*

For this question, 68% of respondents (=n 34) indicated that knowledge of Native American culture and heritage is very important to preventing gang activity (28% n=14) felt this knowledge to be somewhat important, and two felt this to be not very important.

QUESTIONS ASKED ONLY TO GANG-INVOLVED RESPON-DENTS:

Of the 25 respondents who indicated gang involvement, 11 admitted to current involvement, while 14 indicated that they had previously been involved with gangs.

QUESTION: *What is the name of the street gang(s) you were/are involved with?*

There were a variety of responses to this question. The gang affiliation most frequently reported was The Boyz (a Rapid City based street gang) with seven respondents indicating involvement with this gang structure. Five respondents indicated involvement with the Northside Gangster Disciples (a Rapid City based street gang); two each indicated involvement with the Imperial Gangsters, South Park Crips, and Sureno 13, all of these gang structures from various locations across the country. Other respondents indicated involvement with the Native Gangsters, Eastside Crips, Santana Block Crips, Dark Side Family, Northside Tre Tre, Original Gangster Posse, 18th Street Crips, the Lynch Mob, and Westside Locos. These gangs are combination of Rapid City based gangs and gangs from other

locales.

QUESTION*: In what community (city/state) were you mainly involved in street gang activity?*

Again, of the respondents who indicated past or present gang involvement, 56% (n=14) were involved in gang activity within the Rapid City, South Dakota area, or in various other locations. One respondent indicated gang involvement both in Rapid City and elsewhere.

QUESTION: *Did you/do you consider yourself to be an active or associate street gang member?*
ANSWER OPTIONS: *A. Active*
                                 B. Associate

Of the gang involved respondents, 16 characterized themselves as currently being or having been, at some point in time, active gang members. Nine respondents characterized themselves as being associate gang members.

QUESTION: *Did you/do you consider yourself to be a leader within that gang?*
ANSWER OPTIONS: *A. Yes*
                                 B. No

Only eight respondents characterized themselves as leaders within their gangs, while the other 17 did not.

QUESTION: *Is this the first gang you've been involved in?*
ANSWER OPTIONS: *A. Yes*
                                 B. No

The majority of the respondents (n=23) indicated that the gang they claimed affiliation with was their first gang and the only gang structure they had been involved in. When gang members were asked if they would join another gang, most respondents indicated that involvement in a gang was for life, and switching to another gang structure was dangerous, or wrong, because of the proclaimed allegiance claimed to that initial gang structure.

QUESTION: *For approximately how many years/months were you/have you been involved in gang activity?*

Based upon the information provided by the respondents, the average time spent involved in gang activity was 6.7 years.

QUESTION: *Who encouraged you to become involved in gang activity?*
         (Circle all that apply)
ANSWER OPTIONS: *A. No one…I decided on my own*
                B. Friend within the gang
                C. Friend outside the gang
                D. Relative
                E. Other

Total responses delineated by current/former gang activity, as well as total responses for each of the options, are listed in Table 4. Considered individually, none of the possible influences to join a gang was significant when compared with current gang involvement.

Table 4: Who encouraged you to join a gang?

Responses	Current Gang Member	Former Gang Member	Total
A. No One	2	5	7
B. Friend within Gang	4	7	11
C. Friend Outside Gang	2	0	2
D. A Relative	7	4	11
E. Other	0	0	0

QUESTION: *Why did you choose to become involved in gang activity?*
         (Circle all that apply, and then rank order):
ANSWER OPTIONS: *A. My friends in the gang wanted me to join them.*
                B. I wanted to feel like I belonged to something.
                C. I thought it would be cool to be a gang member.
                D. I was forced to get involved, because if I didn't join, I would've been hurt by the gang.
                E. I didn't like my home life and I wanted the gang to be my family.
                F. The promise of money and/or property of some kind.
                G. For access to alcohol or drugs.
                H. To feel a sense of power.
                I. Other

The above answer categories were identified as reasons for joining a gang with the response "To feel a sense of power" as being the most

frequently recorded, and "I was forced to get involved…" being the least common response (Table 5).

Table 5: Reasons for Becoming Involved in Gang Activity
        (By number of responses)

Reason	Current	Former	Total
H. Power	9	13	22
A. Friends in Gang	6	10	16
G. Alcohol/Drugs	6	10	16
C. Cool	4	10	14
B. Belonging	6	7	13
E. Home Life	2	7	9
F. Money/Property	4	5	9
I. Other	3	4	7
D. Forced/Fear	0	1	1

QUESTION: *Do you intend to stay involved in gang activity?*
ANSWER OPTIONS: *A. Yes*
                 B. No
                 C. Don't know
                 D. Refused

        This question was asked of the 11 respondents who indicated that they were currently involved in gang activity. Of these respondents, 4 answered "no", and 5 answered "yes". Several of the respondents answering "yes" to this question indicated their belief that joining a gang was for life.
QUESTION: *What are your main reasons for staying involved in gang activity?*
                (Circle all that apply)
ANSWER OPTIONS: *A. All my friends are in the gang.*
                B. I don't know any other life.
                C. I would be hurt or killed if I tried to get out.
                D. The gang is my family.
                E. I'm in too deep and just can't get out.
                F. I like having access to alcohol and drugs.
                G. I like being a gang member.
                H. Other.

        Only those respondents who indicated current gang involvement answered this question. The number of possible responses selected, along

with the average rank of that response, is listed in Table 6. The most frequent response given to this question was "The gang is my family, and the least frequent response was "I don't know any other life."

Table 6: Reason Respondents Remain in Gang

Response	Frequency
D. Gang is my family	8
G. Like being gang member	7
E. In too deep	6
A. All my friends are in the gang	5
C. Would be hurt or killed	3
F. Access to alcohol/drugs	2
H. Other	2
B. Don't know other life	1

QUESTION: *For how long do you plan to stay involved in gang activity (months/years)?*

Those few respondents who answered this question all indicated that being in a gang was for life.

QUESTION: *Which of the following would be good reasons to stop being involved in gang activity? (Rank order)*

ANSWER OPTIONS: *A. Growing tired of the gang lifestyle.*
B. Threats of physical harm to self or family.
C. New or prospective employer disapproves of gang membership.
D. Involvement in a loving relationship, getting married, or having children.
E. Parent, guardian or other adult disapproves of gang membership.
F. Threat of imprisonment.
G. Other.

When asked to provide a response to a question concerning possible reasons for abandoning gang activity the frequently recorded response was "relationship /marriage/children." For those that listed a category, the ranking was averaged (Table 7).

Table 7: Reason for Stopping Gang Activity
       (By number of responses)

Reason	Current	Former	Total
D.Relationship/marriage /children	10	8	18
A. Tired of gang lifestyle	8	7	15
F. Threat of prison	7	8	15
B. Threats to self or family	6	8	14
C. Employer disapproves	5	6	11
G. Other	2	6	8
E. Parent/other adult disapproves	5	2	7

QUESTION: *Do you think you'll eventually join another gang some day?*
       Seventeen respondents stated they would not join another gang, and one respondent was undecided. However, a number of the respondents stated they would not join another gang because changing gang allegiance or quitting a gang was disapproved of within the gang subculture. In other words, one joins a gang "for life."

QUESTIONS ASKED ONLY TO RESPONDENTS NOT GANG-INVOLVED
QUESTION: *Have you ever been asked to join a street gang?*
    ANSWER OPTIONS: A. Yes
                        B. No
                        C. Don't recall
       Of the 25 respondents who indicated no gang involvement, either past or present, 20 reported that they had not been asked to join a gang. The remaining five had been asked to join a gang. The five who stated that they had been asked to join a gang were then asked to provide, in their own words, their response to that invitation. These answers are elaborated upon in the appendix portion of this study.
       QUESTION: *Have you ever considered joining a street gang?*
ANSWER OPTIONS: A. Yes
                        B. No
                        C. Refused
       Twenty-four of the non-gang involved subjects indicated that they had not ever considered joining a gang. One respondent had considered

joining. Further verbal responses from these individuals are elaborated upon in the appendix portion of this study.

QUESTION: *Do you think that one day you will become involved in gang activity?*

ANSWER OPTIONS: A. Yes

                         B. No

                         C. Refused

All twenty-five non-gang respondents indicated that they would not become involved in gang activity in the future. Further verbal responses from these individuals are elaborated upon in the appendix portion of this study.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

Before discussing the broader implications of these finding it is first important to place this study in context. First, the sample used is this study was purposive and small (n=50) as opposed to random and large, thereby placing restrictions on the generalizability of our findings. Second, the data for respondents was self reported and therefore may contain factual errors. Finally, geographic regional differences would likely produce different survey results.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The main purpose of this research effort was to focus upon two primary elements as they pertain to Native American involvement in gang activity. These focus elements include:

1.A determination of salient factors that contribute to Native American youth becoming involved in gang activity, and; 2.A determination as to whether or not Native American cultural influences tend to discourage those youth who may contemplate involvement in the gang subculture.

CAUSATIVE FACTORS FOR INVOLVEMENT IN GANG ACTIV-ITY-CONCLUSIONS

In terms of the causal factors leading to gang involvement our analysis suggests that a "friend within the gang" or "a relative" influenced their decision to join the gang. We were not, however, able to assess the relative strength of either party's influence on joining a gang. When respondents were asked to indicate the reasons they chose to become involved in gang activity a majority (88%) stated they became involved in order to feel a sense of "power", only 9 of the respondents remarked that their involvement was influenced by their "home life". A number of respondents also indicated that factors such as having "friends in the gang", access to

"alcohol and drugs", wanting to be "cool", and the desire to feel a sense of "belonging" also play a role in their decision to join a gang.

Some of these responses suggest that gang involvement may be motivated by a desire to fill in components which are not found in their home environment, or within the respondent's culture. The need for "power" and to feel a sense of "belonging" portend that certain of these individuals feel powerless and alone, whether it be due to their socio-economic status, their feeling of placement or displacement within the social mainstream, or some other element. By the same logic, if the reason for joining a gang is due to the fact that the respondent's friends are gang-involved, there is apparently a lack of home influence to counteract that desire, suggesting that the influence of friends is greater than the influence of strong parental guidance. Notably, independent responses to this question included the need for "attention" and the need for "respect." Each of these suggests the gang-involved individual is using the gang as a replacement for some element not found within their home environment. Further consideration must be given to the results of this aspect of the study.

When we asked respondents who claimed current gang involvement (n=12) whether they intended to stay involved in gang activity only five individuals indicated that they intended to stay involved with a gang. These individuals, along with the remaining seven respondents, answered the subsequent question which asked what would be their main reason for staying involved in gang behavior. The most common response given to this question was "The gang is my family." This is a very telling response, in that it highlights the problem to the degree that these individuals are openly acknowledging that the gang family has essentially replaced the biological family.

Additionally, when the gang-involved interviewees were asked to provide their opinion as to what would be good reasons to disassociate from gang activity, a significant number of them (n=18) indicated that "involvement in a loving relationship, getting married and having children" would be the best reason. When we asked non-gang members why they would never choose to participate in this lifestyle we received responses including "busy with sports, school, positive home influences…none of my friends were gang involved…no friends involved…I had a good support system…it shouldn't take a gang to find out who you are…gangs mean trouble with the law and family…my parents instilled in me that violence and alcohol are wrong ways of life…it's not the proper way of life…because I have no desire to go in that direction…there's no honor in it…because I have a broader range of friends and because of the negative behavior…". It is clear

from these responses that parental and peer support play a prominent role in diverting young people away from gang involvement.

One of the most informative aspects of this study came in the form of a question asked of both the gang-involved and non-gang involved individuals. Respondents were asked: "In your own words, what do you think are the main reasons behind why Native American youth join street gangs?" In some respects it was surprising that both groups provided similar answers to this question, including "they (gang members) want to be part of something…their family is the gang…they have a poor home life and they want to feel accepted…they're looking for power…they want attention…to fit in…a lot of them don't have a family...when Native Americans don't have a family or someone to talk to, other Native Americans will take them in…their parents were gang related…they're looking for acceptance, belonging, support…to feel a sense of family…to feel a sense of belonging to something…problems at home…they're looking for the gang to be their family because they need help…they're looking for love, respect, attention, belonging, loyalty and protection…it's the only thing they've got…for the love they don't get at home…they're looking to fill a void in their life...they want someone to be there for them…to feel a sense of community and security…they join as a replacement for their family…for self esteem…because of lack of personal attention and love…poor parenting…for the attention they don't get at home…to have some kind of structure to rely upon…they come from dysfunctional family backgrounds where's there's alcohol and abusive parents".

Again, these comments suggest the importance of belong, of family and friends in the motivational decision to join or not to join a gang. The corollary to this is also true. That is, the extent to which family and peer support, sense of belonging and community are absent contribute to ones decision to affiliate with street gangs.

This research also addressed the issue of family life in two separate question/answer formats. Respondents were asked to describe their adolescent home lives by choosing between answers provided in four pairs of opposing statements. Although no significant differences were found between groups (gang and non-gang involved respondents), it is worth noting that more of the non-gang involved respondents indicated that their family life was positive, their parents were supportive of them while growing up and they felt loved as a child growing up. In the survey, one of the four answer sets dealt with whether the respondent felt that his or her parents worked hard to provide a good family life. A notable difference between respondents was found here, as significantly more non-gang subjects reportedly emerging

from a positive family life than did gang-involved subjects.

A second family-based question was asked of each respondent, the question regarding individual belief regarding how important each respondent felt a positive family life was to preventing gang activity among Native American youth. The majority of respondents (n= 42) indicated that a positive family life is very important to preventing gang activity, while 7 respondents indicated that a positive family life is somewhat important. Although no appreciable difference in the response distribution between gang and non-gang respondents, the results of this inquiry are among the most important in this study. In other words, both gang and non-gang members agreed that a positive family life is important in preventing gang activity.

This information, perhaps leads us to suggest that many Native American youth who become involved in gang activity often do so because of family influence or dynamics, more so than being influenced by persons outside the immediate or extended family. While it is apparent to us that family life is not an all-inclusive factor in preventing gang involvement, it is also likely that certain Native American youth who become involved in gang activity do so because they are seeking to fill a void created by a home environment. That is, a home environment which lacks the degree of respect, attention, and nurturing that would dissuade choosing this path of behavior.

Obviously, emphasis must be placed upon creating home environments that minimize the reasons for looking to the gang structure as a replacement for the biological family. Although this is a rather simplistic statement, it is obvious that the family/home environment aspect of this social problem is huge and must be addressed through support of existing programs that provide parenting assistance, as well as the development of innovative programs that address specifically identified family structures. Additionally, since it is already known that a high percentage of gang-involved youth follow the path of older siblings, it is recommended that Native American families with gang-involved children consider the strong possibility of this upon young members of the family, and the impact older brothers and sisters will have on their younger siblings.

CULTURAL INFLUENCES & INVOLVEMENT IN GANG ACTIVITY-CONCLUSIONS

This aspect of the study was designed to determine the extent to which knowledge of and familiarity with the Native American culture has upon negating gang behavior. Within this topic, the first question posed to the respondents asked each person to characterize their knowledge of the Native

American culture and their own heritage. Keeping in mind that each respondent was Native American, of all respondents 19 indicated possessing strong knowledge, 19 indicated having some knowledge, and 12 indicated little knowledge of their culture and heritage. Notably, none of the respondents indicated that they knew nothing of their culture or heritage. When the responses to this question were compared by gang involvement versus non-gang involvement, no significant differences were found between the groups. However, through the individual verbally expressed opinions provided by both groups, it is apparent that knowledge of the Native American culture is an important aspect in the prevention of gang involvement among Native American youth.

Following this notion of the importance of Native American culture and heritage as a means of preventing gang activity a number of respondents n=34, (68%) expressed their belief that knowledge of Native American culture was very important in preventing gang activity, while 14 more respondents indicated this to be somewhat important. Once again, the individual opinions provided support the concept that cultural familiarity and involvement is significant.

Intuitively, one might reason that the greater a person's level of knowledge about their culture, the more this person would believe in the power of cultural knowledge as a means to prevent negative behavior. This, however, could not be supported by statistical analysis. What did emerge, however, is evidence suggesting that both gang and non-gang subjects agree that knowledge of the culture is at least important in preventing gang activity. Interestingly, there were a significant number of gang-involved subjects who claimed to have high levels of knowledge about their own culture, but were still gang involved. Still, these subjects recommend that cultural knowledge be used as a tool to prevent gang involvement among Native American youth.

The following statements, provided by both gang-involved and non-gang involved subjects, provide more insight into this issue. Referring once again to a question that asked for opinions regarding why Native American youth join street gangs, both groups of respondents provided statements, such as "Native kids are trying to find an identity… their culture is lost…they're seeking unity, however bad…many Native American kids are not connected with their culture, they're looking for something to do…you have to fit in somewhere, it's better than being a nobody…to feel something in common with others, to share the same experience…because of an identity crisis…they don't know who they are…they act Chicano, Black…it's a way to vent anger…lack of cultural values."

The conclusion to be drawn from this aspect of the study is that although a significant number of gang-involved individuals claimed to be aware of and involved in the Native American culture, they chose the path of gang behavior nonetheless. These individuals have all had the opportunity to look back upon their experiences and can see more clearly that involvement in their own culture may have prevented their gang involvement in the first place. Therefore, one of the recommendations of this study is that more attention be paid to the power and value of early education in the area of cultural knowledge as a gang prevention tool.

Having said this, one must always take into consideration the brashness of youth, and the need among many young people to experience things for themselves before judging the value in the recommendations of others. Still, this does not mean that no attempt should be made to create a family and social environment that is conducive not only to providing those essential emotional elements that result in positive decision-making, but also an environment where the Native American culture is taught and lived, so that the young person learns early and often the paradox between his or her own culture and that of the gang subculture.

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