Strengths-based assessment of street gangs in Miami: Identifying transferable funds of knowledge and the sense of belonging of gang-involved individuals of Haitian ethnicity through the lens of social constructionism and appreciative inquiry

by

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APPROVAL OF THE DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

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Abstract

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Street gangs in the United States are typically viewed as destructive and violent by the mainstream society (Beare & Hogg, 2013; Lane & Meeker, 2003). Dominant discourses in the United States paint a limited and often negative picture of individuals participating in street gangs. Through a social constructionist lens, dominant discourses are determined by the shared interpretation of a particular notion (Gergen, 2011). My research challenges the dominant discourses of street gangs by exploring an alternate image of these individuals; namely one that celebrates their strengths. The overarching question of this research is: What are the transferable funds of knowledge acquired by street gang-involved individuals that can be utilized in alternate environments outside of a street gang context? I utilized qualitative methodology to uncover the assets acquired by individuals participating in street gang life because it provided the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning that street gang membership held.

A sense of belonging is key to the development of an individual’s identity through the social constructionist lens. Therefore, understanding the sense of belonging that youth attain in a gang is paramount to identifying how the street gang identity is constructed. The funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992) concept was developed to
identify skills acquired by students at home that were useful in attaining success in a school classroom. In this research, the funds of knowledge are the skills that the participants have acquired within the context of street gang life that are transferable in alternate environments. Appreciative Inquiry (AI) supports a social constructionist framework because the focus is on developing a shared meaning of a concept (Barrett, et. al., 1995; Busche, 2011). One way that AI works tangibly within a research study is by generating positive energy in the environment, such as when conducting an interview with a participant, as I have done in this study. I used an AI methodological format to investigate the positive ways that street gang participation has changed their lives and uncover the funds of knowledge, acquired through these street gang experiences that were used outside of street gang life.

The scope of this research was defined by 14 gang-involved individuals of Haitian ethnicity between the ages of 20 to 32 residing in Miami, FL. The sense of belonging and the funds of knowledge were both paramount in helping these individuals attain employment, higher education, and life quality gains. Specifically, a sense of belonging was important in developing an identity as a gang member and this was manifested through three primary mindsets: protection, emotional support, and family. It’s important to recognize how these individuals found a sense of belonging in a gang in order to understand the parallel of acquiring belongingness outside a gang. I discovered that it was the sense of belonging that shaped their identity within a gang, but it was also the funds of knowledge accessed in an alternate context such as in a job that helped them transition successfully to participation outside of street gangs. There were six categories of the funds of knowledge that were transferable in two ways; one mode was for the individual’s gain and one was for the
benefit of the extended street gang community. The six transferable funds of knowledge discovered through this research study were hyperawareness, resilience, money management, networking, critical thinking/wisdom, and business savvy. Implications of this research include suggestions for offering policy changes in higher education and employment, which may reduce the stereotypes of street gangs and increase productive changes in society when opportunities are available to individuals in street gangs. The impetus for generating policy and attitude changes that will open doors is drawn from recognizing the strengths of individuals involved in street gangs.
Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my daughter, Haseena, my daily inspiration throughout my graduate school experiences. May perseverance, passion, and curiosity light the way along your educational journey. You can accomplish goals that may seem insurmountable amidst life’s challenges. Always know that your mama loves, supports, and believes in you. "You are the stars, I am the sky."

I also dedicate this dissertation to all the individuals whose value may not be appreciated or recognized. It is my intentions that this dissertation vocalizes the lived experiences and contributions of the study participants and the extended communities of individuals involved in street gangs whose voices are silenced too often by oppressive energies. May your funds of knowledge hold a transformative power in your own lives and inspire progress towards a harmonious world.
Acknowledgement

Thank you to the individuals who graciously participated in this research study. I am grateful to my chairs, Dr. Monk and Dr. Luschei, for guiding me through this doctoral process, including the tears, joys, and new understanding gained. I value my committee members, Dr. Perez and Dr. Nuñez Estrada Jr., for adding insight that challenged me to consider new perspectives. I am appreciative of Dr. Ochoa’s helpful advice throughout my doctoral education. I value the CGU writing center and especially Jung-Hsien Lin, whose guidance helped me cross the dissertation finish line.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Guns, drugs, and violent crime are often seen as images synonymous with youth involved in street gangs. Social media, movies, and television perpetuate the limited view of violent young males “packing” weapons and provoking havoc in communities through selective news reporting (Beare & Hogg, 2013; Esbensen & Carson, 2012; Lane & Meeker, 2003). However, criminal activity is just one aspect of street gang life, which reinforces the negative stigma attached to individuals participating in these networks. Fear, rejection, and discrimination of street gangs stems from such popular discourse that street gangs are harmful (Lane & Meeker, 2003; Taylor, 2001). The demonizing perceptions, in turn, impact the identities of individuals involved in street gangs. Homicide statistics attributed to handguns in Miami from January 2010 through December 2014 revealed an average of 85 slayings per year, which signals a problem that warrants attention (Miami-Dade Police, 2016). Yet, the common focus on street gangs emphasizes the violence and criminality instead of identifying strengths found within these groups. Recognizing the skills acquired through their experiences in street gangs offers a humanizing perspective needed to deepen and crystalize understanding of these individuals.

Currently, the literature on gangs doesn't offer a common definition of the term. I include the word “street” before “gang” to differentiate individuals involved in social networks functioning in the context of street life. Specifically, I defined “street gangs” as a label generated from the dominant society that describes a group of individuals connected through a common bond. Typically street gangs are associated with activities that are
criminal or violent in nature. Individuals participating in these social networks don’t often use the term gang to describe their affiliation with these groups. The term “street gang” is used in this research instead of “gang” because many groups in society, such as the police, military, or a fraternity could be defined as a gang. However, it is the association with crime and violence along with factors of race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status that demonizes these individuals and shapes the popular discourse of street gangs present in the dominant society (Estrada, Hernandez, & Kim, 2016).

The dominant society refers to the groups retaining power to shape the conversations about beliefs and behaviors that are socially acceptable. Individuals and groups not participating in behaviors that are accepted by society become an out-group. The idea of the dominant society draws on neo-Marxist ideas of power distribution, which maintains the current social structure of unequal opportunity in the United States (Bourdieu, 1986; Noble, 2000). Specifically, I’m using the term dominant society in this research to describe the in-groups that participate in retaining economic and social power in the United States (Allport, 1954). Economic and social power is maintained through the structural institutions of power in society. For example, large corporations have wedged an influence in political systems by controlling some of the modes of production (Noble, 2000).

I observed the individuals involved in street gangs who participated in the community-based program where I worked drawing upon skills to accomplish goals in a different area of their lives outside of street gangs. These skills acquired by the street gangs are known in this study as the “funds of knowledge”. Traditionally funds of knowledge (FOK) are defined as the proficiencies of a student developed within a family that can be
used in a school setting to aid the pedagogy of the teacher as he/she attempts to bring culturally relevant processes into the classroom (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992). The second definition of funds of knowledge that informs this study is the “forms of capital nurtured through cultural wealth including aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital” (Yosso, 2005). Together, these definitions shape the funds of knowledge concept for this study. The former definition suggests that skills acquired in one environment can be used elsewhere to achieve academic success, while the latter suggests that capital is developed and recognized through a variety of non-traditional notions of knowledge as perceived within the dominant society. I surmised that individuals participating in street gangs have accessed these funds of knowledge to achieve employment, education, and successful lives, both individually and within communities.

Specifically, this research focused on Haitian youth (20-32) involved in street gangs in Miami. Historically, Haitian street gang members in Miami have experienced an array of discrimination because of the labels attached to street gangs by the dominant society. Additionally, the history of Haitian immigration to Miami has also resulted in several areas of marginalization including discriminative practices (Mohl, 2003). The literature review will highlight the immigration challenges of Haitians and how these challenges play a role in street gang participation.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to qualitatively identify whether youth acquire funds of knowledge in street gangs that can be used constructively in alternative contexts outside of a street gang culture; and if so, what are these funds of knowledge? A qualitative focus is chosen in this study to generate a deeper awareness of the lived experiences of an out-
group of the dominant society (Gergen, 2014). Specifically, I employ an appreciative inquiry (AI) approach within the interview process to explore the skills acquired by the street gang members. The choice of AI also aligns with understanding these skills by capturing the participant’s perception of the benefits connected to belonging to a street gang. AI is a process of discovery within the social constructionist epistemology focusing on past accomplishments as a foundation for generating imaginative ideas in order to address challenges (Barrett, Cooperrider, & Srivastva, 1995). AI informs the interview protocol as I investigate if there are funds of knowledge acquired by street gang members. The use of AI as an investigative approach also serves to help understand the sense of belonging and identity as a gang member because it focuses on generating positive emotional energy. Developing a positive state of mind about a group that one belongs to can validate one’s identity within this context (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014; Stillman & Baumeister, 2009). Overall, I remained dedicated to recording the authentic voice of the participants as they described their experiences within the street gang community, a practice that aligns with the qualitative research paradigm (Creswell, 2014). Findings from this study can contribute to a new area of street gang research that explores the transferability of the funds of knowledge acquired by street gang members into alternative contexts. Understanding if funds of knowledge exist and how these are transferred to an alternative context can influence strategies for working with a marginalized population in order to value their strengths, reduce discriminative practices that are based upon stereotypes of street gangs, and increase opportunities for achieving improved life quality within the greater society.
**Significance of the Study**

DeWall, Deckman, Pond, and Bonser (2010) suggest that belongingness and acceptance are considered to be essential to survival, while social exclusion can lead to aggressive behavior. Street gangs are labeled as aggressive groups. Yet, the individuals participating in street gangs develop a sense of belonging within the context of a street gang because of the many aspects of support found in these groups. Ruble and Turner (2000) suggest that street gang youth enhance their self-esteem, group cohesion, and a sense of belonging within a gang context. Feeling that one belongs leads to a desire to maintain connection with the place or people that one is interested in, and is followed by a sense of loyalty and dedication (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). I witnessed street gang-involved youth attain this sense of belonging when they began working in a formal work environment that they enjoyed. I surmised that the individuals who have become involved in street gang life might identify with constructive work and educational advancement opportunities in a context outside of the street gang in order to experience alternate life paths.

Following needs of belonging and safety, Maslow (1943) suggests that achievement is one of the manifestations of meeting the need of esteem. Street gang-involved youth can attain achievement such as promotion to a higher ranking through loyalty and dedication in a similar way that an employee might achieve this accomplishment in a formal job (Venkatesh, 2008). Achievement helps develop a sense of purpose and self-worth (Stillman & Baumeister, 2009). When one perceives a sense of accomplishment, it fosters a sense of belonging. Furthermore, a sense of belonging influences the formation of identity (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014; Stillman & Baumeister, 2009). I explored in this study whether the
skills learned in street gangs that reinforce a sense of belonging were transferred to an environment away from some of the dangers associated with a street gang lifestyle enabling connection with another aspect of identity.

There is an abundance of research highlighting the paths to gang membership (Papachristo, Hureau, & Braga, 2013; Pyrooz, Fox, & Decker, 2010; Thrasher, 1927; Whyte, 1943). However, there is little research emphasizing the strengths of street gang life that can be applied in safe beneficial contexts outside of the street-gang life. Furthermore, much of the research on street gangs seeks to uncover the reasons for criminal behavior (Beare & Hogg, 2013, Papachristos, et. al., 2013). Academic conferences such as those offered by the National Gang Resource Center (NGRC, 2014) are geared towards law enforcement officials and focus on the criminal aspects of street gang life. Moreover, the funding for street gang intervention is also facilitated through law enforcement, which increases the rate of incarceration of street gang-involved youth (Klein, 1995; Venkatesh, 1999). There is some research that highlights the marginalization of street gangs and explores the barriers facing youth who participate in gangs (Vigil, 1988, 2002, 2003). Vigil's theory of multiple marginalization stresses street socialization, which creates the pathways into street gang participation. His work also highlights the ways that outside barriers oppress and restrict opportunities for individuals participating in street gangs. Research accentuating the benefits gained within a gang that are not connected to criminal and violent activities is lacking. Stereotypes of street gang members as violent and criminal deviants fail to honor these youth as members of a society that are seeking to survive and thrive in the world amidst a variety of obstacles. Furthermore, failing to recognize the funds of knowledge of street gang members within gangs serves to devalue their identity within this context.
Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study encompasses constructs within social constructionism, identity formation, and funds of knowledge to provide a context for exploring the transferability of specific skills acquired by street gang members for use in alternative settings. First, the qualities of social constructionism theory that operationalizes language and discourse are described to understand how individuals create meaning. Next, the formation of identity is discussed to provide a context for how individuals find a sense of belonging within their subculture of street gangs, and how they might connect to alternate areas outside of these groups. Finally, the fund of knowledge concept is defined, and reasons why this notion relates to skills acquired by street gangs are explained.

Social constructionism.
Social constructionist epistemology utilizes language and discourse as central conceptual tools to understand how individuals shape their understanding of the world and their identity (Burr, 1995; Gergen, 1999, 2009, 2010). There are many interpretations of concepts, events, or objects within human relationships because of the different ways that people create meaning. Gergen (1999, 2009, 2010) proposes that the world is understood and explained through shared interpretation of language and social utility within a particular context and subsequently shapes what knowledge is considered to be legitimate. Burr’s (1995) definition of discourse suggests that the way the world is experienced by an individual shapes their behavior as a response to their perception. This knowledge shapes how individuals make meaning, understand themselves, and creates a standard by which opportunities and life paths are determined (Gergen, 2009, 2010).
When individuals co-construct the meaning of something, this understanding impacts life choices and opportunities. The role that language and discourse play as defining elements of social constructionism will be further delineated in the next chapter.

**Identity formation.**
Internally, individuals form identities based on the interpretation of their experiences in the world (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014; Vygotsky, 1978). By this I mean that one’s experiences provide a lens for viewing how the world operates. Individuals understand their position in the world based on the lens through which their experiences are perceived (Burr, 1995; Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014). The formation of identities is a fluid process because as we acquire new social experiences and knowledge, the connections made with various aspects of our identities are adopted (Burr, 1995, Gergen, 1999, 2010, 2009). Furthermore, identity formation is a continuous progression that changes and develops throughout a lifetime (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014). A street gang member may have grown up in a world where street gangs are the norm, and joining one is a rite of passage into adulthood as well as a way to find connection with his/her place in the world. Consequently, participating in street gangs is part of one’s identity for the individual who enters into this life path. The fluidity of the identity process stems from an ability to modify beliefs and connect with another aspect of self in an alternate setting (Gergen, 1999, 2009, 2010). A street gang-involved youth might learn a skill in a street gang and access this skill elsewhere such as in a formal job. The ability to adapt this skill for use in an alternate setting can then lead to a new way of living and a new aspect of one’s identity (Gergen, 2009, 2010).
**Funds of knowledge.**
The funds of knowledge (FOK) concept (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992), which was first used to help instructors offer strategies for educating youth through culturally relevant teaching techniques, may also be useful when identifying transferable skills for street gang-involved youth. The teachers in the Moll, et al. (1992) study addressed the skills learned by the students in the study when preparing lessons, which reinforces these skills as funds of knowledge gained at home and useful in a school setting. Another example of the use of funds of knowledge is how the identity is shaped through bi-cultural experiences. Some of the youth in the Tucson study crossed the Mexican border frequently to spend time with family. These encounters provide a rich cultural experience that sculpts the identity of the youth (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992). In my study, the youth in Haitian street gangs in Miami may draw upon their own bicultural experiences as first or second-generation immigrants in the United States to navigate their lived experiences within the various institutions of power such as schooling or employment.

Yosso’s (2005) definition of cultural capital wealth also informs my definition of the funds of knowledge because this work from critical race theory sheds light on the skills obtained by students of color that are useful in the academic setting. In my study, the individuals participating in street gangs developed these skills in the streets. Yosso describes aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital in her work. Two of Yosso’s forms of cultural wealth had an influential impact on the design of my study: familial and aspirational. She describes familial capital as “a commitment to community well-being and expands the concept of family to include a broader definition of kinship” (Yosso, 2005). Youth in street gangs experience fellow members of their street gang as an extended family (Esbenson & Carson 2012; Venkatesh, 2008). These social
networks of the extended street-gang family provide support, validation of identity, and resource acquisition. The aspirational capital shaped the template for what I had observed in my prior experiences working with individuals in street gangs as they sought to attain employment or educational opportunities. Aspirational goals are highlighted within my model “Transferability of the funds of knowledge” because obtaining aspirational goals, as a fund of knowledge is key to providing an alternative perspective of individuals involved in street gangs. Individuals participating in street gangs are stereotyped. I’m suggesting that if stakeholders developed a positive perception of these individuals participating in street gangs based on viewing these individuals attain goals, then this new insight may lead to generating inclusive opportunities for these individuals because there will be an awareness of positive goal attainment instead of only seeing these individuals through the lens of goal attainment in a criminal manner.

This study explored whether street gang members developed funds of knowledge within the street-gang environment, and identified if these funds of knowledge were utilized in environments outside of street gang-related activities. Street gang members may not be aware of the funds of knowledge that they have transferred to alternate environments. Skill awareness can be nurtured through understanding and application, such as having the ability to organize, a fund of knowledge that is helpful in a college environment. A street gang member may learn to be organized in his or her street life by employing thoughtful methods to conduct a street business. This skill of organization may be accessed and used in a college setting to help the student learn how to take notes in a lecture hall that will be useful in the exam. Employers, advisors, teachers, and counselors who play a pivotal role in the life of a street gang member can help identify the funds of
knowledge that are useful in an alternate work or educational setting (Espinoza, 2011). Educators, counselors, and individuals who engage with individuals participating in street gangs can help the street gang member successfully gain entry and opportunities in alternate environments by pointing out all the skills that these individuals possess that are applicable in work, education, and other endeavors desired for accessing sustainable lives.

**Transferability of Funds of Knowledge**

I explored whether and how the funds of knowledge developed within the out-group of street gangs were transferred to alternative environments to open up opportunities for their members to participate in alternative aspirational contexts in both community and individual arenas. I examined whether street gang members acquired skills such as entrepreneurship that could be profitable for the individuals in legal career or business endeavors. The first aim of this research was to discover if there were specific funds of knowledge acquired by street gang-involved youth. The sense of belonging plays a pivotal role in the transfer of the funds of knowledge. I suggested that developing a sense of belonging in an alternate context apart from the street gang environment facilitates the transfer of the funds of knowledge because the gang members become aware of their applicability of their skills in alternate places. Furthermore, the sense of belonging in an alternate area shapes the identity in a new environment (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014). In addition, I suggested that the awareness of the funds of knowledge that are useful in alternative contexts for the gang members may also be cultivated through important role models in the gang member’s life who offer a supportive posture to encourage unearthing of talent (Espinoza, 2011; Tsabary, 2010). Exploration of the funds of knowledge is a way of honoring and validating the youth’s spirit and strengthening the identity in this new area.
Transferability of the funds of knowledge model description.
Figure 1 hypothesizes how the transferability of the funds of knowledge acquired by gang members to alternative contexts occurs. The large circles represent the dominant society (in-group) and the street gangs (out-group). The red arrows arching between the two circles represent the tensions between the out-group (street gangs) and the dominant society. These tensions are anticipated as barriers for youth in accessing opportunities as inclusive members of the greater society, and they are based on the stereotypes of gang members as criminal, violent, and evil as perceived by the dominant society (Beare & Hogg, 2013; Lane & Meeker, 2003; Taylor, 2001). In addition, these stereotypes are assumed to lead to discriminative practices directed towards Haitians in Miami (Mohl, 2003). Youth in street gangs resist the discriminative practices prohibiting them from formal work opportunities by using non-traditional means to generate income. I hypothesized that utilizing the funds of knowledge will allow inclusivity for gang members within the dominant society. I explored if the gang members used these funds of knowledge, which are developed through their sense of belonging in alternate contexts outside of street-gang environments to access opportunities in achieving individual aspirational goals and be of value to the greater community. I surmised that awareness of the transferability of the funds of knowledge shaped the identity of the individuals through a social constructionist lens. Identity, represented by a heart, is influenced when a sense of belonging, also represented by a heart, develops in a place or group. Phinney (1992) suggests that a sense of belonging influences specific aspects of identity. Ruble and Turner (2000) suggest belongingness is developed within a gang and influences identity. The funds of knowledge inform one’s identity (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014). Gergen (2009) suggests the knowledge is socially constructed and that it informs multiple identities of an individual. A
sense of belonging is used to access the funds of knowledge needed to participate in an alternate context. The dominant society may develop an alternative discourse by respecting the gang members for their strengths in the community and as individuals and therefore reduce their stereotypes of these youth as a rejected out-group.

The accessible opportunities for youth are developed in two ways: 1) through the gang member’s utilization of the funds of knowledge in the greater society and 2) through the reduction of stereotypes and discriminative practices of the dominant society. I hypothesize that the dominant society will reduce the stereotypes of gang members by gaining understanding of the strengths of these individuals as the funds of knowledge are applied. This new understanding of street gang-involved individuals gained by the dominant society creates an alternative discourse of street gangs. Through the reduction of stereotypes of these individuals involved in street gangs, opportunities for career, education, and other inclusive activities within the greater society might be offered by the dominant society. In this study, I am exploring the funds of knowledge of street gang members that create opportunities to participate in aspirational goals and community engagement.
Figure 1: Transferability of Funds of Knowledge Model

Christine Keaney, 2014

In-Group: Dominant Society

Out-Group: Street gangs

Tension: Discriminative practices based on stereotypes of street gangs, ethnicity, & race

Tension: Resistance to discriminative practices through survival techniques

Circle of Inclusion

Accessible Opportunities:

- Creates alternative discourses of street gangs through:
  - Awareness of strengths within greater society
  - Stereotype Reduction

Attain:

- Aspirational Goals
- Community Value

Utilize:

- RQ 2: Funds of Knowledge

RQ 1: Sense of Belonging

Informs Identity

RQ 2: Funds of knowledge

RQ 3 Transferability of the Funds of Knowledge occurs in this process

Phinney, 1992; Ruble & Turner, 2000


Accessible Opportunities:

- Phinney, 1992; Ruble & Turner, 2000


Figure 1: Transferability of Funds of Knowledge Model

Christine Keaney, 2014

In-Group: Dominant Society

Out-Group: Street gangs

Tension: Discriminative practices based on stereotypes of street gangs, ethnicity, & race

Tension: Resistance to discriminative practices through survival techniques

Circle of Inclusion

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- Creates alternative discourses of street gangs through:
  - Awareness of strengths within greater society
  - Stereotype Reduction

Attain:

- Aspirational Goals
- Community Value

Utilize:

- RQ 2: Funds of Knowledge

RQ 1: Sense of Belonging

Informs Identity

RQ 2: Funds of knowledge

RQ 3 Transferability of the Funds of Knowledge occurs in this process

Phinney, 1992; Ruble & Turner, 2000


Accessible Opportunities:

- Phinney, 1992; Ruble & Turner, 2000

Locating the Researcher in the Study

The lived experiences of an individual structure the actions that one takes based upon the interpretation of a particular life event (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014). My lived experience plays a considerable role in my research pursuit because I am influenced by my encounters with street gang-involved Haitian youth in Miami. This experience working with Haitian youth involved in street gangs shaped my own identity because I chose to research transferable skills of street gang members. Specifically my interest in identifying the funds of knowledge acquired by street gang youth that are useful for their success in alternative life contexts stems from several years of employment as an educator, job coach, and counselor working with street gang-involved youth at a community-based organization in South Florida. I grew up in a small suburban town in New England. My involvement with gangs was non-existent, and my only awareness of their behavior was through the media pictures of “strapped” (carrying a firearm) youth displaying a threatening expression. Media messages persuaded me to view these individuals as social outcasts who should be avoided to preserve my safety. As an undergraduate student at a state university in the Berkshires, I began to understand that I had formed crude stereotypes of people who were street gang members. At this stage in my life, I learned that not only was I completely uninformed about the life and culture of gangs, but I was also ignorant of the complexity of participation, membership, and the diverse activities involved in a street gang lifestyle. After graduating from a university, I gained a deeper understanding of these stereotypes’ influences when I worked for several non-profits whose purpose was serving disadvantaged individuals by offering resources that were meant to create opportunities in employment, education, and meeting basic living needs.
These opportunities to assist disadvantaged individuals became crucial learning experiences that prepared me to work for a street gang intervention and prevention program targeted towards Haitian youth in 2006. As a White woman, I symbolized a person who might be harmful because these youth had experienced discrimination by others fitting the combination of my race and gender, and therefore I was not immediately trusted. Furthermore, Haitian immigration experiences in Miami place these youth at the forefront of discrimination based on their status as an ethnic and linguistic minority in a city that is 65% Latino (US Census, 2013). Although Miami is linguistically diverse, Spanish is the predominant second language spoken and observed in Miami. Creole is a vibrant language within the Haitian community. However, opportunities for learning Haitian Creole are not widespread, suggesting that it is not a preference for various educational institutions as a desired language in Miami or valued as an asset.

After a substantial amount of effort to build connections with these young foot soldiers (street-gang members), I was finally let into their private lives, and began to understand the community from an intimate viewpoint. The youth I was working with saw that I was authentically offering my knowledge of how they could obtain employment and gain access to opportunities that had not previously been available to them. Ultimately their attitudes changed towards me, and they allowed me into their world. For the first time, I was more than a community worker solely locked into leaving my work at the day’s end. The issues that these youth dealt with were on my mind often, which led me to offer my private number for concerns after the office closed. The organization was not just a nine to five job for me; rather, it was an experience that shaped my identity, and subsequently influenced my academic and career interests.
Prior to obtaining a job, life challenges such as child care, family needs, or financial challenges needed to be addressed for many of these individuals participating in the organization. Sometimes, these needs are immediate, such as finding a doctor to begin prenatal care or locating agencies providing food for undocumented immigrants. The job allowed me to engage intimately with the youth and learn many ways of assisting these youth to attain opportunities for academic, career, and life goals. After a few months at the organization, I created a conflict resolution program to assist the youth in managing the rivalries with peers in a non-violent way. I discovered that these youth experienced marginalization and discrimination from many avenues based on their age, ethnicity, race, socio-economic status, and street gang affiliation.

I also observed that these youth had many talents, which hadn’t been developed through previous experiences with formal schooling or other avenues. Exposing these individuals to new paths by arranging field trips and individual outings to poetry readings, plays, college tours, museums, and record studio events opened up opportunities to explore new areas of interest and pursue potential career goals. Furthermore, this exposure opportunity offered access to some places where these youth could also access, and value their identity. The street gang members found recognition with aspects of their identity in a new environment. For example, one individual attending a poetry event realized employment, as a poet is a career option. Furthermore, accessing poetry as a creative outlet also was a fresh idea for some individuals who had not previously attempted performance art as form of expression. As I facilitated this new learning for these youth, I also discovered that they possessed a rich well of knowledge that they could draw upon in new non-street-gang related environments. At the community-based
organization where I was employed in Florida, a social enterprise was created to address funding shortages; however, it also opened a new opportunity for youth who had sophisticated skills in entrepreneurship. Selling and organizing in the streets led to promoting and managing in the silk-screen shop. I observed youth develop a sense of belonging in the new environment of a workplace. Eyes opened to alternate possibilities about how they could live and work, and many of the youth began to see viable new opportunities that were acceptable in their own life and in the dominant society. Still, some of these talented youth were lost to the streets because of the perils of street gang life. Sadly, lack of funding forced the near shutdown of the agency, and my work with these youth was nearly halted.

Although I had moved over 3000 miles away, these individuals stayed in my heart, and I stayed in communication with many of these young people. Over the years, I was saddened each time I became aware that another young adult met an early demise. It was through my experiences in my doctoral program that I realized my passion for doing research to assist individuals involved in street gangs to succeed in alternative contexts. I knew these individuals to be different from the stereotypes I was exposed to in my childhood. I had learned first hand that the street gang members had acquired positive skills that could be used in a safer environment. This learning motivated me to research the positive skills learned in gang life because I believed these skills and abilities could transform their life quality.

**Research opportunity.**

My experiences within the Haitian street gang community have informed my interest in this research as well as the research design. It is my authenticity that allowed
me to gain entry into this community. The marginalization that these youth have experienced has inspired my passionate interest in this research. Bearing witness to their experiences of marginalization increased my bias. Therefore, it was important that I used a process of inquiry in this investigation of transferable skills that did not assume the discrimination of these youth, but rather sought to discover the lived experiences. My research design is focused upon understanding of the funds of knowledge. Therefore, I have selected a qualitative method of inquiry that sought to discover if there were aspects of street gang life that are helpful to the gang members and their communities in improving life quality.

Through my experience working for the street gang intervention program in Miami, valuable relationships developed within the Haitian community. These affiliations have allowed me to gain entry into the Haitian gang population through links with non-profit agencies working with street gangs. Furthermore, my employment for several years within this community led to existing connections with individuals currently and previously involved in street gangs. These personal and professional affiliations with the Haitian street gang community in Miami have afforded me a valuable opportunity to conduct academic research with individuals in a population that is not easily accessible by many scholars.

**Research Questions**

The knowledge of street gang members performing a positive role in their community may alter the current stereotypes of these individuals as deviant members of an out-group of the dominant society. As the street gang members develop a sense of belonging in an alternate environment away from the activities associated with street gang life, a connection can be made with a different aspect of their identity. Through a social
constructionist perspective, the individuals in the street gangs are accessing multiple identities (Gergen, 2009). For example, an individual participating in a street gang might find a sense of belonging in an academic or work setting and this can begin to shape their identity in this new environment. Discovering the funds of knowledge that individuals acquire while participating in gangs that are accessed outside of a street gang context can also help these individuals envision an alternate way of living with these exposed skills which may be safer than some of the aspects of gang life.

The overarching question of this research is: What are the transferable funds of knowledge acquired by street gang-involved individuals that can be utilized in alternate environments outside of gangs? In order to answer the overarching research question identifying the transferable skills acquired by youth in gangs, an understanding of the individual’s connection to gangs as a part of their identity must first be explored. This connection to identity is considered through a social constructionist lens. Acquiring a sense of belonging within a group satiates motivation for human survival (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). It is important to uncover how the individuals develop belongingness within a gang in order to see how belonging can be cultivated in an alternate context. Specifically, by exploring the skills (funds of knowledge) acquired within a gang context that address how this sense of belonging is socially constructed, an understanding of how this belongingness informs their identity can be explored. If these skills can be transferred to alternate settings, perhaps the street gang-involved individuals can identify with alternate groups, settings, and goals outside of those associated typically with street gangs. It is through the sense of belonging that the youth can move into an alternate environment. It is the funds of knowledge that function as tools allowing success in a new environment.
The research questions to be examined are:

1) How do individuals involved in street gangs perceive a sense of belonging as an out-group of the dominant society?

2a) How do street gang-involved individuals acquire funds of knowledge through their participation in street gangs?

2b) What are the various funds of knowledge acquired by the street gang-involved individuals?

3a) How have these funds of knowledge been transferred to lead to accomplishment in aspirational goals for the street gang-involved individual?

3b) How have these funds of knowledge been transferred to lead to community value for the street gang-involved individual?

The next four chapters will describe the relevant literature, methodology, findings, and implications of the research findings. In chapter two, the literature review will describe the conceptual framework including the three main components of social constructionism, sense of belonging, and funds of knowledge. Chapter three reveals the choices for the methodological approach in this qualitative research. In chapter four, the ways that a sense of belonging was felt for the participants and the funds of knowledge including those that were identified as transferable are discussed. Finally in chapter five, the discussion of the implications of this research in the literature as well as real life implications for policy makers, employers, investors, educators and practitioners who have an impact with street gang members are discussed.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review supports the choice of the conceptual framework in conducting this research investigating the transferable funds of knowledge acquired within Haitian gangs in Miami. The literature review begins with the role that social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) plays within the concept of a dominant discourse. As gangs are identified as a non-dominant group in society, their members face substantial barriers to accessing employment, education, and opportunities for success. Many of these barriers develop because of the stereotypes linked to street gangs (Esbenson & Carson, 2012; Lane & Meeker, 2003). In this study, the participants are the targets of discrimination based on their linguistic, racial, and ethnic identity as Haitians in Miami (Stepick, 1990). The literature review also describes the role of language and discourse as conceptual tools within social constructionism that lead to the formation of identity (Burr, 1995, Gergen, 1999, 2009, 2010). Specifically, code-switching is described as a skill that facilitates navigation as one tries to assimilate in alternate environments (Gergen, 2009). For youth in gangs, the ability to code-switch plays a focal role in offering a safer alternative environment away from the dangers associated with some aspects of gang life.

The literature review then turns to the social constructionist perspective of identity (Burr, 1995; Gergen & Gergen, 1997; Gergen, 2009, 2010). Previously, I shared that the social constructionist epistemology purports that individuals understand their lives through their experiences and the meaning that is made of these experiences, which then influences how they define the self, including the perspectives, behaviors, and beliefs. I propose that youth involved in street gangs can validate their sense of identity, and thus their sense of belonging by developing an awareness of their transferable talents. The
formation of identity is a social product, whereby the self is defined through the connections made through culturally developed meaning of one’s experiences (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014). Following this section on identity is an explanation of the role that belongingness plays in connecting the youth to a specific context such as race, ethnicity, or another aspect of cultural identity. The time in the gang is part of figuring out who one is, and how one belongs in a particular group or place. The skills that are acquired within gangs that are useful in alternative environments are known in this study as the funds of knowledge. The definition of funds of knowledge and how this concept is operationalized in this research is then described in this literature review (Moll, et. al., 1992; Yosso, 2005). Following the section on the funds of knowledge is the history of Haitian immigration in Miami, which provides some background for understanding the arrival, treatment, and challenges that Haitians experience in Miami. Specifically, the history of the Haitian immigration patterns provides a context for describing the barriers leading to marginalization of Haitian youth in the United States (Mohl, 2003). This Haitian history includes the adjustment challenges that lead youth to participate in street gangs. The literature review is summarized with a discussion of the potential impact of this research for the street gang-involved youth and the greater society in improving life quality and collective gains if opportunities for the funds of knowledge to be transferred are available for individuals involved in street gangs.

Social Capital

Bourdieu’s (1986) social capital theory describes how power distribution is created through a hierarchal order. Yosso (2005) described how social capital is used within marginalized groups to obtain opportunities. Individuals involved in street gangs may
obtain resources leading to desired opportunities in areas such as employment by using
social capital to network. The capability to control economic opportunity is facilitated
through the use of an individual or a group’s social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). For example,
individuals from affluent families with an abundance of wealth will often have social ties
through their family name that can influence their personal relationships and work
opportunities. As non-dominant groups, street gangs lack opportunities to access economic
power that is available to the dominant society though social networks retaining political,
social, and financial control in the United States (Venkatesh, 2008). Gang members are,
therefore, participants in alternative discourses to the ones influencing the behaviors of the
in-groups that are part of the dominant society. Additionally, their alternative paths are not
seen within the dominant society as a preferred path for successful living (Lane & Meeker,
2003; Esbensen & Carson, 2012). The social construction of a concept is determined within
human relationships (Gergen, 2011). The interpretation of successful and valued lifestyles
is socially constructed within dominant society and out-groups such as street gangs.

Bourdieu (1986) suggests that social capital is the acquisition of resources gained
through a robust network of connections where mutual benefit is present. Bourdieu’s
(1986) theory of social capital embedded within the dominant discourses further
differentiates social lines between the in-groups attaining life successes and out-groups
struggling for opportunities. Individuals participating within the dominant discourses may
not be aware of the power afforded by social capital. Acquiring a profitable job through
family connections might be interpreted as the result of a typical job search process instead
of a privilege offered to individuals with access to valuable social capital. Bourdieu (1986)
suggests that social capital provides access to opportunities for upward mobility. The
power afforded by social capital provides entry and access into employment only for some individuals. A street gang member may not have this same access to secure work at an enterprise that offers resume building experience and future social connections. Street gang-involved youth instead may seek resources by using their social capital through connections within the gang to attain employment, which can help them to move up within the gang family (Venkatesh, 2008). The social capital is therefore a fund of knowledge that can be accessed as a resource for creating opportunity. However, opportunities in formal and safer employment aren’t always available for those with less social capital (Bourdieu, 1986, Mohl, 2003).

In-group and Out-group

Allport (1954) suggests that stereotypes and “othering” lead to anxiety, alienation, and the creation of out-groups. Individuals in out-groups such as street gangs experience discrimination as an outcome of the stigma of violence attached to this social network, which reinforces the status quo of the unequal balance of power between the in-groups and the out-groups. The dominant society is where the in-groups in this research retain and use power because of the ability to dictate what’s socially acceptable and what is not allowed. Furthermore, individuals who are part of the out-groups are limited in accessing opportunities that are available to the in-group.

“Street gangs” are the out-group on which this study is focused. Street gang youth typically experience themselves as an out-group (Vigil, 1988, 2002, 2003). Additionally, the term “street gangs” is constructed from within the dominant society and does not reflect the descriptive term often chosen by the individuals participating in these networks. Consequently, the use of the term “street gangs” reflects on the dominant society’s power
to influence. Furthermore, the term “street gangs” generates stereotypes based on fear and the stigmas attached to these groups (Beare & Hogg, 2013; Lane & Meeker, 2003). Apprehension towards alternative lifestyles that are not supported within the dominant society, stifle notions that street-gang youth can contribute to their communities (Esbensen & Carson, 2012; Lane & Meeker, 2003; Venkatesh, 1997, 1999). Furthermore, individuals banding together become an out-group because they do not identify with the attributes attached to the in-group (Allport, 1954). Street gangs are defined as an out-group because it is perceived that how they attain work, acquire resources, and participate in life is not acceptable by the dominant society.

The idea of the dominant society draws on neo-Marxist ideas of power distribution, which maintains the current social structure of unequal opportunity in the United States (Bourdieu, 1986; Noble, 2000). Specifically, I’m using the term dominant society in this research to describe the in-groups that retain economic and social power in the United States (Allport, 1954). Economic and social power is maintained through the structural institutions of power in society. For example, large corporations have wedged an influence in political systems by controlling some of the modes of production (Noble, 2000). Dominant society also refers to the influence the in-groups retain by creating overriding social discourses. "A discourse refers to a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements, and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events" (Burr, 1995). Dominant discourses are created through the collective processes in which people engage in daily life. Furthermore, dominant discourses are socially constructed; the ideas, values, and knowledge accepted within society are created through the understanding that people derive within social processes (Gergen, 2011). The
American Dream is an example of a dominant discourse, suggesting a specific way of accomplishing a preferred life path. An example of a path to success such as prosperity in the American dream is attaining employment through a formal process, such as filling out a job application, submitting a resume, and performing an interview with a manager. Most often, street-gang members are not viewed as following a preferred life path when they are seeking out the American dream because of the association of violence and crime linked to the way that gangs are perceived as acquiring income (Beare & Hogg, 2013; Cloward & Ohlin, 1960; Shaw & McKay, 1942).

The tension between street gangs as an out-group and groups retaining power within the dominant society is fueled by stereotypes, which lead to marginalization of these groups (Vigil, 1988, 2002, 2003). The resistance to the discrimination experienced by the street gangs is illustrated by their ability to survive in society through alternate discourses. Some of these alternate discourses lead to these gang members being labeled as criminal and violent by the dominant society, as depicted in stories about this subculture relayed by the media and entertainment industries (Esbensen & Carson, 2012; Lane & Meeker, 2003). As individuals in street gangs develop an awareness of how to use their funds of knowledge to access opportunities in education and employment, these prospects can become life-changing experiences leading towards a sense of belonging as an inclusive member of society and thickening their identity construction. Specifically, accessing the funds of knowledge will shape the identity for these individuals as they experience new environments where they find a connection to self (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014). For example, street gangs can work as community activists by accessing resources such as food for low-income families within their neighborhood through careful use of social capital.
(Venkatesh, 2008). This sense of self further solidifies a connection with identity as a productive and valued member of society (Adler, 1930; Adler & Fleischer, 1988; Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Awareness of the strengths of street gangs can lead to reducing the stereotypes held by the dominant society and successively open doors of opportunity that have been shut because of the misplaced rejection of individuals participating in street gangs. This awareness leads to a repositioning within discourses that describes the strengths of street gangs as contributing to the greater society.

**Social Constructionism**

Simply defined, social constructionism is the shared understanding of a concept. Social constructs such as race, affect the beliefs about a person based on this identifier. Language, discourse, and code-switching are the elements of social constructionism pertinent to this study because together they encompass meaning derived from linguistic expression and a manifestation of how individuals within this study have behaved in order to navigate their world including structural inequalities based upon stereotypes and discrimination towards individuals involved in street gangs.

The definition of success is socially constructed, as is the route of acquiring knowledge or truth (Burr, 1995; Gergen & Gergen, 1997; Gergen, 2009, 2010; Yosso, 2005). Each person explores the world through their own lens; however this lens is created through social processes. Success and lifestyle choices are limited or enhanced by the opportunities available to an individual from their particular position, including their access to opportunities. Specifically, the place and time we are exposed to will shape what we consider to be the truth about the world including our role and the prospects available to us (Burr, 1995; Gergen, 2009, 2010). For example, many street gang members do not
find traditional employment that sustains a decent living wage because of discriminative practices based upon stereotypes of race, ethnicity, and fear of individuals involved in street gangs (Whyte, 1943; Venkatesh, 2008). Traditional employment consists of paid work performed in small businesses or within institutions of power, such as a corporation, government, or religious organization. In other words, traditional employment is typically defined as a legal or legitimate pursuit of work. The various barriers to employment for street gang members are perpetuated through discriminative practices based on class, race, ethnicity, and stereotypic perception (Vigil, 1988, 2002, 2003). Youth in street gangs have gained specific skills that confront the claims of the stereotypes that hinder their opportunities in work, education, and access to social capital to facilitate improved life quality through career and academic accomplishments. In my work, I have seen street gangs combine unity, loyalty, and strategy to support their community members who have been victimized financially, physically, or emotionally. The youth participating in the community-based agency where I worked acted as a united front to motivate a perpetrator to restore justice.

**Language.**
Individuals participating in street gangs use language relevant to the context of the street life to communicate and understand. An observer of conversations of individuals participating in street gangs gains understanding of how individuals within street gangs interpret the context of street life (Bear & Hogg, 2013). Understanding the context of street gangs can give outsiders a chance to walk a mile in their shoes and gain a deeper understanding of choices that are made, which are based upon the structure present for these individuals. From a social constructionist perspective, language is beyond simply a
form of expression (Gergen, 1999, 2009, 2010). Rather, language serves a cultural and historical purpose that produces individual action and behavior (Burr, 1995; Gergen, 1999, 2010, 2011; Foucault, 1969). Language provides the framework for understanding our experiences within the world (Burr, 1995). A good way to contemplate how language structures experiences is to consider conversations between people. The words used may have different meanings to each person and it is through the evolution of the conversation that the meanings become clear. This language then shapes the knowledge that we create through the shared understandings of the meanings (Burr, 1995; Gergen, 1999, 2009, 2010). A gang member might be described as violent, deviant, and engaging in criminal behavior, yet another description could be protective, loyal, and a powerful presence in the community. Both meanings create a picture of a gang member based on the individual’s understanding of a gang member. The understanding of the street gang member is derived from societal “knowledge” of these individuals and is based on the language learned to describe these individuals. The ideas that are accepted as knowledge are created through shared understandings of a concept (Burr, 1995; Gergen, 2009, 2010). Furthermore, this language is historically and culturally specific to the time, space, and place where the individual lives and interacts with others (Burr, 1995, Gergen, 2009, 2010). A person with no private experience with gang members might gain their understanding of these individuals from messages offered by friends, family, and the media. A person who lives in a neighborhood with a high population of gang members might offer the second description of the gang member because their experience is shaped through their cultural knowledge of the gang members. It is the language that provides a context for life. The
collection of unwritten rules, customs, and understanding of a particular concept defines the discourse (Foucault, 1969).

**Discourse.**
The shared interpretation of a concept or object constitutes a discourse (Burr, 1995). Each discourse establishes “knowledge” based on a particular set of meanings of a concept or object. Outsiders looking in to individuals participating in gangs understand these groups through the popular discourse, which suggests violence or criminal deviance is the sole identity (Esbenson & Carson, 2012). For example, one’s knowledge of a gang member is manifested through the linguistic descriptions available to the beholder of this interpretation. Learning about individuals participating in gangs is performed through exposure to books, television, movies, and conversations that depict gang members. The social media produces a particular kind of discursive formation about gangs. Although there may be many discursive formations, there are dominant discourses within the space that individuals inhabit, which deserve some attention. Concepts constructed within dominant discourses are often accepted as knowledge for a majority of individuals. For example, street gang members are often viewed within dominant society as violent and criminal (Lane & Meeker, 2003). The discourse of a street gang member as a delinquent of the society is reiterated because of the limited perspective of street gang members on the news. Therefore, the prevailing perception of a street gang member as someone to be feared is influenced by the knowledge created within a particular discourse. To change the discourse, a new awareness of the concept, which in this case is a group of people, must be present.
**Code-switching.**

Code-switching represents a way of navigating across contrasting and sometimes contradictory environments. People use code-switching to seek understanding, be understood, gain respect, attain success, and feel more comfortable as they respond to diverse and competing cultural prescriptions (Gergen, 2009, 2011). Code-switching is a skill that is accessed for an individual to fit in to the alternate setting. A street gang member attending a university accesses his scholastic skills and uses academic language in order to fully engage in the university setting (Gordon, 2002). Accessing the academic language and nuances associated with being a student in the university while unlocking street survival language in a street gang context requires an ability to successfully navigate the art of code-switching. Code-switching entails understanding what is accepted in a particular environment and accessing this ability to move seamlessly between the different identities (Gergen, 2009, 2011). Consider a street gang member successfully performing at a university by accessing scholastic language. Utilizing the skills required for success in an academic environment illustrates the ability to understand the differences between street and university life and successfully transfer the talent in either environment.

**Social constructionist perspective of identity.**

Language, discourse, and code switching all play a role in the way that identity is shaped for individuals participating in street gangs because our experiences are informed through the language and discourses that we occupy. Code switching is used to navigate different environments and apply acceptable behavior, language, and customs. Our identities are structured by our experiences in the world (Burr, 1995; Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014). There are dominant perspectives that offer specific images of gang members. These perspectives can be defined as stereotypes (Esbenson & Carson, 2012; Lane &
Meeker, 2003), which have an impact both on the societal perception of a gang member and also influence the identity of a gang member as he or she either rejects or accepts these labels. The label is placed on the group, yet this identity of the group is intertwined with the individual (Gergen, 1999). Street gang members identify with some of these behaviors that suggest that they are violent criminals and, therefore, respond to that recognition.

Our identities are externally influenced as we observe the way that others perceive meaning about a particular notion (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014; Gergen, 1999, 2009, 2010). For example, the idea of how a gang member behaves will shape the street gang member’s sense of self as he or she connects with an aspect of their identity. The street gang member is therefore externally influenced through the stereotypes about street gang members and he/she may adopt an aspect of this classification as part of their identity (Vigil, 1988, 2002, 2003). A youth in a street gang might carry a gun; however, this does not necessarily validate whether or not he is aggressive or violent. Carrying a weapon creates an image of violence for many within the dominant society because of the association of brutality attached to street gang members. The right to bear arms is awarded through the constitution, yet street gang members accessing this privilege are often feared as opposed to other groups retaining weapons. Other groups such as the military are not necessarily viewed as violent by their use of weapons because they are not associated as participating in criminal activity in the way that street gang members are affiliated with terrorizing the streets. Furthermore, the military is an accepted group within society, because of their association as a defensive force supported by the government. The military could also be defined as a gang, yet the ways that the military are viewed by society suggest that this “gang” is accepted within the structure of the dominant society. Therefore, the experiences
of the military are shaped by this societal acceptance. Our identities are socially constructed through the structure of the society that we inhabit and our personal experiences within this structure (Burr, 1995). The experiences of individuals participating in street gangs are shaped by the predominantly negative manner in which outsiders of street gangs view them.

Internally, who we think we are is constructed from our experiences with others and made possible through language (Burr, 1995). Language provides a way to express one’s understanding of a concept. When a concept that a person learns about is something that resonates with one’s internal dialogue, an acceptance of an aspect our identity unfolds. One learns about multiple identities that can be adopted through exposure to new experiences (Gergen, 2009, 2011). The various aspects of how we understand ourselves can be described as multiple identities and these may vary based on time, setting, and place. For example, a street gang member might access the academic environment and accept this as a part of his identity if he relates to this experience. It may seem strange to associate street gang members as students because the discourses of student and street gang member aren’t often connected. Yet, both of these identities can reside within the same individual. These new experiences show another way of living that resonates with how we feel about the self (Burr, 1995). With new options to ponder and adopt, a gang member might see that he can be part of a different community, such as a university. As a college student, the street gang member might begin to code-switch between the street life and the academic life and while this is occurring, new perceptions about his own identity are forming. The street-gang member may then see that being a college student offers better life opportunities for paths to achieve aspirational goals.
Sense of Belonging

Baumeister and Leary (1995) suggest that a sense of belonging develops when one feels connected to a place or person. Individuals involved in street gangs obtain a sense of belonging from their experiences within the street gang context (Ruble & Turner, 2000). This sense of belonging manifests through the connection one feels to their identity. In other words, features such as race, ethnicity, language all contribute to the cultural identity development. Belonging provides an encouraging psychological function for youth involved in street gangs as it contributes to one’s identity development: whereas you might feel hated in your biological family, you feel belonging in this chosen family (DeWall, Deckman, Pond, & Bonser, 2011). In this study, the experiences of being a Haitian, Black, and current resident of Miami with immigrant parents may play a significant role in whether the individual feels a sense of belonging in the street-gang subculture. Phinney (1992) describes belongingness as a key ingredient in racial identity and specifically in the development of a bicultural identity. A bicultural identity for immigrant youth stems from the experiences of being born in one country and being raised in another (1.5 generation) or being the first generation born in a particular country. To give another example, one’s perspective is strongly influenced by his/her home life and the caregivers cultural identity juxtaposed with the influence outside the home including schooling (Orellana, 2009). If a child is teased at school for an aspect of language, skin color, clothing, or custom, it can lead to a sense of inferiority as this child attempts to find a sense of belonging. An affirmative racial identity has a positive impact on life satisfaction, which also develops a sense of belonging (Yap, Settles, & Pratt-Hyatt, 2011). Another manifestation of belongingness is exemplified in prisons. Fellow incarcerated street-gang members provide protection
against attacks from other inmates (Beare & Hogg, 2013; Winterdyk & Ruddell, 2010). Furthermore, in many instances, street gangs function as a family by providing protection, support, and social connection thereby increasing the sense of belonging (Venkatesh, 2008).

**Funds of Knowledge**

The funds of knowledge, FOK, are the abilities that are used in one context, such as school, but drawn from an alternate environment, such as home. The term “funds of knowledge” hails from educational and anthropological research that seeks to uncover how historically and culturally developed wisdom from a child’s home education are useful by the student and the teacher in the classroom to facilitate the learning process (Moll, et. al., 1992; Yosso, 2005). Moll and colleagues found that families in Tucson acquired skills in the various areas of home life, such as construction, agriculture, and folk remedies. Through the use of social capital, these families found ways to address economic hardships by applying these abilities within social networks. Specifically, youth in these families learned a skill such as masonry from a family member, and then used this talent through community referrals to generate income. The home education is then a helpful way to address economic challenges faced by the family. Yosso (2005) offers another example of the funds of knowledge concept by distinguishing the various forms of capital that facilitate access to opportunities. In this study, I investigate if the funds of knowledge helped the individuals involved in street gangs attain aspirational goals and engage in their community in a helpful context.

Street gang-involved individuals might learn that street survival requires networking with others who can provide protection (Winterdyk & Ruddell, 2010). In an
alternate setting, the street gang-involved youth might reflect on how this particular
knowledge of social capital is beneficial to attain growth in a career (Bourdieu, 1986).
Consider a study demonstrating how funds of knowledge are accessed in university
students who are also gang members. Gordon (2002) in her study used her role as a
professor to create a peer-learning opportunity by inviting her students who were street-
gang members to share their experiences of marginalization and to describe their
experiences negotiating the academic setting. This learning opportunity created a space for
stereotypes to be broken down and for voices to be heard and thereby socially constructing
a new experience for all her students. This social construction of knowledge created
through the peer-sharing experience offers the street gang-involved students the chance to
draw upon their funds of knowledge to educate their colleagues in an academic
environment. Experiential learning activities create a space for new understandings of how
social learning applies in a classroom. This social learning allowed the street-gang
members to tap into their funds of knowledge and transfer those in order to successfully
function in an academic setting. Another example of a fund of knowledge is the role of
street gangs in providing informal security to a community. Police often fail to respond
quickly and consistently to low-income neighborhoods to address crime. Street gangs use
street skills, such as intimidation to protect, defend, and resist harm within their
neighborhood (Venkatesh, 2008). This skill of intimidation is understood through the
discourse of street life, and can be used in an alternate setting to help the community when
it is presented as a security force to protect the neighborhood from outsider aggression.
Research Context

It is important to understand the funds of knowledge and the sense of belonging developed within the street gang environment. Additionally, a social constructionist epistemology provides a lens to understand the specific history of Haitian immigration in Miami and the experiences of the first, second, and 1.5 generation individuals participating in this study. Particularly important to this study is understanding the barriers faced by Haitian youth that affect street-gang participation, skill development, and opportunities for improved life quality in this linguistically and ethnically diverse city.

Haitian history in Miami.
The history of Haitians as they immigrated to Miami provides a context of their marginalization experiences prior to their decision to join street gangs. In addition, the discrimination and alienation of the individual street-gang members increases exponentially as the youth continue to participate in street gangs. Haitians have largely settled in the Little Haiti section of Miami due to the proximity to job opportunities in the garment and warehousing industries as well as access to inexpensive housing (Mohl, 2003). Little Haiti is an area of Miami bordering two low socio-economic communities where Black Americans face similar barriers in seeking employment. As Haitians are often racially identified as Black, the discrimination experienced by the Haitians when seeking employment is magnified due to the stigma of poor, low-skilled, disease carriers that are attached to Haitian immigrants (Stepick, 1991). These negative stereotypes directed at Haitians coupled with the existing racism towards Blacks in the United States creates additional barriers in obtaining resources for survival. Understanding the challenges of the Haitian immigration pattern in Miami provides insight into the alienation and
discrimination Haitian street-gang members encounter. Some of these challenges were the catalyst that provoked youth to join street gangs in Miami. Yet, the youth experienced further alienation and discrimination beyond their experiences as ethnically and linguistically diverse individuals in Miami because they are involved in street gangs.

**Historical immigration patterns.**
The Haitian settlement in Miami occurred in three distinct historical waves. The first Haitians to arrive came in 1957 after fleeing the Duvalier dictatorship in Haiti (Portes & Stepick, 1985; Vilme & Butler, 2004). The first Haitians to arrive were generally a formally educated group with economic resources (Vilme & Butler, 2004). The second wave of Haitians to arrive came between the 1960s and the early 1980s (Vilme & Butler, 2004). The second group was mainly comprised of skilled laborers. The third wave migrated from the middle 1980s through the current time were comprised of general laborers (Vilme & Butler, 2004). Haitians migrating to the United States in the latter two waves experienced discrimination politically and through the oppressive attitudes from the dominant society.

Haitians in Miami experienced barriers in securing employment due to the perception of these individuals as low-skilled workers (Vilme & Butler, 2004). In addition, language presented a challenge in obtaining work because Haitian Creole was not valued as a benefit in Miami. Haitians further experienced discrimination because of the accusations of transmitting diseases, such as tuberculosis and AIDS (Stepick, 1991). Many Haitians were only able to find work through self-employment by selling food or goods mainly within the Haitian community (Stepick, 1991). Additionally, Haitians were not granted political asylum and were successively detained in a concentration or internment camp setting in the everglades during the Reagan administration (Stepick, 1991). This
experience within the concentration or internment camp led to depression and suicide for many Haitians as they were labeled as impoverished disease carriers in addition to the challenges they faced seeking work (Clerge, 2012).

Prejudice and discrimination during the second and third waves of the Haitian immigration also created racial and ethnic alienation in Miami (Stepick, 1990). Haitian youth experienced discrimination by peers in school and attempted to distance themselves from the bias directed towards Haitians by emphasizing the lightness of skin color or their international sophistication (Clerge, 2012). Developing a sense of belonging as a Haitian youth in Miami presents a challenge because of the discrimination experienced racially, ethnically, and linguistically. Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, and Vedder (2001) describe belongingness as a key ingredient in racial identity and specifically in development of a bicultural identity. In Miami, I observed Haitian youth choose to join street gangs validating their racial and ethnic identity. Furthermore, race and ethnicity are primary factors in gang membership (Esbensen, Brick, Melde, Tusinski, and Taylor (2008); Pyrooz et. al, 2010; Vigil, 1988, 2002, 2003). The lack of employment options for Haitians as well as the marginalization of Haitian youth makes gang membership a foreseeable life path.

Adjustment challenges.
Haitians arriving in the eighties through today experience differential treatment by the Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) policy, which labels Haitian immigrants in the United States as economic migrants instead of political refugees (Mohl, 2003). For example, Cubans often find a more favorable welcome to the United States when leaving their homeland because the stated reason for emigration of their homeland is communism. In contrast, Haitian immigrants leaving Haiti do not have the option to state that
communism was the reason for their immigration to the United States. Haitians immigrants are therefore refused entry into the United States or live in fear of deportation (Kretsedemas, 2003). Many Haitian immigrants flee Haiti in order to seek economic gain in the United States.

Alienation and discrimination of Haitian youth.
Haitian youth experience higher levels of unemployment and fewer academic credentials when compared with other immigrant groups in Miami (Clerge, 2012). Identification with one’s Haitian roots varies for youth in Miami, as some adolescents deny this aspect of their identity because of the stigma they have seen their parents experience when seeking employment and government resources (Clerge, 2012). Some youth have maintained the connection to Haitian roots as a great source of pride as an aspect of their identity (Vilme & Butler, 2004). The formation of Haitian gangs in Miami is a natural progression for youth who find pride in their heritage and want to retain this aspect of their identity through the development of a sense of belonging within a street gang. As a linguistically and ethnically diverse minority in Miami, Haitians lack access to opportunity in the formal employment sector and acceptance into dominant society. This lack of opportunity shapes the decision for many youth to join street gangs as they seek financial gain, acceptance, and support through the street-gang.

Haitian street gangs in Miami.
Data about Haitian street gangs is primarily in news reports and executive summaries distributed for law enforcement. At this time, it is estimated that there are about seventy active street gangs in Miami, yet the data is not disaggregated to identify Haitian gangs specifically (Uchida, 2011). One of the main purposes of the research done
for law enforcement is to uncover the criminal activity and dismantle the gang (Klein, 1995; Uchida, 2011). Additionally, research on street gangs in Miami describes the social, economic, and psychological benefits of street gang involvement for the individual street gang members (Palacios, 1996). The research from law enforcement also describes the extent of criminal and violent nature of street gangs in Miami and the ensuing impact on the local Miami communities. As identified earlier, one significant psychological benefit to belonging in a street gang is the sense of belonging that develops. Yap, Settles, and Pratt-Hyatt (2011) found that positive perceptions of a racial or ethnic group increased belongingness to group. Specifically, participating in a gang that validates ethnic identity is important in a city where Haitians are discriminated against because of their ethnic background. Immigrants are more likely to participate in street gangs. Immigrant youth have a higher ratio of participation (20%) in street gangs than individuals born in the United States (11%) (Esbenson & Carson, 2012). Street gangs provide a sense of belonging for individuals in gangs and a way to attain needed resources. Research seeking to discover the aspects of street gang life that are productive for the individuals themselves and their communities as included members of the greater society is the objective of this study.

**Summary of Literature**

The epistemological lens I am using in this research is social constructionism. At its core, social constructionism is the process of understanding and creating the world through our social relationships (Gergen, 1999, 2009, 2010). This lens is produced by how we understand our experiences with others, in particular cultural and historical settings (Burr, 1995). The way that we experience the world is available through the lens that we develop as we move through life, and this will be different for individuals hailing from
different parts of the world, places in time, and by each person’s interpretation. In addition, it is the language that outlines how we understand all that we come to know in the world (Burr, 1995). For example, street gang-involved individuals learn about the necessity of being “strapped” as a source of protection from real and perceived enemies. An individual in the dominant society who is outside the world of street gangs may not understand the need of keeping a loaded gun available because bearing arms at all times isn’t part of his or her understanding of the world. The discourses available in an individual’s life experiences provide the backdrop to the paths chosen in life. Youth experiencing marginalization and alienation by dominant society will choose to participate in a street gang as a way to find unity, protection, and a sense of belonging within the street gang (McMillan, & Chavis, 1986; Ruble and Turner, 2000). Creating this sense of belonging outside of street gangs could open new opportunities for safer life paths for these individuals by validating alternate aspects of identity.

A social constructionist lens is useful in understanding why transferable funds of knowledge are important to uncover research on street gangs because it shows how street gangs are created and how they function through the power dynamics between dominant society, and the individuals participating in the street-gang subculture. These power dynamics influence the experiences of marginalization that hinder opportunities for these street-gang members and also shed light on the survival skills developed within the subculture of the street gangs (Bourdieu, 1986; Venkatesh, 2008; Vigil, 1988, 2002, 2003). The dominant discourses in turn may present new definitions of street-gang members, which can generate opportunities for connections between the out-group of street gangs and the in-group of the dominant society.
Identity through a social constructionist lens is created through the meaning made out of experiences within human relationships (Burr, 1995). The language that we are exposed to in our lives provides the lens for understanding our interactions with others while the experiences shape our acceptance of the different aspects of our identity (Burr, 1995; Gergen, 2009, 2010, 2011). For street gang-involved individuals, the notion of what a street-gang member looks like and how he behaves will influence the individual’s beliefs about participating in a street gang.

It is the social construction of identity within the street-gang subculture that has informed the research intention. An investigation of the behaviors and skills constructed within a street gang subculture and in the dominant society will offer insight about the application of the skills and funds of knowledge that can be used in productive ways for street gang members to attain success in contexts that benefit the community and the individual. For example, street gang members working towards community development can address equity issues in their neighborhood by galvanizing an activist perspective tackling the social inequities. The Black Panthers are an example of a gang working against racial and class oppression through organized networking (Barganier, 2011). The Black Panthers observed many racial, ethnic, and class barriers in society; and used the power of the group to generate awareness about the structural inequalities and worked as a group to motivate social change.

Currently, the literature about street gangs focuses mainly on the motivation for street-gang membership and criminal activities for street-gang members (Beare & Hogg, 2013; Esbensen & Carson, 2012; Lane & Meeker, 2003). Vigil (2002, 2003) explores the marginalization of street-gang members, which informs the interest for addressing the life
problem in this study. Understanding the experiences of marginalization that street gang members experience offers a perspective of how their identity is shaped through these experiences of marginalization. Literature on the skills of street-gang members that are useful in alternative settings outside of the street life is missing. It is my intent in this research to contribute to providing alternate perspectives of street gang members apart from the stereotypes of criminal and devious individuals. My study will contribute to the literature by exploring the positive skills learned in street gangs, which can offer alternate perspectives of street gang members for stakeholders, teachers, counselors, employers, and groups with the capacity to reduce barriers to employment, education, and offer alternative safer and productive life paths. Role models and interested parties may help youth to identify their skills that validate their sense of belonging and offer future life improvement opportunities by creating activities focusing on these funds of knowledge when offering education for career choice, job skills, or community activism (Espinoza, 2011; Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014). Essentially, the awareness of the funds of knowledge for the street gang-involved youth can open a multitude of opportunities through the partnership with teachers, counselors, and others interested in creating inclusive benefits for the gang members as valued members of the greater society. In addition, this awareness can improve the overall life quality for street gang members as they contribute in meaningful ways in their own pursuits as valued and included members of the greater society.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research is an appropriate choice for research within a social constructionist framework because it aligns with the descriptive inquiry essential for understanding the experiences of the participants beyond the statistical cause and effect design in some areas of quantitative research (Creswell, 2014; Gergen, 2014). This methodological choice to investigate the funds of knowledge acquired within street gangs qualitatively is described in the first section of this chapter. Next, the use of appreciative inquiry as a format for creating and asking interview questions is appropriate in developing the interview questions because it aligns with the social constructionist lens, which informs the framework (Barrett, et al., 1995; Busche, 2011). Following the explanation of specific methodological choices, this chapter will describe the particular factors relevant to this study, including the sample population, recruitment tactics, protection of human subjects, instrumentation, pilot study, procedure, data analysis and accountability to the community. The chapter will conclude with a summary of the research methodology.

Qualitative Research

This study employs qualitative methodology to explore if there are transferable funds of knowledge acquired by youth involved in gangs. Qualitative methodology provides a space for the researcher’s perspective to play a pivotal role in designing, conducting, and analyzing the data (Creswell, 2014; Mertens, 2010). The researchers’ own experiences influence the methods chosen to conduct the research, and in the interpretation of the results (Mertens, 2010). In some qualitative research within the social justice area, the inspiration for the study might be an awareness of a community injustice. Often, the
researcher has a connection to that community through their own identity or is impassioned through their experiences working with this community, which might be how the awareness of the injustice was developed. In a qualitative approach, the researcher is the instrument as opposed to a survey or questionnaire functioning as the instrument in quantitative research (Mertens, 2010). In my research, I had prior experience observing the marginalization, barriers to employment, education, and sustainable life paths of the community. The experiences and bias of the researcher played a role in how the data was analyzed, and which research techniques helped to uncover the answers to the research questions.

The group studied in this research is an out-group of the dominant society and as such has been subject to experiences of marginalization (Stepick, 1990). Qualitative methods are effective for investigating challenges facing marginalized groups when the researcher uses interviews and member checking to determine the participant meaning (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative research is also used to understand the experiences of the marginalized groups through a transformative nature (Mertens, 2010). A transformative design may help bring about social change to an underrepresented group or marginalized group, such as street gangs. Additionally, an objective of qualitative research is to reduce alienation of these individuals (Gergen, 2014). The research questions in this study provide motivation for using qualitative methodology because of researcher’s relationship to the community. Additionally, I sought to understand the participant meaning through the process of investigation (Creswell, 2014). My experiences working in a non-profit gang prevention program influenced the research question, methods, and analysis of the data. Specifically, my prior involvement working with the Haitian gang community in Miami
offered a more intimate cultural understanding of this group, and motivated an invested interest in improving the life opportunities for these individuals. My familiarity with the group provided a foundation for reflecting on how my experience shapes the research and interview questions. Specifically, I identified proficiencies previously witnessed within the community that suggest acquisition of skills within gangs that might be used in alternate settings. Understanding the transferability of skills may provide a transformational experience for the Haitian gang community, when these gang members themselves, teachers, outreach staff, policy makers, counselors, and others who can impact the opportunities for these individuals engage in developing an awareness of the funds of knowledge. As a social constructionist lens locates the meaning of concepts in human relationships, it is important to use qualitative methodology that seeks out the significance of the participant’s understanding of their own experiences. Furthermore, it is imperative that this meaning is understood through the lens of the street-gang members in order to provide robust analysis sustaining the integrity of the participants. Qualitative methodology lends itself to gaining a deeper insight by using an inductive style to develop themes on the funds of knowledge and sense of belonging from the data through multiple interview sessions. I interviewed each participant between 2-3 times in this research study.

**Appreciative Inquiry Approach**

Appreciative inquiry (AI) is described as a method, a philosophy, or approach depending upon how and where it is used (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1996). In its pure essence, AI sets up an environment where the participant feels comfortable and subsequently can share. AI utilizes positive emotional energy to think creatively about challenging situations (Barrett, et. al., 1995; Busche, 2011; Lewis, Passmore, & Cantore,
In a place of employment, AI can be implemented by using the 4D model including discovery, dream, design, and destiny to respond to a challenge at work. The participants will be guided through using the principles to work out challenges focusing on what works. However, AI’s origins began in grounded theory research by generating awareness of the researcher’s motivation for the research (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1996). For example, I have a section in my introduction about locating the researcher in the study to provide background about my knowledge and interactions with the group studied and my inspiration for undertaking this endeavor. My bias as a researcher is important for the AI process because it provides a context for how my experiences shaped my design and analysis. One example of using AI to facilitate positive emotional energy for individuals or groups is to create a café setting complete with light food, coffee, or tea and cozy chairs, which creates an interview setting where the participants engage in storytelling about their experiences. AI also aligns with understanding identity through a social constructionist lens because the individuals are in a safe space to share their perspectives. A social constructionist framework complements the AI approach because the focus is on developing a shared meaning of a concept (Barrett, et. al., 1995; Busche, 2011). By focusing on past accomplishments instead of deficits, the conversation is lead by the positive emotional energy because the participants are in a space where they feel good when sharing their prior experiences (Kelly, Mohr, & Watkins, 2011). There is no judgment, which might often be the case when a marginalized individual shares his backstory or reveals personal information. The conversation is an important feature of AI because the participant experiences a sense of being heard in an atmosphere where trust is present, and participates in creating shared meanings (Lewis, Passmore, & Cantore, 2008).
In this research study, an AI approach set the tone for the semi-structured interviews. Using an AI approach for the interviews facilitates the conversational style of investigation for the interviews with gang members because the process on inquiry is focused on strengths and accomplishments. Using an appreciative inquiry style serves to generate the positive emotional energy needed to reflect on the benefits of being in a gang that are connected to transferable funds of knowledge in alternate settings. Venkatesh (2008) found that a traditional clipboard and survey format were rejected by a street-gang culture because questionnaires didn’t capture the real life experiences of these individuals. AI shifts the negative emotional energy associated with a problem solving approach to one that increases the positive emotional state leading to a creative process for discovery (Lewis, Passmore, & Cantore, 2008). Specifically, AI is used in the design of the interview questions by awakening the positive emotional state helpful to identifying the funds of knowledge. AI can be helpful in generating an awareness of the transferable skills that are useful in alternate environments as opposed to triggering painful aspects of gang life. AI generates a positive emotional state, which enhances the ability to think creatively (Lewis, Passmore, & Cantore, 2008). One critique of AI is that the positive experiences of one individual may be negative experiences for another. In this study, participants may share their experiences where they have felt that they have developed a skill and outsiders may view this skill in a harmful manner. I am using AI because there are many stereotypes associated with individuals participating in gangs and little recognition of the strengths of street gangs mainly from individuals with limited experience or awareness of street gangs or the individual actually participating in a gang. AI is linked to the research question because it’s a process of inquiry focusing on the strengths. The funds of knowledge are
strengths that are drawn upon for use in alternative situations apart from their original setting. AI sets up the opportunity to have a conversation where the funds of knowledge are reflected upon, and perhaps creative ways to use these funds of knowledge in alternate settings may also arise from these conversations because of the presence of positive emotional energy lending itself to an imaginative awareness of new ideas that are possible.

Table 1 below describes the research questions, the constructs associated with the research question, the investigative approach of methodology, and the interview questions (Appendix B) aimed at answering the research questions. The constructs aligned with the research questions are what I will attempt to uncover. I chose semi-structured interviewing to have a baseline of questions and allow the conversation to evolve into ideas and constructs that the participant may want to share. A semi-structured interview allowed me to understand the perspectives of the participants through both a focused and open-ended conversation. The interview questions that are listed are linked with the research question and construct that I am attempting to answer.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Approach &amp; Elements of Appreciative Inquiry</th>
<th>Interview Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) How do street-gang members perceive a sense of belonging as an out-group of the dominant society?</td>
<td>Sense of Belonging</td>
<td>Semi-Structured Interview; Conversation through the development of trust, authentic listening, &amp; shared meaning</td>
<td>A: 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2a) How do street-gang involved individuals acquire funds of knowledge through their participation in gangs?</td>
<td>Funds of Knowledge</td>
<td>Semi-Structured Interview &amp; Member Checking; Conversation through the development of trust, authentic listening, &amp; shared meaning</td>
<td>B: 3, 8, 9, 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2b) What are the various funds of knowledge as perceived by the gang-involved individuals?</td>
<td>Funds of Knowledge</td>
<td>Semi-Structured Interview &amp; Member Checking; Conversation through the development of trust, authentic listening, &amp; shared meaning</td>
<td>B: 3, 8, 9, 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3a) How have these funds of knowledge been transferred to lead to accomplishment in aspirational goals for the gang-involved individuals?</td>
<td>Transferability of Funds of Knowledge</td>
<td>Semi-Structured Interview &amp; Member Checking; Conversation through positive emotional energy</td>
<td>B: 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 11, 12 D: 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3b) How have these funds of knowledge been transferred to lead to community engagement for the gang-involved individuals?</td>
<td>Transferability of Funds of Knowledge</td>
<td>Semi-Structured Interview &amp; Member Checking; Conversation through positive emotional energy</td>
<td>C: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 D: 1, 2, 3, 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sample Population

The group studied in this research includes 14 street-gang members in Miami between the ages of 20 and 32. All participants identified themselves as having full or partial Haitian ethnicity. I utilized contacts that work with the Haitian gang community in Miami to obtain participants. I gained access to this community through my work experience in the gang prevention and intervention program. I also have contacts in Miami from other community-based organizations working with individuals involved in gangs. Specifically, I have prior experience working with former Haitian gang members, community workers with access to this population, and current associates who are involved in Haitian gangs in Miami. I generated the sample population for this research study by using purposeful and snowball methods (Creswell, 2014; Mertens, 2010). In order to contact and recruit Haitian gang members, I used a purposeful approach by communicating with community workers who have contact with individuals meeting the participant criteria of individuals involved in Haitian gangs in Miami. Furthermore, I accessed my own associates participating in Haitian gangs in Miami by contacting them via email or phone. I asked these individuals to provide names of other participants that would be interested in sharing their experiences with me. After initial contacts were sought out through a purposeful approach, a snowball method was used to identity participants that might be interested in this research (Creswell, 2014; Mertens, 2010). By using a snowball method, I recruited participants based on the assessment of street gang members already participating in the study who have an awareness of another appropriate individual to interview. In addition, the snowball sampling is an effective technique in this study because it allows the researcher to reach out to participants beyond the researcher’s contacts in the
community with whom entry to the population was initially developed. Snowball sampling offered a broader perspective of participants unknown to the researcher, who presented new information based on their life experiences within the Haitian gangs. The specific population sought out in this research was individuals affiliated with gangs between 18 and 30 years of age, residing in Miami, and of Haitian ethnicity. This population was chosen because these are the individuals predominantly involved in Haitian street gangs in Miami from the researcher’s prior experiences working within this community. In addition, the gang members who are 18 and older have a greater influence on the activities of the younger members within the community (Vigil, 2003). Yet, the age group I interviewed is a young population still navigating the influences of adolescence in some respects, which makes them good candidates for their younger peers to revere as role models or someone to listen to in the community.

Unconventional Recruitment Tactics and Challenges

I interviewed 14 individuals meeting the criteria of having full or partial Haitian ethnicity, living in Miami, and having an affiliation with a gang. In addition to participants obtained through former contacts and the snowballing effect, I was able to get the participation of some individuals through unusual recruitment techniques. I had a prior professional relationship with a correctional rehabilitative program, which serves youthful offenders, aged 14 to 24 who are at risk of facing serious felony sentences if they do not complete the rehabilitation program successfully. I was able to reach out to this correctional program to recruit and interview participants for this research study based upon my previous working relationship with the organization. However, I did not know any of the participants that I interviewed in this research from my prior experience.
working with the correctional rehabilitative program. The program involves a three-tier system where the young offenders must complete all phases of the rehabilitation successfully in order to avoid lengthy incarceration. The ability of the participants to remain in this program is a measure of success because it is physically and mentally challenging. I witnessed the participants do excessive exercise much in the way that it occurs in a military boot camp. Additionally, I observed participants endure deafening verbal commands from drill instructors. Furthermore, in order to earn privileges including visitation, the participants must strictly follow the orders of the staff. Succeeding in the correctional rehabilitative program is difficult, yet I was able to meet with six participants who were accomplishing the goals of the program.

In order to establish the rapport and gain the trust of another research participant, I exercised in a physical fitness boot camp program for two weeks prior to one participant agreeing to be interviewed. I also offered transportation some participants who did not have any means of traveling to the interviews. Finally, I also transported one client to the police station at the end of his second interview at his request to turn himself in. This is of importance because enough trust had been established that he wanted to give me a second interview prior to turning himself in and he felt comfortable to ask me to drive him to the police station at the end of the interview. It was because of my relationships within the community that I was able to conduct these interviews. Two potential participants declined interviews and informed another participant of mine that they had declined to be interviewed due to my racial background because they didn’t trust people of my race. One final challenge that I ran into during the interviews was a couple of participants flirting during the interview. However, I effectively declined romantic requests and was able to
obtain the interviews. These aforementioned challenges should be considered by others seeking to replicate this research in future studies. Additionally, it was important to share the challenges of the research in order to convey my experiences in obtaining this data.

**Protection of Human Subjects**

The protection of all participants is a necessary part of any research project, and this study in particular demands an additional level of protection because of the sensitivity of the population being studied. I share an interest in the safety of the participants because of the nature of some of their experiences with violence, which is part of the motivation for conducting this study into the transferable funds of knowledge that individuals involved in street gangs acquire. I obtained IRB approval for this study through San Diego State University. I maintained confidentiality by conducting the interviews in secure locations comfortable to both the participant and the researcher such as a quiet café, library, or a conference room of a university. I will not share the legal or street names of the participants with anyone. I used pseudonyms to identify the participants in the dissertation and in my notes. The pseudonyms are only available to the researcher and all research materials including notes, transcripts, and interview recordings are kept in a secure locked location. The interview transcripts are kept in a password-protected computer. I shared the purpose of the study through a Consent Form (Appendix A) with the participants. However, I did not require a signature because there is no identifying information included in the findings. The confidentiality will be maintained by keeping the participants’ legal and street names private, and only known to the researcher.
Instrumentation

Conducting research with a special population such as street gang members requires a thoughtful design for the interviews. Street-gang members are a special population because they are an out-group of the dominant society (Allport, 1954). Many research studies are conducted by engaging a sample of students from a university (Creswell, 2014; Krathwohl, 2009; Mertens, 2010). Traditional interviews with a sample population obtained from a university might involve asking students to respond to a structured questionnaire. Venkatesh (2008) found that asking a standard set of questions was not successful for developing rapport and obtaining responses from the gang members that he studied. My study also involves interviewing street-gang members to understand constructs within the context of a street-gang subculture. I engaged the participants in a conversational style interview within the appreciative inquiry paradigm as a way to build the trust and rapport needed to establish a successful relationship between the participants and myself (Lewis, Passmore, & Cantore, 2008). This conversational interview approach in appreciative inquiry built trust in the interview process by utilizing active listening to create shared meanings between the participants. The Interview Protocol (Appendix B) for this research study includes specific interview questions aimed at understanding the different constructs of the research questions. The interviews were semi-structured so that the participant could openly share new perspectives that offered insight into worthwhile areas not previously addressed through the researcher’s interview questions (Krathwohl, 2009). The street-gang members shared stories that offer ideas about the funds of knowledge through the open structure prevalent in a semi-structured interview. The interviews left room for the flow of the conversation to present additional
avenues for exploration into the funds of knowledge acquired. Furthermore, it is important that the researcher allows the ideas to emerge from the reflection of the interviews as the rapport and trust grows. Therefore, I aimed to conduct these interviews in 1-2 sessions with each participant in order to develop the rapport with the participants and to gain the trust of the participants in order to respond to my questions. The interviews, in fact, took 2-3 sessions. Additionally, I was able to follow-up with many of the participants when additional questions arose through texting via Instagram, Facebook messenger, and mobile devices. Furthermore, follow-up interviews allowed for member checking as I determined the meaning understood in previous sessions. The greatest gain from two sessions and the follow-up through social media devices was the richer detail that emerged as the trust and rapport developed between the participant and myself.

**Pilot Study**

A pilot study was conducted prior to the start of the data collection in order to ensure that the interview protocol was appropriate to answer the research questions. In particular, the pilot study was conducted to ensure that the linguistic elements of the interview questions were appropriate for the participants. The pilot study offered an opportunity for me to predict and respond to possible challenges that might arise during the interview process of the dissertation. Areas of observation included pre-interview outreach, interview behavior, content modifications, and format adjustments. The purpose of the pilot study was to observe the participants and to make appropriate adjustments for future interviews in order to maximize successful study. I interviewed two participants for the pilot study; one male and one female. Both participants fell within the desired age of the research study perimeters.
The pre-interview outreach was slow as both participants rescheduled a few times for both the first and second interview. I recognized that participants had other obligations to attend to in their busy lives. As an incentive to engage participants in the research and accountability to the community, I offered to assist participants with resumes, cover letters, or any other assistance needed based upon the my skill set. Snacks, beverages, and light meals were also served to participants in order to create a comfortable and inviting environment.

During the interviews, the male participant remained active with his phone, which was a little distracting as he answered the questions. The rapport was already developed with this participant prior to the interview, so the trust was not lost through this process. However, the interruptions created a challenge as the second interview needed to stop and restart a few times while he attended to his calls and texts. I did not find a way to address the disruption caused by the interruptions except to review the last comments made in order to regain momentum and flow.

I listened for preliminary categories of identity, sense of belonging, and funds of knowledge during the interview process. It was helpful to review these themes prior to the interviews in order to facilitate a conversation that might lead to development of themes under the headings outlined in the research questions. These headings include: sense of belonging, identity within the street-gang, identity in other areas of life, funds of knowledge developed within the gang, and access of funds of knowledge in other aspects of life. It was helpful to record researcher observations immediately after the interview to gain initial awareness of participant’s responses and perspective in order to obtain initial
comprehension of participants’ responses and perspective for a better understanding the narrative shared.

I observed that it was helpful to partially memorize the interview questions so that the conversational approach would be available during the interviews. Notes were taken during the interview as the participants responded to the questions. I also observed that it was important to maintain a rapport by discreetly taking notes and also maintaining some eye contact. Finally, providing a relaxing atmosphere of a café environment aligned with the appreciative inquiry style necessary to create a comfortable and inviting setting. I worked to achieve this goal by providing snacks, tea, water, and coffee. Furthermore, the appreciative inquiry approach was used throughout the interview questions to generate positive energy and sustain an inviting atmosphere that was helpful to identifying strengths.

Observations from the pilot study aided in conducting and facilitating further interviews with the targeted population. A greater awareness of building trust and developing rapport was an understanding developed from the pilot study. Using alternative language that might seem appropriate for the targeted population was an initial concern for the pilot study. However, I observed that rephrasing questions was a helpful tool for some participants, but it may not be necessary for all. Overall, the pilot study offered an opportunity for strengthening the interviewing skills and strategies necessary for unearthing information useful in addressing the research questions.

**Procedures**

I contacted participants via email or telephone, and inquired about their interest in participation in the study. I arranged meetings with interested participants to meet
individually in a mutually comfortable private setting such as a remote room in a library. I presented the consent form and explained the purpose of the study. I also requested that the interviews be recorded for reference, clarity, and research analysis purposes. In the events that participants did not wish to have the interviews recorded, I asked the participants if they were comfortable with me taking notes during the interview. The interviews could not be recorded in the corrective rehabilitation program per requirements of the county restriction on custody facilities. However, I was allowed an exception and permitted to bring my computer into the correctional facility. Upon completion of the first interview with each participant, a subsequent interview followed within a few days to three weeks in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants’ responses and clarification particularly as it related to the research questions. Interviews lasted between 45 minutes to 2 hours 20 minutes. Each participant was interviewed at least twice in order to maximize data collection and rapport. Additionally, I was able to get further clarification with some participants including texting through mobile devices and social media: Instagram, and Facebook. By interviewing more than once and checking for clarification via texting methods, I engaged in the process of member checking by clarifying any responses that I felt confused by and asking additional follow-up questions.

**Data Analysis**

I used coding to analyze the data from this study. Specifically, I used inductive reasoning to develop themes about the transferability of the funds of knowledge. I hypothesized that the funds of knowledge are transferable when a sense of belonging has been developed in a context outside of street gangs. This sense of belonging shaped the
identity of the individuals involved in gangs through a social constructionist lens. I reviewed the data for themes that investigated the participants’ identity as a member of a street gang, utilizing a sense of belonging as a framework to assess this identity as a gang member. I also sought out the funds of knowledge acquired in street gangs by searching for themes inductively when the participant named a fund of knowledge. This naming was defined by the strengths or skills acquired within the participation in the gang. The transferability of the funds of knowledge was determined by the participant’s recollection of funds of knowledge that had been useful in alternative settings such as in a work, educational, or community setting. I reviewed the data after each interview and recorded my initial impressions about what the participant identified in relation to the constructs of identity, belongingness, and the funds of knowledge. Second, I examined the data for additional information provided by the participants because of the open-ended nature of the interviews that might provide insight into the transferability of the funds of knowledge. Through a process of member checking after each interview, I sought to explore the constructs relayed in the research question regarding the identity, belongingness, and the transferability of the funds of knowledge.

It is important to note that I was not able to use Nvivo software to code the data, as I had initially planned, because the Nvivo may not have recognized the jargon of the participants. As I coded the data, I first charted the participants’ pseudonyms along one side with the seven pieces of the research question along the other side. As I combed through the data, I discovered further themes of interest, which I thought might help answer the research questions. After this chart was completed, I went through the major themes in the theoretical framework including uncovering how the participants felt the
sense of belonging, the funds of knowledge, ways that the funds of knowledge were acquired, and how the funds of knowledge were transferred. I charted each theme, including the sense of belonging, fund of knowledge, how the fund of knowledge was obtained, how the fund of knowledge was transferred for aspirational achievement, and how the fund of knowledge was transferred for community value on an index card. I used a color-coding system to identify each section using different colored index cards. I then reviewed these themes as I had initially found 21 funds of knowledge and 12 ways that a sense of belonging was felt. Additionally I found 13 ways that the funds of knowledge were transferred. After consultation with my co-chairs and a reanalysis of the data, these themes were reduced to three focal ways that a sense of belonging was felt and six central funds of knowledge that were transferred. The themes were reduced so that the reader would not be overwhelmed by an unmanageable amount of categories. Furthermore, the most salient themes were brought forth through the deeper analysis.

A social constructionist lens utilizes language as a main tool to understand the meaning made from discourse (Gergen, 1999, 2008, 2009). In particular, themes emerging from the data were revealed to the participants in the subsequent interviews to understand their perceptions of their identity within the street-gang, including their sense of belonging, and acquisition of the funds of knowledge. By sharing my understanding of their responses to the participants, I sought to understand how the street-gang members developed a connection within the street gangs and how this could and does occur in alternate non-street-gang related environments. For example, I aimed to discover the marginalization experiences of the street gang members as an out-group to the dominant society because these experiences informed the social construction of identity as street-gang members.
Additionally, I tried to understand what drew the participants to join street gangs. I sought to discover the elements that lead to a sense of belonging within a street gang because this also informed their identity as street gang members through a social constructionist lens. Using a social constructionist approach to understand the formation of identity, I investigated the transferable funds of knowledge. Specific questions in the interviews addressed the constructs of the sense of belonging, funds of knowledge, and the transferability of the funds of knowledge. In summary, it was the meaning developed through the dynamics of the conversation that assisted the researcher in dissecting the different pieces of the research question through a social constructionist lens.

The repeated communication between the researcher and the participant served to develop rapport, which created a greater possibility of acquiring greater detail in the interviews. The bias of the researcher is a critical factor that needs attention when validating the analysis of any research study (Creswell, 2014; Merton, 2009). The researcher bias in this study is identified in the section “Locating the Researcher in the Research”. In this study, the researcher bias informs the analysis of the data because of the relationship and prior history with the Haitian gang community. My researcher bias is based upon my experiences bearing witness to experiences of marginalization of this community as well as the strengths I observed from these individuals within this community thus prompting the idea to investigate this research question.

**Accountability to the Community**

Research with a vulnerable population may further marginalize the group if there is no benefit returning to the community. I completed resumes, letters of reference, editing, and assistance with job, higher education, and community knowledge for participants. The
research participants have continued to seek assistance with challenges and I have assisted them as I could with referrals and my services for the aforementioned items. I anticipate that my research will be a benefit to the community by filling in a gap in the literature (Creswell, 2014; Mertens, 2010). I also planned to relay my findings back to the participants in the study by sharing the dissertation via email. Gergen (2014) describes the action as part of a transformative process when reducing marginalizing outcomes of the individuals, and in this context, those who have given their time and commitment. It is my hope that sharing my findings with the participants will contribute to their own learning, and that they will experience a heightened sense of being respected and acknowledged for their expertise and insights. There were some instances where the participants wanted to use my knowledge of the community resources in Miami, and I shared this information. These instances included sharing of relevant contacts and organizations in the community.

Summary

The stereotypic portrait of a street-gang member held by the dominant society limits the participation of street-gang members as inclusive members of the greater society because of the discriminative practices employed by members of the in-group who retain power to offer educational, work, and other life-changing opportunities. Understanding the transferability of the funds of knowledge in aspirational goals and community engagement may open doors to these individuals, which have been closed through the discriminative practices fueled by stereotypes of street gangs. The methodology outlined in this research was used to uncover the social construction of identity, a sense of belonging, and funds of knowledge as perceived by gang members. The use of appreciative inquiry was specifically chosen within the qualitative paradigm because of the conversational approach, which
served to develop the rapport and trust between the participants and the researcher. The rapport and trust built within the conversational interview served to develop a greater understanding of participant meaning. In addition, appreciative inquiry was utilized in these interviews because of its focus on accomplishments, which served to generate positive emotional energy needed to identify the funds of knowledge. I will demonstrate in chapter 4 how street gang members, scholars, educators, counselors, and many individuals within the greater society can benefit from the awareness of skill transferability as a tool to reduce stereotypes of street gangs and potentially provide inclusive opportunities for these individuals in alternate areas outside of the street-gang life.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The overarching question of this research is: What are the transferable funds of knowledge acquired by street-gang-involved individuals that can be utilized in alternate environments outside of a street-gang context? The sub-questions supporting the main research question are:

1) How do individuals involved in street gangs perceive a sense of belonging an out-group of the dominant society?

2a) How do street gang-involved individuals acquire funds of knowledge through their participation in gangs?

2b) What are the various funds of knowledge acquired by the street gang-involved individual?

3a) How have these funds of knowledge been transferred to lead to accomplishment of aspirational goals for the street gang-involved individual?

3b) How have these funds of knowledge been transferred to lead to community engagement for the street gang-involved individual?

Finding the answers to these research questions was an endeavor close to my heart because of the importance this community holds in my life. I have witnessed an abrupt end to the lives of several young individuals that I knew intimately before they reached their 25th birthday due to an untimely death from the perils of the street-gang life. Additionally, many others have missed out on productive and fruitful lives because they were saddled with lengthy prison terms. The dangers of street-gang life and the criminality associated with these individuals has been documented and widely portrayed in the media. My intention in this study was to uncover another aspect of street gangs that is not well known
or documented in the literature. Specifically, I investigated the strengths-based qualities of street gangs as opposed to the deficit model that is commonly circulated among the general public. It is important to note that all of the participants provided data respond to questions, yet some of the participant’s responses featured more prominently within the three major findings of this study.

The study addressed the overarching research question investigating the transferable funds of knowledge acquired by street gang-involved individuals and aimed to explore the funds of knowledge utilized in alternative environments to improve life paths for the individuals involved in gangs. Table 2 contains demographics of the research participants, immigration-generation status, gang affiliation, and brief description of all the participants. I have highlighted six of the participants and provided more depth on their challenges, daily life, and how they defined being involved in a street gang to generate a closer look into street-gang life for the research participants. The definition and significance of the street-gang label was delineated both by the researcher and the research participants.

There were three major findings that emerged from the study. All of these findings were devised based on repetitive themes from the participants. The first finding is the sense of belonging cultivated through the experience of being part of a street-gang and is described through the three focal ways through which participants developed this impression in this study, which were emotional support, protection, and family. The second finding is the six major funds of knowledge, including hyperawareness, resilience, money management, networking, wisdom/critical thinking, and business savvy skills that the individuals obtained through their experiences within the street gang. The third finding is
the transfer of the funds of knowledge to alternate environments outside of street-gang activities. This transferability of the funds of knowledge occurred through attainment of a personal goal. Additionally, in some participants, the funds of knowledge were beneficial to the community. I have provided examples of the transfer of the funds of knowledge for personal gain, which I have named aspirational achievement. Also, I have included the funds of knowledge for the benefit of the greater community, which I have named community value. Some of the funds of knowledge did not have a transfer that benefitted the community directly. However, I did list the funds of knowledge that had a direct benefit to the community when this occurred. The ways that these funds of knowledge could further be transferred for individuals involved in street gangs will be elaborated upon in the next chapter.

Research Participants

Table 2 includes the age, sex, immigrant generation status, ethnicity, street-gang affiliation, and brief depiction of each participant. The brief descriptions help identify the participants as the reader combs the findings. There is not a consensus on how to define an immigrant within the literature; 1) an individual born outside of the country that they are residing in or 2) the first individuals in their family born in the country that they are living while their parents are both foreign born (Garcia-Coll & Marks, 2009). I am using the latter definition in this study. Subsequently in this study, second-generation immigrants are children born in the United States that have at least one parent that was born in the United States. One-point-five generation children are foreign born and have immigrated to the United States during their primary school years (Perez, 2012). The participants revealed some of the challenges of being first, second, or 1.5-generation children during our
conversations. I have highlighted some of challenges faced by participants as it relates to their immigration status in the findings because it provides a valuable backstory of the participants and generates thicker and richer descriptions of the qualitative data generated (Geertz, 1973; Mertens, 2010). I have defined street-gang affiliation by describing individuals as having high, medium, or lower involvement in street gangs, both currently or formerly. One participant relayed her observations and experience as a family member of an individual involved in a street gang including how she benefitted from her experience on the fringe of street gang life. Two participants initially denied street gang membership, yet affirmed participation during the interview process after trust and rapport were established.
Table 2. Demographics of research participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Immigrant Generation Status</th>
<th>Time &amp; Affiliation w/ Street gangs</th>
<th>Brief Identifier</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Desmond</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Haitian, Dominican, Venezuelan, &amp; Jamaican</td>
<td>1st</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Homeless at time of interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nelson</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Haitian</td>
<td>1st</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Financial responsibility as a teen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huey</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Haitian &amp; Dominican</td>
<td>1st</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Lost brother to drive-by</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bobby</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Haitian</td>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Partial blindness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stokely</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Haitian</td>
<td>1st</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Musical talent to spread his story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Haitian &amp; Bahamian</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Lost mother at 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohandas</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Haitian</td>
<td>1st</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Youth mentor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sojourner</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Haitian</td>
<td>1st</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Family member highly involved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bunchy</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Haitian &amp; Trinidadian</td>
<td>1st</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Gunshot wound at 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Booker</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Haitian</td>
<td>1st</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Attended state university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baldwin</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Haitian &amp; Bahamian</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Attended private university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medgar</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Bahamian, Haitian, &amp; American</td>
<td>1st</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Football star in high school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chavez</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Haitian</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Came to U.S at 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elie</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Haitian</td>
<td>1st</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Lost role model when he was 15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table Key: Gang Affiliation Self-identified experiences with street gangs at any level of involvement whether family member or self-involvement: High- 10+ years; Medium, 5-10 years; Low-Less than 5 years

A defining feature of qualitative research is the rich and thick description of the data which provides a context of the participants’ experiences (Geertz, 1973; Mertens, 2010). In this study, the thick and rich data comes from the reflections of the research participants whose responses gave depth to their stories. Each of the six individuals below shared their
identity within the “street gang” including the typical day and the challenges faced within the street-gang environment. I have highlighted six participants in this section to give a broad description of the daily experiences of growing up under difficult conditions in Miami based upon the individual's characteristics of identity. The stories shared by these participants offered a rich nuanced account of their own battles, yet the themes paint a picture of how participating in street gangs can be a viable and necessary option for these individuals. The narrative of these six participants generously addresses the crux of this research study by responding to the features of the research questions. Elements from all participants’ experiences will be shared throughout the three findings in this chapter because all chronicles illustrate important responses that speak to the focus of the dissertation.

**Huey.**

Huey’s involvement in street gangs started when he was 10. He had formed his own crew by the time he was 16. Huey is a first-generation American with parentage from both Haiti and Dominican Republic. He has three siblings and is the father of four children. He graduated from high school after dropping out once. Huey was motivated to start his own street gang with his friends through the strong influence of watching his brothers accumulate financial capital through their experiences in a street gang. Huey has survived 9 bullet wounds. He describes the streets back when he first started.

A typical day back then was everyday there was 30-40 guys on the block selling rocks. There would be a little excitement where people in between the crews will be starting fights, you know like stupid stuff like rolling dice. ... A regular day was just making money.
Huey felt influenced to begin his own street gang because that was what he saw his brothers doing and there was a need for protection when fights broke out in his neighborhood and among his friends. I asked him how he would define street gangs and he described how street gangs form within Haitian neighborhoods in Miami.

The street gangs. It don’t just start out as gangs. We was 11 or 10. It gets crazy when other crews quote unquote gangs when they come in the picture and they want to beef or fight and it get crazy from there. ... We was top dogs. That’s how gangs start. It is not like Latin Kings or Bloods or how those organized gangs is. With these little bullshit gangs, it’s just us chilling at the park and representing where you from.

Gang culture can vary in its presentation based on many factors including race, ethnicity, location, and socio-economic status (Vigil, 2002, 2003). Huey’s definition of street gangs also addresses the street gang label because he did not identify with the term gang and preferred other words to describe the bond between his crew. Huey’s mother died when Huey was 18. Huey’s brother was killed in a drive-by shooting when Huey was 14. Clearly the death of family member can have a traumatic effect on an adolescent. In Huey’s case, losing his brother in a drive-by shooting at the impressionable age of 14 had a significant impact on Huey’s street-gang participation. He spoke about the challenges of street-gang life and the loss of his brother.

One of the challenges was [pause] I don’t know if I was afraid because if I was afraid, I probably wouldn’t been chilling. But, I didn’t want to go out like my brother. You know, a car pull up and you walking across the street directly in front of the cars and then all four doors open and they just shooting you up. It
was a couple days when robbers used to come out to the block and try to rob
us. ... Just getting killed by a bullet. Or just getting killed, you know in a drive-
by. You know I tell myself that I don't want to go out like that but I still went
out to the block everyday.

Huey expressed concern about experiencing an untimely death such as the fate of
his brother. Yet, he continued to participate in the street gang. This statement is significant
especially within this research because there was something compelling about
participating in the street gang. The significance of this quote is the impetus he felt to
create and lead a crew despite the dangers of the street-gang life. Street gangs were the
backdrops to Huey’s experiences while he grew up and subsequently shaped his identity
among his family and friends. Huey’s story provides a glimpse of how a sense of belonging
lead to building identity because of how his life experiences hold meaning.

Desmond.
Desmond described himself as the “eagle eye” of his street gang. Desmond is the
father of 6 children and a first-generation American. Like Huey, he graduated high school
after dropping out once. Desmond asked me to drive him to the police station upon the
completion of the second interview so that he could turn himself in and Desmond was
homeless at the time of the interview. Despite being homeless and wanting to turn report
to the police, Desmond still participated fully in the dialogue with me.

My definition of a gang is people that come together to be an organization. It
will be people that you grow up with. People that you know, that you
comfortable with. ... We work together to get jobs or take care of whatever
we have to take care of. Family support. If one don’t have and the other have.
If one eat, we all eat. That’s how I see it. Us being a gang, I see it as being a family.

Within Desmond’s description of a street gang is the word family. Family is one of the ways that a sense of belonging was felt for the study participants as they described their experiences and identity within the context of the street gang. His depiction of a street gang also shows a sense of caring about the welfare of others, which was another common feature that I heard repeated by many participants in this study. Care may not be a word that comes to mind when considering the media images that depict street gang members as ruthless criminals. Often times the daily life of a street gang member might be considered violent and unlawful. Desmond described a typical day in the street-gang life.

A typical day would be going to the studio, playing basketball, football, we do it all. ... We got a lot of athletes or shall I say people who used to be big in the athlete system and then came up and still got it in them, but we do it the street way. ... We have some people that did what they have to do to go to college and finish up. It’s not all bad and it’s not all good.

Although Huey spoke about the street sales, Desmond recalled another aspect of street gang life in the friendships that were cultivated through his experiences. He also highlighted the presence of sports activities. Desmond revealed many of the challenges that he experienced.

Desmond: I don’t have a place to stay right now.

Researcher: Where are you going to go tonight?

Desmond: I was at my aunties’ house last night but she don’t even want me there. It’s too crowded over there. Tonight, I’m trying to see what I’m gonna
do. I normally sleep at that block where my boy died at but since nobody is there and that happened. It’s a little hard. ... It’s hard work keeping yourself safe, staying alive, cuz that’s my 9-5, staying alive. I’m trying to survive. Desmond comments that staying alive is a daily challenge. To complicate this further, he must find a place to sleep every night. He revealed that he didn’t want to ask his friends for help with somewhere to stay because of his pride. Desmond also reveals that a friend of his had died recently. This shooting occurred a couple of days prior to him commencing the first interview, yet he still fulfilled his agreement to complete the interview. He has also learned to accept his current state of homelessness and the need to look over his shoulder to maintain his safety as part of his lifestyle.

**Bobby.**

Bobby is a 2nd generation American and is running a lucrative business despite having lost vision in one eye from his street-gang experiences. He is the father of 2 children. He was able to graduate high school on time. Bobby shared his view of his role on the streets.

A clique is more of the term because gangs are people who come in and there’s a certain type of initiation to come into a gang and they have one way out that is death. You have to go commit a crime to get in and do this. Us as cliques, we are just a group of guys who came from the same neighborhood. I guess you could say that we are the cousins to gangs.

Just like Huey, Bobby used a term other than gang to describe his experiences with his friends. Bobby also refers to the bond developed among the guys from his
neighborhood. This bond is part of what is needed to create that sense of belonging in a group regardless of whether the unit is labeled as a gang, a crew, or a clique.

Bobby also described the typical day back when his clique was highly active in the neighborhood. “Back then hanging out would be going to the neighborhood and we sit on the park bench and talk for hours. Basically that’s a normal day for us. Everything else is just extracurricular activity.” Bobby’s reflections of his experiences are similar to Desmond’s because the street-gang life was about connecting with friends. Again, this friendship creates a space where one feels that they belong. Both Desmond and Bobby shared that spending time together with friends was one of the main pastimes. This image of youth engaging in sports activities or talking on a park bench depicts schoolmates in many places in the United States. Yet, it is a stark contrast to the gun-toting, angry young men presented in the media of street gangs. It’s friendship that forms the base of how these individuals both develop who they are and how they find a place to fit in. Finding belongingness in a place shaped their identity as street-gang members. Bobby also shared the challenges that he faced when he was more active in the clique’s street activities.

Barriers, the same barriers that we face now. Because of the decisions that you make, you can’t go certain places. You gotta be careful about where you stay. … If you are in my position, you are like I don’t want to talk to this white man. I’m concerned about what they are going to say and what they are going to think about me. … They would discriminate because everyone does criminal background checks, but that stops you from getting a lot of jobs. … Cuz I had a job one time as a security officer. I went to jail for possession of a firearm. It was a totally legal firearm. It was dismissed in court, but just cuz I
went to jail for it. I wasn't even charged for it, but I couldn't stay at the job. ...

For someone who has a criminal background, he's gonna work harder than the next person because he's trying to prove to the owner that they deserve it.

Bobby highlighted the importance of having to look over his shoulder wherever he goes, which is a common aspect of street-gang life. He also emphasized the challenges with discrimination that individuals with criminal backgrounds face. Many individuals participating in street gangs have criminal backgrounds, so the experiences may be similar for many others participating in street gangs. It may not be considered discrimination if someone is not hired because of their criminal background, yet it is still a barrier that many individuals in street gangs face when trying to lead more productive lives. Bobby illustrated this point clearly when he shared his experience of losing his job despite the lack of a criminal conviction. He also expressed trepidation about approaching Whites for opportunities because he doesn’t feel that he will be trusted based on his perceived identity. A few of the participants shared their experiences with discrimination and prejudice. These are challenges that these individuals face based on their identity both through their street-gang involvement and as Haitians in Miami. Stereotypes and discrimination based on street-gang membership are harmful and are part of their real-life experiences. Bobby has successfully transferred many of his funds of knowledge and created a successful business today, which I will describe in the funds of knowledge section.
Martin.
 Martin is a 1.5 generation American who arrived to the U.S. at the age of 3. He lost his mother at the age of 17 and he was able to get into foster care shortly after her death. His involvement in the foster care program helped him to change his living circumstances because Martin was able to obtain custody of his younger brother. Martin was able to graduate high school on time. His definition of a typical day was similar to Bobby and Desmond’s reflections. “We hang out everyday like 24/7. ... We would go outside and play basketball in a game called hustle.” Martin’s recollection of daily life in a street gang emphasizes the friendship activities that were a prominent part of his street-gang involvement. He also shed light on some of the greater challenges he experienced by participating in a street-gang.

It was really difficult because they could have a fight afterschool. There was fights all the time. I was either going to fight with them or go to class. ... At first I was getting bullied in elementary and then it got worked out. Then I realized that they live in my neighborhood. Then we had to fight cuz I saw them everyday. You need permission to come into this territory. And you gotta know somebody to come into that territory. You might get shot or killed. Or they might strip you naked if you are not from the neighborhood. ... The police would accuse me even I wasn’t involved. They would drive by a fight and just accuse whoever is standing there.

Martin underscored the bullying that he experienced as a young child, which prompted the need for protection at his school and in his neighborhood. Martin also described the attitude of the police towards street-gang members. Other participants also detailed harassment and mistreatment by the police as well. As a young Haitian male in
Miami, Martin navigated intimidation and bullying from his peers and from law enforcement. Martin’s definition of a street gang was simple yet insightful. “I look at a gang like a regular person. Me and you are just two human beings.” His perspective suggests that individuals in street gangs should be respected because they are human beings.

**Baldwin.**

Baldwin is a 1.5 generation American who was born in the U.S. but spent the first six years of his life in the Caribbean. He received a full scholarship to a private university, which he attended for the first year. However, he returned to Miami when his scholarship funding was cut.

I got accepted to private school with a full ride. I lost my academic scholarship and was forced to come back to Miami and do what I knew. I came back down to robbing and stealing. ... Right after I got arrested and made bond, I was robbed of what I had in my possession. My assailant had a glock 40 pulled on me, but he just lowered the trigger and rolled away. ... I came back to find a job and build up as much credit as possible and try to get a student loan. Nobody was hiring. I woke up at 8am and I walked from 120<sup>th</sup> to 175<sup>th</sup> and I only had found two jobs hiring.

Baldwin embarked on an opportunity to move away from criminal behavior when he pursued a degree. Baldwin didn't encounter prospects to survive outside of his previous criminal endeavors once he returned to Miami. He connected with the street-gang world that was already part of his former identity. Baldwin emphasized how opportunities are socially constructed and based on aspects of one's identity. He did not share that he was discriminated because of his appearance or street-gang affiliation, yet he did share that he
struggled to find employment and found himself reengaging in the viable options available to generate income so that he could return to his higher education endeavors. Baldwin’s statement emphasizes the need for accessible opportunities and resources to attain success outside of unlawful activities typically associated with street gangs. If employers had given him an opportunity, then he was prepared to take a different path than illegal ways of meeting his financial needs.

**Bunchy.**

Bunchy has one son. He dropped out of high school but hopes to return to achieve his GED. His mother died when Bunchy was 18. Bunchy also lost his uncle to death in a drive-by shooting and sustained a bullet wound when Bunchy was only 14. Bunchy’s older brother is carrying out a 15-year sentence. He remarked on numerous challenges both with the police and struggling to maintain his own safety where he lived.

Some of the police don’t care, they slap you or kick you. One day they made me cry. That was a big challenge. I was about tell, but I was like if I do it, I’m putting my family in danger. I had a challenge of watching my back and watching out for people who trying to come rob me. People who come shooting. ... Yes, I faced challenges getting robbed or getting shot, which I did. Or certain friends stealing from me. ... When I was six months into it, I had to watch out for robbers. ... Another challenge I was facing was staying alive. Every time that I wasn’t around them, I would be sleeping every night and I would hear gun-shots. At first I wasn’t scared and then I seen a car with multiple gun-shots. I saw two people that were dead at a stop sign. At that point that didn’t scare me no more. I was like 15 or 14.
Police brutality or harassment was a common theme among the participants as Bunchy has described here. Bunchy also remarked that he didn’t go to the hospital when he was shot due to his harmful encounters with police officers. His most poignant comment is his reflection about surviving amidst neighborhood violence. He had experienced violence on a daily basis in his neighborhood and from the police. Understanding some of the struggles of these research participants sheds light on how they lived and the barriers they faced prior to joining a street gang. It also describes who these individuals are in a more detailed way so the humanity is brought forward instead of the anonymous villain whose story we don’t hear when being presented with the idea of a “gangster” on the evening news story about a shooting.

The accounts of Nelson, Stokely, Mohandas, Sojourner, Booker, Medgar, Chavez, and Elie along with the six individuals whose experiences were highlighted in this section are interwoven throughout the findings in this chapter. The pseudonyms chosen for each participant represent the names of prominent leaders of the Civil Rights, Human Rights, and Black Panther movement. Each respondent embodied a quality of that particular leader, which is why I gave each participant a particular pseudonym.

**Finding 1 (RQ 1): Sense of Belonging**

Participants perceived a sense of belonging in many ways, but three themes were consistently expressed for the majority of the participants: emotional support, protection, and family. Although interest in financial capital was also an important reason for street gang involvement, it didn’t register as highly as the other three themes around developing belongingness in a street gang. This sense of belonging shapes how a person actually identifies in the world. For example, one’s identity as a street gang member denotes a
significant part of their existence, as do other aspects of one’s identity such as career or family role as a mother, father, daughter, or son. This identity is socially constructed and the sense of belonging pertinent to the development of this identity.

The sense of belonging evolves as one feels connected to a person or place and adopts this place or people as important to their own identity (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). For individuals in this study, the sense of belonging was connected to areas where specific needs were met. The individuals may have sought out the street gang for financial gain, yet this was not one of the three central ways that a sense of belonging was felt. Experiences of bullying and prejudice shaped needs for emotional support. The challenges of living in situations where maintaining safety was difficult provided the impetus for protection, which was the second major theme. Finally, the majority of the participants expressed feeling that the street gang was a family to them. A sense of belonging was strengthened as these needs were fulfilled within the context of the street gang because the individuals were connected through their identity as members of the street gang. The experience of being part of street gang shaped the identity of the participants, yet the label didn’t resonate with the participants as a self-description.

**Gang label.**

Being labeled as a street gang member isn’t a term all participants used to describe themselves when I began the interview process. Some participants didn’t identify with this term based on their understanding of the term “gang.” Huey and Bobby both rejected the term because the organization and initiation qualities that Huey and Bobby used in their description of the term “gang” didn’t fit who they were within their street gangs.
Participants shared other terms such as “crew”, “clique”, “friends”, or “family” to better characterize the sentiment developed within the relationships in the street gangs. The weight of the street-gang label carries the negative association of individuals participating in violent, criminal, and negative behaviors and is perpetuated through social media, the internet, and news networks (Beare & Hogg, 2013; Lane & Meeker, 2003). Participants shared experiences of discrimination from law enforcement due to stereotypes from this label. The association of street gangs connected to violence and crime retains some validity as the individuals participating in this research study mentioned participation in acts of an illegal nature. Yet, descriptions of violence and criminal behavior that normally characterize street gangs rarely take into an account a broader perspective of the strengths and positive traits of individuals involved in street gangs. Nor do efforts to define street-gang culture as violent shed light on the barriers faced by these youth prior to and during their street-gang involvement.

Labels that have a negative stigma attached, such as street-gang member, impact the sense of belonging that an individual marked with this label experiences in an alternate environment. For example, Martin described difficulty transitioning into a higher education setting because of his identity as a street-gang member and all that this label encompassed. I will share Martin’s example later in the chapter. A couple of participants expressed a strong awareness of the power that the label of street-gang member could hold when articulated by an authoritative party such as law enforcement. Several participants described the discrimination and harassment from the police, yet it was not a question included on the interview protocol.
The power of this label was experienced through stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination that affected the self-esteem, opportunities, and social engagement of many of the participants. For some individuals, the street-gang label did not fit with their self-perception. Alternate definitions of their group membership such as “friends, boys, or human beings” which resonated with their identity were chosen. For other individuals, the street-gang label was internalized and accepted as part of their identity. It was apparent in the study how discrimination, prejudice, and negative stereotypes to which the participants were subjected affected the individual’s identity and sense of belonging when a negative definition of street gangs was internalized for the individuals.

**Impact of gang label on sense of belonging.**
Many participants described experiences of discrimination by the police. In many cases, these stereotypes became fuel for internalizing the negative attributes of the street gang label and didn’t foster belongingness in alternative environments such as a university. Martin shared the effect that his identity as a street gang member had on his experience in a college environment.

I didn’t know nothing about college. Me going to college was ... none of my family went to college before. I had a nursing scholarship. ... When the teacher approached me about the scholarship, I told her to give it to somebody else. I was a gang member. ... I’m not a likely student to go to a fancy college and get a scholarship. I wrote an essay. Out of 25 students in the classroom, I was in the top three. I didn’t think it was true that I was one of the top students in class.
Martin had internalized the negative stereotypes and labels associated with street-gang members that he had been exposed to and, thus, declined an opportunity for higher education. He didn’t have a sense of belonging in a college setting. Rather, he felt that he didn’t belong in academia. I conjecture that there are many individuals, such as Martin, who don’t embark on the higher education journey despite having acquired a financial scholarship to attend a university because of a lack of belongingness in an academic environment.

Another participant in this study Baldwin, introduced earlier, received a scholarship and was able to successfully transfer his funds of knowledge and develop a sense of belonging in higher education. “My friends in school were almost always happy. ... I like school. I like learning.” Baldwin was able to survive and thrive in a university setting. He succeeded, but had to leave the college environment because his scholarship funding ended. In the implications section, I further describe how the opportunity for higher education is an avenue for individuals who are able to transfer their funds of knowledge, if policy changes foster the pathway to these opportunities in higher education for individuals such as Martin to accept and use an educational scholarship. There is more to Martin’s story as he did enroll in a community college at a later point. Yet, he didn’t utilize the full scholarship that he was offered in high school to a more prestigious four-year university. He stated:

I learned about family and loyalty when I was in a gang. And then I take that out and when I first went to college, I was like ‘oh snap. I’m in this territory. I don’t know nobody’. My mindset is like a gang member. I was like ‘oh man,
I’m not smart’. I was thinking, I’m not stupid, but I’m in a room with like 50 people.

Martin was able to enroll and begin a higher education, yet today he still has not completed a bachelor’s degree because he didn't feel a sense of belonging in a college environment. Martin’s reflections of his experiences as a street gang member in a college setting suggest that he felt like a fish out of water. The way that street gangs are depicted by the dominant society shaped the ways that the individuals in this study engaged in their role and identity as a street gang member. For example, some of the research participants perceived their opportunities, such as financial gain or higher education based on what was presented to other individuals, perceived to be similar to them in cultural identity. Individuals developed a sense of belonging in a street gang when specific needs were met.

**Emotional support.**
Emotional support was a need that was fulfilled for 9 out of the 14 research participants through their membership in a gang. Sometimes emotional support was characterized by unity during difficult times. For others, the support was characterized by encouragement to succeed. Overall, the emotional support was a source of bonding built on care for each other in the street gang. Huey described how he would always provide emotional support for his friends. He refers to his fellow gang members as his “homies”.

Just the love for my homies and feeling respected and being popular. ... Me, I’m a people person. I loved to be around my homies and crack jokes. I learned that I was a survivor. I was a leader. I knew that I cared about people, cause I never asked anybody to pick up a gun and shoot up somebody for me.
Whatever the limits of any fucked up thing that we did, I did it first. I knew that I would rather put myself in the fire for any of my homeboys.

Huey bonded with his friends in the street gang and was willing to do anything for them including risk his life. This quote indicates a deep sense of belonging built on an emotional bond because risking one’s life is an ultimate sacrifice. It is within the structure of some aspects of street gang life that literally risking one’s life is possible and likely. Huey cared about his homeboys as if they were his brothers. Although this relationship was not a blood one, it has manifested into a strong love for each other. Huey notes that he felt popular and respected by his crew as a leader. Martin also shared a similar story of the street gang being supportive to each other when challenges arose.

We know each other. We ate together. We go to the park. One day, you might get into a situation and they are there for you. They were always there for us. It was a small circle. ... Nobody not leaving by themselves. We leaving together. ... I felt the teacher cared about me and the gang cared about me.

Martin’s comments reflect a feeling of support of the street gang because of the unity among friends. He remarks that it was a small circle of friends. He refers to his high school teacher as well and shares that the teacher provided some support for him. These friends look out for each other and support each other because they spend time together. Medgar, a 20-year-old first-generation American, who initially minimized his street gang affiliation also commented on the support of the street gang when violence was present.

Fights and shooting at each other. We stepped in and be behind him whenever you need to be. Just always being there for each other. If somebody was doing something negative or positive, we always just trying to hold each
other up. ... If I had a dollar, everybody had a dollar or we were gonna have to find a way to split it. That’s really how it was. Sometimes your own family drive you crazy. ... All that stress with your family disappears when you with your friends. Say you say you want to go to college to play ball, we stay on top of you to stay at your best. ... I just got a letter the other day that one of my main man, he got a scholarship to play ball. ... Everybody got their own thing. You would have a group who tighter than everybody else and then you have a person who real smart and you tell them to stay in the books. For instance the one who just wrote me, he too big, he supposed to be playing football. He want to be in the streets. We make sure we tell them if he need anything that we are here. ...They used to push me. When I used to get in trouble, one even took a charge for me. If we know one person can help the next person, they’ll do it. My friend took the gun charge for me cause I was in school.

Medgar describes both providing physical presence, but also support emotionally. He describes a friend from the street gang who was good at sports. The street gang showed emotional support to help this individual succeed in sports at a university. Medgar commented that the street gang did this for him when he was focused on school as a college student. This level of support demonstrates an awareness of the street gang to help an individual who has an opportunity to succeed. The street gang shows emotional support to the individual who has an opportunity to use his intelligence or athletic abilities not only through encouragement, but also through providing resources if needed. There is also a sense of sharing inherent in this type of bonding. If one feels that others will share their food or money with another, it can generate a feeling that another person cares about one’s
welfare because they are helping that individual attain their needs. Desmond described how the street gang was there to offer assistance with conflicts, including challenges of homelessness such as he had experienced.

What I like about it is that we stay together. We take care of each other when it’s necessary. If it’s a real deal conflict, then we help one another. ... I know this one guy and he’s going through it. And he’ll sleep at my house. I’ll help him out with a lot of stuff. ... Me and my boys been together for years. ...

Cause when you’re ganged up, unity is power ya know. You want to unite and maybe his skills could defeat my skills and my skills could defeat his skills depending on what skills. You work together and with patience and with people, you get the job done.

Desmond was homeless at the time of the interview, so it was poignant that he spoke about offering shelter to a friend who needed a place to stay. Desmond also spoke about feeling supported because the street gang takes care of each other’s needs. He also shared the strength developed from providing support to one another. This support isn’t found alone but with others, suggesting that gangs have strength because there is unity. Mohandas also shared his reflections about the support he felt amidst hardship.

Yeah, it shaped my mindset. It shaped the way I thought about things. It shaped my view of things. It shaped me to be a better man today. ... The adversity, cause there definitely was adversity. The sense of wanting to belong and to do different and not wanting to be incarcerated with my friends. It is still tough. Sometimes I cry and I miss the friendships.
Mohandas commented directly about feeling a sense of belonging within his street gang. Most of his street gang peers are currently incarcerated and he was reflecting in our conversation on the loss of those friends because he felt that he belonged in that group. Mohandas appreciated the emotional support because there was hardship. Bobby spoke about the friendship and how it developed by watching the older street gangs.

When you are small and you watch the older guys from the same neighborhood. They hang out and the things they do. And how they take up for each other. I mean as a kid you want to be like them. You look up to them. When you get older, it’s just natural. When you get older, it’s like you inherit it. You just have to. ... I felt like it was just connection. Friendship was the most benefit. All of us still look out for each other to this day. That’s something that you can’t find everywhere.

For Bobby, the street gang provided a way of how to live and feel connected to others who stood by with continuous support. It was the friendship that was mentioned as the most rewarding benefit. He remarks how he learned from watching the older guys in the neighborhood who supported each other. Three other participants shared comments about the friendships that they enjoyed from being a part of the street gang. Booker commented on the emotional support. “The times going out to eat, when we were all sitting in the car separating the money, the laughter, the jokes.” Bunchy also shared having enjoyed the financial benefits and the friendship. “I enjoyed the bonding and the money.” Finally, Stokely remarked on the good times shared within the street gang.

We had fun. We would go out. We would go to the beach, talk to girls, go to the movies, go to the fair. It feels good when you with all your friends. ... I feel
like more people care about me. When somebody wants to see you do better and they cheer for you. They actually care.

Emotional support within the street gang contributed to a sense of belonging because the individuals felt cared for by their peers. Reliance in a time of need such as adversity was a way that the emotional support was cultivated. The fulfillment of the need for emotional support led to a sense of belonging for individuals participating in street gangs because of the care, friendship, and help amidst difficult times.

**Protection.**
Seven out of the 14 research participants expressed receiving protection from the street gang away from bodily harm. Witnessing violence including altercations, shootings, and beatings was a childhood experience for many participants in this study, who were desiring protection. As mentioned earlier, the challenges for the individuals revolved around meeting basic needs and maintaining safety. These individuals have survived bullet wounds, armed robbery, and being shot at. Individuals in this study found a source of protection within the confines of the street gang through their membership. This protection was characterized by the members of the street gang watching out for potential danger and coming to the aid of each other whenever needed. Bunchy, reflected on why he needed protection and how the street gang provided protection for him.

We didn’t have no father figure. I didn’t have nobody to protect us. I couldn’t protect us. ... I wanted to be around that type of environment. When I was younger around 12 or 13 years old, I thought being in a gang, you would be protected forever. ... You wouldn’t have to worry about nothing. ... They told me that they had my back and they said they still have love for me. ... The
[prominent Haitian gang in Miami] would watch my back and made sure I was dressed every day and that I had food. ... The only thing I could say is a benefit is the money and a protection. ... You don’t want nobody to mess with you or your family.

Bunchy was shot at the age of 14. He lived in an area in Miami where hearing gunshots was a nightly event. The need for protection was real. He also remarked that he thought he would be protected forever. This belief was prior to him being shot. His belief about being protected forever may have shifted once he was shot, yet he still appreciated the street gang watching out for him. As a young teen, he faced danger that required protection or quick thinking in order to survive. He comments that the street gang did protect him, thus meeting a need that he faced daily where he lived.

Several research participants expressed a need for protection as a reason why they joined street gangs because of the dangers they had encountered in their experiences. Huey commented on his boys being there for him when he was attacked in his neighborhood. “This dude came into [area of Miami] and he tried to fight me. I scooped him. I slammed him. My other homeboys seen us fighting and they jumped in.” Being in a street gang meant that the individuals had others there if one was attacked physically such as Huey described. Desmond shared how he felt that he was protective of others in the street gang. His role was the eagle eye so he would look out for danger and protect others if it was imminent.

Me being overprotective people like if somebody messed with you and I know you. I probably gotta protect you. I gotta defend you. ... You gotta protect yourself, but if you around a whole squad, one person has your back and I have their back.
Desmond also shared the sentiment of Huey in that the street gang provided strength in numbers. Individuals in the street gang were safer from attacks because they were not alone. Participants expressed feeling supported by others in the street gang and feeling that others would be there to protect them from bodily injury. Some participants spoke of experiences of bullying, teasing, and physical harm. Mohandas reflected on his experiences of being teased. "We got picked on a lot. People would pick fights with us. People would pick on the way our culture dressed." Mohandas shared his recollection of the teasing that he experienced and witnessed towards Haitians. Mohandas expressed his feelings about the protection that the street gang gave him from the bullying. "I think the benefits would be that people didn’t pick on them and they are able to live free. You don’t have to worry about being bullied or being picked on.” Mohandas reflected that being in a street gang protected an individual from bullying. In his case and that of others, the teasing was focused on an aspect of his ethnic identity.

All participants in the research are 1st, 2nd or 1.5 generation Americans and identify as full or part Haitian. Individuals in street gangs in Miami have experienced teasing and physical attacks based on their ethnicity. Bunchy reflected on a day created to provoke and inflict harm on Haitians. “Haitians versus Americans”. They pick one day of the year to fight Haitians. We had to stick together. Some Haitians get real beat up. We learned to stick together. Haiti is rough.” Nelson also shared his recollection of this same day.

We had a big Haitians versus Americans war. It was literally about 30 Americans and 30 Haitians. The Haitians was actually scared to fight them. They would say that’s a gang, but half of us didn’t know each other. ... One day an American dude, they more aggressive you know, they would
intimidate you. They would pick on people from Haiti cause they didn't speak good English. Then they would pick on the Haitians that are from Haiti cause they been through some stuff. It turned from 2 dudes fighting to everyone fighting. They had their people and we had our people. ... It happened a whole bunch of times, but this was the only time I was in it. You had to make your choice: Is you gonna fight or not? You could walk away, but you were fighting for something. It wasn't like you were fighting for a girl or something, but you were actually fighting for your culture. You're fighting for what you believe in.

Both Bunchy and Nelson spoke about this recurring event of “Haitians versus Americans”. Other research participants mentioned this day as an event that was part of life in Miami for Haitian males. Nelson’s comment also reflects that it was important to fight because it was fighting for a source of identity. It’s important to recognize that Bunchy and Nelson’s comments reflect a need for protection from bodily harm because it was something that occurred on a regular basis. Nelson also described his first experience with prejudice based on his identity as Haitian.

I went to this elementary school and the teacher asked me if my name was Haitian. I just came from a school with a whole bunch of Haitians. Then afterschool a whole bunch of dudes tried to jump me. I went to a lot of schools after that who didn’t like Haitians, but that was my first encounter.

Nelson’s experience with prejudicial behavior began when he was a young child. This bullying instilled a need for protection. Nelson and many of the participants needed
the street gang to help them avoid or survive bodily or emotional injury from their street experiences. Martin also experienced being bullied as a young child.

Martin: We all went to the same school. We hang out every day. Everyone knew each other. Everyone had each other’s back in that neighborhood.

Researcher: Protection?

Martin: Yes, you could say that. ... They had my back and I had their back. I got bullied in elementary. ... He [his brother] would call me from school and say that he was about to get jumped and come bring the boys. ... Being inside a gang, I felt protected like everybody was my brothers and sisters. It gave me confidence because I knew they had my back. I was shocked cause I didn’t know all of them at first.... The whole gang’s family was protected. In a drive-by, you would be protected. Nobody would tell where anybody lived. That was the first rule.

Martin’s experiences with bullying and infliction of physical harm were similar to Nelson’s experiences because they were both attacked as young children. Martin also expressed that the street gang gave him a feeling of protection. For Martin, the street gang functioned as a family system where support is offered emotionally and physically. There were also participants who sought protection in the form of security. Medgar expressed how he felt about the protection provided by the street gang.

My uncle was involved in a gang and my big brother was involved in a gang. ... It was knowing what the drugs did to help him take care of everybody. My brother used to tell me to stay in school and play ball. He said he would
handle anything we needed if we just asked him. It was like a sense of protection.

Medgar described how his brother used the financial capital that he gained from the streets to take care of his family, which gave Medgar a sense of economic security. He also remarked that his brother encouraged him to stay in school and pursue his athletic abilities. Medgar had an awareness that the street gang could protect him and influenced his decisions to participate in a street gang. Bobby expressed that he felt protection because his friends were like brothers to him. “I’m the only boy. I never had a brother. I felt like they were my brothers and they had my back.” For Bobby, the street gang provided a source of protection, as he mentioned that the street gang had his back. The street gang was also given this opportunity because Bobby accepted them as his family. The street gang as a family is the last focal way that the research participants felt a sense of belonging.

**Family.**
Seven participants expressed that their participation in a street gang was akin to being part of a family unit. The support that is provided through the structure within street gangs strengthens a sense of belonging as one’s identity within a whole family system is nurtured. This support through a family was characterized through sharing, admiration, longevity, and loyalty. Booker reflected directly on feeling like the street gang was his family. “My friends had my back. We treated each other like family. ... My co-defendant would take a bullet for me. Loyalty is something that I enjoyed from some people.” For Booker, the support of his peers in the street gang was helpful to the extent that he felt his friends would step in the way of a bullet for him. A co-defendant is someone else that is arrested and charged with a crime at the same time as another defendant. In Booker’s
quote here, a co-defendant is also his peer in the street gang and someone that he is
considers a close friend or family as he mentions in his quote.

Medgar agreed that the street gang was a family that helped him through
challenging times. “I would look at it as, family without blood. People at their worst times,
people will help you get through struggle. ... Everything, it was really a family away from
family. Blood couldn’t make us any closer.” Medgar’s comment refers to the support that a
street gang provides in order to help individuals meet their needs. Medgar also referred to
feeling that his peers in the street gang were as close to him as many people consider
family to be. In other words, his peers in the street gang represented the same roles as that
of brothers within a family. Martin commented on feeling that he was supported by the
street gang in the same way that a family unit functions.

That’s the only family I had. Everyone knew each other. ... The gang was a
family to me. They helped me get my mind together. It felt like they were my
family cuz I knew them for a long time. ... Like I was in a gang with [name of
his friend] and he used to give me food. Everyone was like a brother.

Martin was introduced earlier as one of participants whose reflections had a strong
influence on answering the research questions. His mother died when he was 17 and he
only had one brother in Miami. For Martin, the street gang filled a family gap that he didn’t
have prior to his involvement in the street gang. He reflected that the street gang helped
him mentally. He expressed that losing his mother was a difficult time for him. It is
important to note that he felt supported by his peers in the street gang as if they were his
family members. He mentioned receiving food from his fellow street gang member.
Desmond also commented on the family bond developed when sharing food.
We grew up sharing quarter juices when we were thirsty, honey buns and stuff like that, 1 bag of 25 cent chips, we all eat together. That’s family to me. I just don’t want to never lose that. We never lost that. We’ll have people that don’t even have a mother or a father and they will just have us.

Desmond remarks that he felt a sense that the street gang was a family to him and they engaged in resource sharing amongst each. Sharing food even where there is a small amount helped Desmond feel a sense of belonging in the way that one feels connected to a family. He also commented on how he enjoyed the bond that he shared with his peers in the street gang and remarked that it is long-lasting today.

Bunchy reflected on the sense of family that he found in the street gang. He noted that the street gang provided food after his mother died as well as financial support to help him and his brothers get through the mourning period.

Bunchy: We didn’t have no father figure. We had a mother and a grandma. ...

Around that time, I wanted to protect them by providing for them. I was giving my mom money. She was asking me where I was getting the money from. I was telling my mom that I was working at a car wash.

Researcher: Did the gang support you and your brothers after your mom died?

Bunchy: Yeah they showed up. They bought a little. The way we do it. They be having Haitian patties and tea and they make food. They gave my grandma money and stuff. They just told me to keep my head up. ...

Researcher: Was there financial help for you and your brothers?
Bunchy: Yes, they gave us a little money. I didn’t want to accept it. To that point, everybody was just there but I wasn’t paying attention to nobody. My brain was lost.

The street gang supported Bunchy during some difficult moments. The street gang provided comforts and resources such as food and money to show support to Bunchy during the time period when he lost his mother. At that time period, Bunchy was not as actively involved in the street gang.

Bobby also commented on the feeling that his friends in his street gang were family to him. He had some biological family members in the street gang as well. "Family period cause I consider my friends and my blood family all family. ... Whatever they go through, you try to be there for your friends." He felt a sense of belonging and loyalty towards his friends. The sense of belonging in a street gang was a natural transition for individuals such as Bobby because blood family including siblings, cousins, and uncles were involved in street gangs. I have spoken to Bobby via text several times since the interview and he has commented on this connection towards his peers in the street gang regarding what he has done for his brothers.

Chavez also expressed that he could count on members of the street gang as he would his family. “Family and loyalty. Like this one don’t have it, you can depend on someone else to help you out. Loyalty over royalty.” The street gang provided support for Chavez when it was needed in the same way that a family provides this care. Finally, Huey shared his reflections of looking up to his brothers who were in a street gang. He formed his own street gang in the way that he saw his brothers functioning as family unit.
I always wanted to be like my brother. He was very popular, had all the girls, and he was a good fighter. After I had got that, I always imagined if my brother was still out here, “what would my brother be doing?” I kinda thought like that. … He was always running his group of homeboys. His homeboys they look up to my brother. My brother was 5’6. So when [name of his gang] came about, I always was like I gotta have my own crew. I gotta make a name out here.

Huey’s admiration for his brothers influenced his decisions when creating his own street gang and when he made decisions about what to do within his street gang. In Huey’s case, his brother’s crew was not part of his street gang. However, the street gang that his brothers participated in made a big impact on how he led his crew. The support that is provided through the family roles within street gangs strengthens a sense of belonging as one’s identity as a unit of a whole is nurtured.

Individuals such as Bobby and Huey observed the lifestyles of their relatives and sought to achieve the same qualities in their own lives. The sense of belonging in a street gang was a natural transition for these individuals because close family included siblings, cousins, and uncles involved in street gangs. It’s important to understand the sense of belonging for each individual as it shaped the identity for the participants. The sense of belonging and the way that it influenced the identity of the participants helps to share the experiences of these 14 individuals participating in this research and sets the foundation for understanding how the funds of knowledge are transferable.
Sense of belonging in the development of identity.
The research participants described their affiliation with a street gang including some challenges faced and the experiences that they had within the context of their street gang. Additionally, I used an appreciative inquiry format in order to learn more about the positive benefits individually gained from their street gang participation and how this shaped their identity. One’s identity is influenced by the sense of belonging one has in a particular setting (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014). The identity of the research participants was shaped by the ability to feel that they fit in to an environment such as a street gang. Several participants shared their experiences and how they felt connected to the street gang through various ways. However, three themes were repeated frequently and it is these themes of emotional support, protection, and family, that charted the course for the majority of participants to develop a sense of belonging within the street gang. This sense of belonging in a particular area shaped their more permanent identity as a street gang member, which was illustrated each time the individuals shared their feelings of connection to the street gang and the integral part that it played in their life. The sense of belonging is an important ingredient in facilitating the transfer of the funds of knowledge. When individuals feel a sense of belonging in one environment, it shapes their connection to this environment and crystalizes aspects of their identity. In order to adopt a sense of belonging in a new environment, there must be a connection with this new environment. Esteban-Guitart & Moll, (2014) shared the idea that the development of identity is a fluid process influenced by the sense of belonging.

It’s important to understand the opportunities where a sense of belonging may develop in an environment outside of a street gang in order to understand how the identity of the participants could be shaped by these experiences. Recall the story of Martin who
lost his mother when he was 17. He was offered a college scholarship, yet he declined the opportunity because he didn’t think that he fit into a university environment. He hadn’t developed a sense of belonging in the college environment, yet later he did apply and begin classes at a community college. When he did attempt higher education, he was trying to find a sense of belonging in that environment. If Martin had developed a sense of belonging in an alternate environment, this could have shaped his identity as a college student. Higher education is an example of an opportunity where the research participants could develop a sense of belonging and thus influence their identity within academia, but the opportunity has to be available and accessible.

I have suggested that the funds of knowledge facilitate the transfer from the street-gang context into another, such as work or higher education. Part of developing the sense of belonging in another environment is feeling connected to that environment because you enjoy some aspect or you feel good about yourself in that place. Using one’s skills in a particular setting can help to generate the feeling of belongingness, which also serves to strengthen one’s identity in an alternate setting.

When Martin first journeyed into higher learning, he revealed feelings of trepidation and a lack of belonging. He didn’t feel a sense of belonging because he thought he wasn’t smart enough to be among college students as a street gang member. Furthermore, he felt that he was in danger from rival street gangs.

It felt so awkward. I was feeling scared. I saw people from rival gangs in my class. I was thinking I gotta find a way not to come back in their view. If I saw them, I would walk somewhere else. They would see me and we would lock eyes. ... They used to follow me to the door. I had a find a way to cut them off.
It felt weird to go from the gang to college. It felt weird to talk to people from class. I was thinking that you don’t know me from a can of paint and you want to talk to me. I was surprised that people were friendly. Where I’m from, people don’t look my way. ... Mind you, I was in a gang mindset. I was thinking, I wonder who might get shot up. I was paranoid. I had flashback. I get so nervous. I had to get out of the room. When I went to college, I was leaving that gang life. I was thinking about what changes can I make for myself? When I went to college, I was thinking that none of my friends are here. ... I was thinking if he has a gun and he was shooting at me and I didn’t have a gun. ... Man what am I gonna to do.

Martin’s feelings echo the sentiments of the dominant society’s perception of street gangs. The dominant society had an influence on Martin’s identity as a street gang member, including the opportunities that he felt were available and accessible to him. Martin’s identity as a street gang member also influenced his sense of belonging as he entered the college classroom. Entering into a new environment is a crucial phase where the identity of an individual in a street gang must be validated through the development of a sense of belonging. Here it is important to note that the sense of belonging is a key component in the facilitation of the transfer of the funds of knowledge. Without a sense of belonging, the individual either may leave the new environment or does not succeed in the new surroundings. Martin’s response illustrates how important the sense of belonging is when adopting a new aspect of one’s life.

Martin’s experiences as a street gang member shaped the hyperawareness of his surroundings. His reflections here demonstrate that he moved away from the college
environment despite taking a leap into the new environment because he feared for his safety. He didn’t develop the sense of belonging in this new environment. It is important to understand how individuals acknowledging affiliation with street gangs as part of their identity gained specific skills during their experiences in their street life. These skills are known as the funds of knowledge in this research.

**Finding 2 (RQ2 & 2a): Funds of Knowledge**

The funds of knowledge are characterized in six central ways in this research: hyperawareness, resilience, money management, networking, critical thinking/wisdom, and business savvy. I will describe each of these funds of knowledge in its respective sections. These funds of knowledge identified occurred the most frequently among the participants.

As I theorized in chapter 1, if the individuals in the gangs are able to use and transfer the funds of knowledge acquired within the context of street-gang life, then the opportunity for being included within the greater society will be possible. I suggested that if stakeholders had an awareness of the strengths of street-gang members, then they might offer opportunities to individuals involved in street gangs. For example, if organizations that have funding opportunities offer grants or microloans to individuals in street gangs, it will allow a space for the street-gang members to begin to be included in discourses where street-gang members are valued for their strengths because individuals in the dominant society have begun to develop a more positive picture of individuals in street gangs. Having an awareness of these strengths or funds of knowledge of street-gang members might help to modify negative perspectives of individuals in street gangs because the stakeholders have seen the strengths of these individuals. I also conjectured that if the
individuals had an awareness of their own funds of knowledge, then they could use these funds of knowledge to access opportunities in alternate settings outside of the street gangs such as work or higher education.

**FOK 1: Hyperawareness.**

Hyperawareness is defined in this research as an advanced alertness to one’s surroundings. By advanced alertness, I mean a heightened ability to focus attention and peripheral vision in all directions to determine potential danger. Ten out of 14 individuals developed this skill through their involvement with street gangs. In many cases, hyperawareness was acquired through facing danger in the street. Participants revealed experiencing robbery and assault in their middle childhood and adolescence. In addition, hyperawareness includes the ability to read people. Understanding the motivation and intention of others is how I define the ability to read people for the research participants. The in-depth interpretation of body language, gestures, and linguistic patterns aided the research participants in acquiring this fund of knowledge through their street interactions.

Sojourner’s brother was heavily involved in a street gang. As a sibling, Sojourner acquired her own funds of knowledge by benefitting from her brother’s participation in a street gang and as living in a neighborhood with a large number of street gangs. Sojourner received some protection from the street gang through her brother’s involvement. However, Sojourner also incurred threats to her safety through her brother’s involvement in a street gang.

Sojourner: Getting a job was a challenge. Getting to and from work was a challenge because these people were outside at the time when I went to
work. ... I didn't want people to know where I lived. It got better because I knew everyone and what they were capable of.

Researcher: Was that because they knew who your brother was?

Sojourner: Yes.

In Sojourner’s comment she revealed that she was concerned about going home from work because of the individuals in the neighborhood. She also knew that she had some tools at her disposal because of her brother’s involvement in the street gang. She also commented on what she learned through her role on the periphery of street-gang involvement.

Appearance is important to safety. People broke into my house and stole my tv because I was too flashy. They took all of my stuff. I learned to take off bling before I get in my car. I take off my car magnet [advertisement for her business] before I get home. I don't want people to know how I get my money. ... One day you are making money and one day you aren’t. I don’t want to get robbed while walking home. Other people think that I think that I am too good for the neighborhood, but they don't know what I have experienced.

Sojourner learned from her experiences that displaying one’s clothing, jewelry, or shoes in the community invited muggings. Sojourner’s comment reveals that she acquired a heightened awareness of her surroundings due to experiences with robbery. This awareness might arise in other ways for people in others walks of life. However, the individuals in this research noted that they had experienced violence and exposure to danger at a young age, which strengthened their hyperawareness of their surroundings.
Desmond described how he experienced a robbery as a young child and it was through this experience that he began to develop hyperawareness.

We got a home invasion.... It was like a coke-head. I was young, I was watching cartoons. I had a golf club in my hand. My mom’s boyfriend leave and he comes back up with this guy and she sees this guy walking up and he barges in. I don’t know. It was crazy that day. That guy tried rob us. That right there taught me to be more aware. ... It wasn't just on TV or a movie. It was reality.

Exposure to violence at a young age led to his ability to become more aware of what is happening around him. The experiences that Desmond shared as a young child may not be common among all children, yet he lived in a neighborhood where one would need protection when returning home at night, as Sojourner also described. Many of the participants portrayed the neighborhoods where they grew up as places where drugs were sold on the corner. It would be necessary to have a heightened awareness of potential danger beginning as a child. However, it was the experiences participating within a street gang that helped Desmond bolster his hyperawareness. He remarked that these experiences helped him develop a skill as a lookout.

I’m overprotective about mines [his loved ones including family and close friends]. I’ll be the eagle eye of the clique. I’ll sense everything before it happens. I’ll sense the danger or I’ll know something because it’s so obvious or it’s just common sense. ... Yeah, it taught me how to be alert. Way alert. My boys be telling me that I’m on point. I can’t say I’m perfect, but I always
taught myself never to be too comfortable. ... I’ve been shot at a few times, but I’ve escaped. I always dodged a bullet. I’ll see it before it happens.

Desmond described the protection that he provides to his boys in the street gang. He acknowledges this as part of his role by saying “I'll be the eagle eye of the clique”. The clique is another term for street gang. He mentions that he has been the target of gunfire, yet he has managed to avoid being shot. He credits his hyperawareness as a reason for dodging bullets. Huey spoke about his experiences hanging out in his neighborhood when he sensed a robbery prior to it happening.

It was a couple days when robbers used to come out to the block and try to rob us. But we would always have our guns on us and we would always be shooting back. That happened one time and my homie, he just died a couple months ago. He got killed. I remember me and him was chilling on the block and robbers came. They couldn’t even get out of the car and we started shooting at them.

Huey shared that he was able to shield himself from being robbed for a couple of reasons. He always had a firearm with him. He was also aware that the attack was going to occur prior to the robbers completing their task. Although this may not initially be understood as a positive event, it was Huey’s hyperawareness that helped him to protect himself. Several participants shared experiences of robberies, shootings, and assault arising from their street gang life. Hyperawareness was developed through exposure to danger arising from street-gang activities. Exposure to danger for many of the individuals in street gangs is a reality of life. Developing a way to protect oneself from bodily harm,
including death, is a necessary skill. Bunchy also reflected on the ability to develop hyperawareness through his experiences in his street gang.

They taught me how to be aware of your surroundings, cause you don't know what could happen in a split second. Anything could happen in the blink of an eye. ... They taught me right from wrong and to respect elders. They taught me to be on point. You gotta be sharp if you want to be in a gang. You can't be hanging around laughing.

Bunchy again referred to the danger that many individuals in street gangs experience. The fund of knowledge of hyperawareness is a necessary part of participating in a street gang to protect oneself from the perils of robbery or being shot at, which are part of the street-gang experience. Bunchy commented on avoiding laughter when hanging out on the corner. Laughing would lessen one's ability to sense danger that might occur.

Recall that Bunchy observed the death of his friend minutes after he was shot. Bunchy had just been speaking to his friend and when his friend was out of sight, a drive-by occurred where his friend was fatally wounded in the head. Bunchy himself was shot at the age of 14. The hyperawareness is largely developed out of necessity in a street gang, but it is useful in other areas of life such as a place of employment or education. Consider how an undocumented immigrant might utilize hyperawareness in an academic setting to stay focused while avoiding discriminative practices based on policy and attitudes.

Martin gained a hyperawareness through his street gang experiences as a natural response to danger that he was facing. “Common sense. The instinct and the feeling and the drive. I already know how it’s going to go down because I had the experience already.” He was able to apply this fund of knowledge for aspirational achievement, as I will
demonstrate in the transferability section. The consistent theme within hyperawareness is the ability to sense what danger may be present. Martin described his keen ability to foretell future danger because of his experiences that led him to acquire this fund of knowledge. A key part of the funds of knowledge is the experience developed within a street gang, which proved useful in future endeavors and experiences outside of street gangs.

Two other research participants also described developing hyperawareness through their street-gang experiences. I asked Elie what he learned from his time in the street gang. He stated “Be aware of my surroundings. I learned how to watch my back.” Elie’s quote is not elaborate, but attests to the fund of knowledge of hyperawareness again out of necessity. Bobby also expressed a similar sentiment. “I was a very paranoid person. That’s what kept me safe. I knew what might happen.” In Bobby’s statement, it is the hyperawareness that is necessary to stay safe. Both of these statements are consistent with the idea that danger is a part of street gang life. An ability to maintain safety or avoid injury is necessary and useful in a street gang. Therefore, hyperawareness is a fund of knowledge paramount to survival.

To this point, I have been describing the hyperawareness as it relates to a deeper understanding of potential danger in one’s physical surroundings. Hyperawareness is also manifested through an ability to read body language. It also comes from keen radar within interpersonal interactions with others who may pose a threat to an individual. Participants in the research shared that the ability to read people comes from being faced with the threat of bodily injury or harm. Baldwin described his ability to read a person.
We learn how to read a person in person in under a couple minutes. We pick up on spirits. When I say spirit, I mean a person’s soul. ... When I say we, I mean the gang members. Sometimes that gut spiritual sense is a matter of living or dying.

Baldwin described this aspect of hyperawareness through understanding others through his interactions. He suggested that he learned to understand the spirit of the person. He described that he had a sense of the person’s soul. He learned to read the intentions of the person that he was interacting with in order to decide how he might need to respond to this person. For example, if this person posed a threat to him, he might take a defensive posture. If Booker felt that he could trust the person, he might relax a little in the other person's presence. Booker also commented on the ability to read people through a feeling he developed when interacting with another person that he didn’t know.

I learned who I could trust by how they look and trust. My stomach starts to hurt. I can tell who I can trust. ... I get a gut feeling. I like to stare at people in their eyes. I know if I can trust somebody. ... I can read people by the way that they walk that they are doing fraud. I can even tell by a conversation. I can tell if it's a lie.

Booker’s comment reveals that he assessed his engagement with others through a gut feeling. He also used body language, such as looking at someone’s eyes, to determine if the person was trustworthy. He also commented on understanding whether or not someone was engaging in fraud as this was his own experience so he was able to read the signs. Another participant Chavez also learned to assess his potential danger by reading body language.
Yeah, really I learned when something bout to happen. I could read body language. I know if you coming to hurt me. I know when there’s pressure in the air. We know when somebody playing up under you for what you have.

Chavez stated that he knew whether or not another person was a threat to his safety by assessing the body language of that person. He was in tune to the energy of whomever he was engaged with in an interaction. He also suggested that the street gang as a whole also possessed this skill. Hyperawareness was necessary to determine and respond to potential danger through frequently occurring phenomena, such as robbery or shooting.

**FOK 2: Resilience.**

Resilience is a fund of knowledge that is measured through success amidst obstacles. Several individuals interviewed mentioned the dangers of street life, such as robbery or assault. Additionally, many participants have encountered extraordinary life experiences, yet they have overcome these difficulties. Nine participants shared difficult encounters that they were able to overcome in order to achieve success. Resilience is the fund of knowledge that describes the phenomenon of accomplishment amidst adversity.

Earlier, I mentioned that Huey’s mother and brother had met their demise when Huey was young. Huey was 14 when he brother died and 18 when his mother died. He spoke about these experiences in the interviews with me.

I turned 18 and my mom died. That’s when everything got all. That’s when I [pause] well, I already had built an “I don’t give a fuck attitude” in 2002 my brother got killed in a drive-by shooting. ... I adjust to things. I’m never uncomfortable with something. I feel like if God put it in front of me, let me work it until I understand it.
Huey reflected on developing an unsympathetic attitude towards life once losing his brother at the impressionable age of 14. He also expressed how the death of his mother at the age of 18 was difficult. In fact, he trailed off during the interview when thinking about the experience. It was clear from observing him at this time that the loss of his mother was a painful time in his life. Yet, he learned to adjust to life’s challenges because of his experiences and his capacity to keep living life. He mentioned that he will strive to understand all that he has been through because it is a divine experience. Martin also shared the difficulty of losing his mother, who was the only adult in his biological family.

I knew my mom was sick in the hospital. It was the worst time ever. ... It was hard where we was living because we were struggling and she was kinda sick and the people didn’t want us there. ... The gang was a family to me. They helped me get my mind together. It felt like they were my family cuz I knew them for a long time. ... After my mom passed away. That was really hard for me. ... And they didn’t want to come take me and my brother. ... I remember that she told me to be careful of the immigration so that we wouldn’t get deported.

Both Huey and Martin experienced the death of their mothers when they were only teens. Martin described how difficult the experience was when his mother was sick. He expressed that he wasn’t welcome where he was residing. He felt comforted by the street gang. He also described how hard it was when his mother passed away because he felt unwanted. He also recalled needing to be mindful of the immigration authorities. The barriers experienced by Martin were almost inconceivable but definitely difficult for a young man growing up in an impoverished neighborhood, yet he survived.
Bunchy also experienced the loss of his mother when he was 18. Additionally, his uncle died when Bunchy was 15. Bunchy also reflected on the experience of being hit with a bullet when he was 14. Several research participants were shot at and hit with bullets. However, Bunchy described his feelings during the experience.

My uncle passed away when I was almost 15. ... He got shot in a drive-by shooting. Me and my brother, we was young. ... When I came home, I heard he died. I was so sad. I was looking up to him. He used to show me everything. He would show me what to do and what not to do. He used to help me with a little reading and little math. School was hard for me. I didn’t have my head really into school. He would just teach me certain words how to pronounce them and how to spell. My mom passed away when I was turning 19. ... She died on July 4th and that just. I couldn’t think straight that whole month. ... I seen my other brother’s friend. I was talking to him and he went around the corner and I heard gunfire. Then I saw him laying there and his head was open. ... When I was younger, I got shot. ... I was so scared to tell me my mom I got shot cause she would have beat me with the extension cord. I went to the hospital and then I left cause they were taking too long. I went home and put a red and black pill, that’s a Haitian herb, on the cut so it could close up.

Bunchy reflected on the vexing experience of his beloved uncle’s death. Bunchy commented on the bond that he and his uncle shared because of all that his uncle taught him. Bunchy then expressed how immobilizing the loss of his mother, as it was just a few years later. Bunchy experienced the death of two close family members in the span of three
years. Additionally, he witnessed his brother’s friend shortly after he was shot. All of these are incredible hardships to navigate for anyone and Bunchy was a teen during all of these experiences. Finally, Bunchy himself was shot at the age of 14. He left the hospital and treated himself for the wound. All of these experiences presented obstacles for Bunchy, yet he still managed to survive. Bunchy achieved successes amidst this adversity simply by surviving and striving for goals. Bobby also described that challenges that he faced physically. He became partially blind from getting shot.

I could say the streets define me because I made it from the streets. I have a strong and weak side of me. ... I’m strong because of what I came from and the things that I faced. I’m soft when it comes to my family so my family defines me.... You don’t know what you really are signing up for. You just think these are my friends and we got each other’s back and if something happens to them...you never [pause] You gonna face a lot of challenges whether you in a gang or a clique. You are gonna get shot at. I lost my vision. That’s something that happens when you choose to be in that kind of life.

Bobby describes how he cultivated strength from his street life experiences. He also shared that he didn’t understand the depth of the danger to which he would be exposed as a member of a street gang. Regardless of what he understood about joining a street gang, he was able to succeed despite being shot at and losing vision in one eye. Nelson also reflected on experiences of adversity that he faced as an adolescent when his mother was sick with cancer and when individuals wanting to fight approached him on the street.

My mom had cancer. I was basically paying all the bills. Nobody asked me no questions. They put all the pressure on me. She only told me. My mom hasn’t
worked in like five years. ... Some guy stole my mom’s car three times and blew it up the fourth time. They set it on fire and it blew up. ... I got incarcerated when I was 18. I had 16 felonies or 17 or something like that. At the time I didn't realize the significance of what I was doing.

Nelson felt the responsibility of caring for his family of origin when he was a teen. Nelson did what he needed to do to help pay the bills, which included criminal activities that then landed him in jail. Stokely also shared some challenges that he had regarding getting arrested, getting robbed, and a time when the power went out because he couldn't pay the bills.

I ended up getting arrested for no reason. ... The police came upstairs and started searching the room. When they found weed, they started questioning everybody. Nobody wanted to own up to it. The girlfriend said it was hers because nobody wanted to own up to it. When he was searching us, one of my friends had a concealed weapon. When he found the concealed weapon, he took five people to jail instead of seven. It didn't make no sense because they only took five. ... It was probably the looks, the dreads. They left behind the oldest and the youngest person there. The officer came over to me and asked me to put my hands behind my back. I asked him why and he told me that I was resisting. ... I started getting money a little bit and one day I was showing my friend my new laptop. I went home and put it upstairs. I went back outside. I was walking around the neighborhood. When I come back home, I noticed that my kitchen door was kicked open. I was like wow, maybe they took everything. Then, I noticed that everything was still there
except my laptop. ... There was 2 months that my mom was having surgery in Boston. I was 21 and it was big for me. She left. I didn’t have no job. After all my clothes got dirty and I didn’t have no source of income, I was basically lost. I went 2 days without food. It was hot. All my clothes were dirty.

Stokely faced arrest by association. He had gone to help his friend who was stranded out of town. He felt that he was arrested because of his appearance. He also shared another experience when a friend of his robbed him. He was surprised again that his friend had stolen from him. Finally, he had a challenge when handling the household duties and bills as a young adult. He was unable to manage the bills, food, and get out of the house to stay cool during the Miami heat. Both Stokely and Nelson shared challenges facing danger in the street or robbery from a trusted friend. Booker also described a difficult experience when he got attacked outside of a club with a gun.

The friends that I had on the east side jumped me. The friends on the west side approached me and asked if I wanted to do the scamming thing...I had $150,000 saved up. At the same time, I got shot and pistol whipped. Around that age, I started going to the strip club a lot and people would see me there and they wouldn’t like it. When we tried to leave they would try to kill us. I was 16, 17 at the time. At 18, it got even worse, cuz that’s when a lot of my friends started dying.

Booker expressed that his friends first attacked him when he was in middle school. He had moved from one neighborhood to another, which happened to be a rival neighborhood. He had to get involved with one group to gain protection. He also expressed that the new friends solicited him for fraud participation. This group was his street-gang
family. Booker expressed that he was assaulted with a gun and shot at after leaving a club. He also experienced the loss of friends at a young age just as Bunchy mentioned. Mohandas also expressed a general sentiment about the challenges of street life.

The adversity, cause there definitely was adversity. The sense of wanting to belong and to do different and not wanting to be incarcerated with my friends. It is still tough. Sometimes I cry and I miss the friendships.

Mohandas’s statement provides a good summary of the challenges that many of the individuals that I interviewed experienced. As humans, we all faced some adversity in our lives. I am suggesting that the adversity faced by these individuals was intense for anyone and even greater due to the young age of the participants. All were 21 and under and some as young as 14 when facing death, experiencing bullet wounds, or powerful threats to safety. Finally, one participant shared how he first started experiencing incredible hardships and responsibility as a nine-year-old.

I learned how to deal with life because of going through struggle and going thru the hard times. ... I was 9 years old watching my sister while she [his mother] was at work. I was hearing shots through the building and everything. My mama used to tell me don’t open the door. My mama just tell me to play video games, and she would leave food and drinks and tell me don’t touch the fire or the stove.

Researcher: How old was your sister at the time?
She was 4 or 5, but I had it down pat. I started being daddy since that age.

Researcher: When you heard shots, what did you do?
She would tell me that when you hear shots, just get down. We had this one sliding door in our room and we would see shadows cutting through the back. It was a scary situation back then, but I had to man-up.... But, I figure that I know enough to survive. I know enough to take care of my people, and take care of whatever situation it is.

Desmond described his experiences as a nine-year-old child taking care of his sister. He was faced with the responsibility of protecting his sister from gunshots, yet he was a child. This experience helped him begin to learn how to face and protect himself. This was also the time period when he began to get involved in a street gang. More importantly, his ability to survive this difficult experience helped him to build resilience. He was able to use this resilience to get through more difficult times.

FOK 3: Money management.
Money management is defined in this research as the ability to invest or save money in order to acquire economic stability. Nine participants learned to be successful money managers through their experiences in the street gangs. For many participants, money management was realized through the ability to maintain purchase power for cars, clothing, and savings. Participants noted that earning money quickly also meant that it could be lost quickly, so it was an important survival skill to be able to spend wisely and invest for one’s future sustainability.

Desmond remarked on what he learned about money management.

They taught me money is power and it’s the root of all evil. I was never materialistic. Even though I always had it. ... My first car, I was 13. I done had about 16 or 17 cars by now. ... You learn how to be organized. Yeah, drugs,
you gotta get organized, But I always knew I wasn't gonna be doing that forever, casuse I did get locked up for it in a sting operation in 2009 where I was going through it. You learn to count money. ... I learned how to control money, I learned how to be a manager, and boss of my own.

Desmond’s comment reveals that he learned the fragility of money. He learned how to stay organized within his street sales to attain money management skills. Staying organized and maintaining a good awareness of his money allowed him to own at least 16 cars. He also spoke about learning math skills through his street sales experiences. Bunchy also remarked on learning math skills through his experiences with street sales.

Yes, I learned addition skills and division from the gang. I had to learn how to divide what was mine or I coulda got beat up for not learning it. ... It was a particular gang member. That was the one telling me how to count the money. Who to trust and who not to trust. Telling me that you can’t let your friends know because they be trying to steal from you. ... They taught me how to watch my back, how to divide, how to sort the money and be cautious with the police.

Desmond and Bobby both reflected on improving their addition skills through their participation in a street gang. For Bunchy, not knowing math skills could lead to harmful consequences. He also mentioned that he learned to conceal his money so that others would not attempt to rob him. For Bunchy, acquiring money management included math skills such as addition and division as well as organizing his money. Bunchy spoke about learning about investment strategies. He shared what he learned about money candidly
during my time with him. “I learned how to save and make the right investments. ... Try to invest in yourself. Try to save your money. Try to buy a house. You know, things like that.”

Bobby revealed that he learned about investing through his street gang participation. The reality of street sales for these individuals involved in this research was that it was a business of highs and lows. Participants had to accept and be prepared for the gains and losses within street sales. Bobby has utilized his money management skills exceedingly well today. Huey also acquired money management skills through his experiences.

You know I was on street corners making 1400 to 2300 per day. ... There’s something about that fast money. Just living for the moment, it tricks everybody. Nobody don’t sit and think about it. You want to live for the moment. I be telling people, whatever you make fast don’t last long. I learned that.

Huey described learning an important skill in money management, which is the fragility mentioned previously about money. He also has made great leaps and utilized his fund of knowledge in money management to succeed in aspirational achievement and community value. Stokely commented on a different aspect of money management. He realized early on that flashiness or bragger doesn’t serve one well when trying to survive.

Money is an impression. I was stuck in the impression stage. People were spending $500 on a pair of shoes and that $500 for food could be food for months. There’s no point. Same thing with smoking weed. You think it’s $10, but it’s not $10. You smoke and then you get hungry but you spent your last $10 on food.
He experienced losing electricity and an inability to attend to his basic needs through that experience. He learned that money was better spent on necessities than on something that is desired. Boasting about one’s money or being flashy with clothing was about an appearance and not a good way to manage one’s money. For Stokely, he learned about money management through his experiences in the street gang because he understood how to maintain financial security through careful budgeting.

Sojourner also shared her cultivated awareness of money management. “I have to look a certain way. I can’t live like I have money, because then they watch you.” She reveals that it’s important not to brag because others will watch her movements. She alluded to the idea that she may get robbed if she is watched because earlier she spoke about the danger she experienced walking home at night. If an individual faces potential robbery through their daily life activities, it is important to learn money management. Money management isn’t just about budgeting or math skills, but also about how one attends to financial needs.

Booker expressed that he learned about the fragility and fluidity of money.

I learned how to do fraud. Just be generous, cuz it’s not all yours. Every fraudster has a time when he has no money at all. The schemes don’t last. I learned to save money. When one person found a way of getting money, we would tell the whole group. People looked out for each other. ... We didn’t need to share money.

Booker shared that it was important to learn money management so that he could be prepared for days when he wasn’t making money. He also shared that he learned to share what he learned about money management with his peers. Baldwin also directly stated that he learned about money management through his experiences in the street
gang. I have been a victim of identity theft and fraud myself. However, it is the ability to save, budget, and invest money that is a fund of knowledge acquired through these experiences. It is important to remember that fraud, street sales, and other financial endeavors developed out of the very few viable options available to these individuals to make a living.

Money management. They helped me attain money that I wouldn’t be able to get a in a 40 hour work week. ... Discuss money and make plans on how to make more money. If the opportunity presented itself, execute it. ... My mom worked two jobs. She worked at night to make sure that we had what we needed. I always knew it wasn’t enough and I knew that my mom deserved more than what she has.

Baldwin learned about money management through his street gang experiences by learning how to acquire cash and how to increase it. He shared that he observed his mother work two jobs, yet it wasn’t enough to take care of the family. Baldwin wanted to make enough money to achieve stability. He believed that the street gang offered him opportunities that he couldn’t achieve in a traditional job. Finally, Medgar shared that he learned to maintain and make money through his experiences observing his brother’s money management skills. Medgar adopted these strategies with his own group of friends.

My uncle was involved in a gang and my big brother was involved in a gang...

My brother got his own business. He don’t need nothing. He takes care of his family. I mean when he comes back down here every other month, he still be with the same people. They still doing them. They got positive stuff too; show
you how to get money, maintain it, manage it, take care of people who need to be taken care of.

Medgar observed his brother using his money to take care of his family. He learned that his brother was able to meet all the needs for taking care of his family. He also started to speak about the street gang’s responsibility to the community. Further in this chapter, I will highlight the transferability of the money management fund of knowledge for community value.

FOK 4: Networking.
Networking includes the use of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) in order to access opportunities. It also includes working with others as a team to accomplish tasks both for individual gain and for the greater community. Networking might best be described as a street form of “Linked-in,” whereby individuals connect with others sharing similar interests to collaborate on projects, jobs, and events benefiting themselves and others. Eight participants shared experiences of learning helpful networking strategies through their experiences within the street gang. In this research, networking is the ability to use social capital to obtain opportunities and often incorporates teamwork. Research participants revealed using their social capital to gain business opportunities within the context of street life. Huey described learning the benefits of networking to improve visibility and gain opportunities.

I tell my cousin. You are an NMB [area of town] native. Find a way to be on the counsel. They know more and they know more people. I feel like being an EMT [emergency medical technician] is just a stepping stone to getting to know somebody who will put me in a better position. I learned networking a
long time ago. You gotta find the people who know stuff. ... Just chillin around my homeboyz, running stuff, taking over stuff, just power, well back then..baby power, not the kind of power that I want now. Back then we thought we want power we didn't understand what was real power until you start seeing power multi-millionaires and the type of power they got between regular street corner power is nothing compared to that little bit of power to go to the store and buy a pair of shoes or handle a bill or two is nothing compared to being a millionaire.

Huey alluded to the value of this networking when suggesting that his cousin should acquire the attention of political figures through networking. He stated that he learned the power of networking and the financial control it can yield. He uses the example of moving up in a work position through gaining the attention of powerful individuals. It is the social capital that Huey is using to network with others who can help him to attain desired opportunities. Huey also reflected on learning about the power that comes from being financially stable. The common threads throughout this section of interview quotes are the opportunities that come from networking with powerful people. Bobby also observed that being in a street gang helped him to network.

I just see that when you are in a clique, you get to meet a lot of people and you network and you see how people think. You see how people think and you know what things you should do, what you should wear, and how you should think.

Bobby noted that core strength of being in a street gang is because individuals have the ability to develop opportunities that they may not have access to on their own. Bobby
learned how to open doors through observing others, which he utilized when networking.

Bobby has also improved his own life path through the acquisition of his funds of knowledge.

Martin also reflected on acquiring networking as a fund of knowledge. “I learned motivation, social skills, and networking. I learned customer service. When I was selling drugs, I was networking.” Martin equated the experience of selling drugs to networking. Street sales offer opportunities to come into contact with many people, but it also helped Martin to cultivate a skill in learning to talk to others. The skill in networking was developed through the interaction with others as Martin engaged in street sales. Mohandas also described learning about networking through his participation in a street gang.

I learned how to network, how to make friends. ... I think the influence that we had, we could use that to be positive in way. ... You have influence because there are those out there that look up to you and want to be like you. ... I learned value of friendship, decision-making, and team-work whether the teamwork was negative or positive.

Mohandas stated that he learned to network through his experiences in the street gang. He observed that it was the teamwork within the street gang that has the potential to be a positive feature for influencing others. Finally, Mohandas mentioned the prejudice experienced as a Haitian. Banding together as a united front through networking helped individuals to find strength as a community. Networking with others is also a way to engage in opportunities outside of street life. Stokely also remarked on the benefits of networking with others as a group through street gang participation.
When you are working, you are in a gang, you are in a team. ... You learn to deal with other people and then you get to peep who’s who. Even at your workspot. Just because you are at work. This person is negative, I need to stay away from them or this person is positive. That could be something big at your job. You get around the negative people you lose your cool and then you lose your job.

Stokely remarked on learning to interact with others while in a street gang. He also described that one learns who to connect with or who to stay away from through networking. He alludes to how networking and awareness of who is helpful or harmful has benefits at one’s place of work.

Bunchy commented on an interesting benefit of networking for the greater community. He remarked that the street gang would step in to prevent burglaries or fights. “They protect the community. They stop the burglaries and people breaking into cars. They stop people fighting. People listened to them.” Bunchy remarked on the street gang’s ability to engage in the community as a protective force, which demonstrates another side of networking. The individuals in the community benefitted from the street gang whether or not they were a part of the street gang through having their car, homes, and even themselves protected from bodily harm. Finally, Desmond described acquiring networking through both traditional and inventive ways in the gang.

Everybody has some type of way of doing things that it can be done easier or the hard way. I like to take the easy route. Back in the days with the drug selling, it gets you to know a lot of people. ... I learned how to be a handyman from friends, doing lawn work, yard work, construction, contracting,
painting. I learned a lot. ... Back in the days, there was a lot of girls going through it to so they was selling themselves. I always had clientele. I was like a poor pimp. I was always poor pimping. That’s what we call it. They help me out cause I was helping them out. I don’t want their entire check [income], cause that’s their movement. ... They get checks for it. We call the money checks. It will be things that you don’t want to do. True enough, we all grew up saying that. I want what’s right for us, but we fall into the depths of those hands. ... There was times I used to have to put money down for the hotels just to help these girls. I would have two hotels at the time, one for the pimping and one for the drug-selling. It was hard. We used multiple hotels throughout Florida, wherever we see the money at. If we see the junkies here, we gonna be close to establish close to the spot. If we see a lot of tricks here, we line it up for the girls. I even had a compadre with me.

The experience of selling drugs was a way for Desmond to network through his interactions with others in the street. Desmond also remarked on a noteworthy aspect of networking in the development of useful construction skills through his connections in the street gang. These skills can be used to help him find work. He has been able to find work for many years through learning technical skills. Even more remarkable was the ability to engage with others who he observed needed his skills in order to acquire financial gain. He described helping girls by providing protection while they engaged in prostitution. Although Desmond’s help might be seen as aiding in illegal acts, it is my observation that he was not perpetrating human trafficking through his actions with the prostitution. His attitude towards the prostitution was a belief that he was helping girls that needed
protection from clients who may harm them. He was making money from his help so it was still part of a street business. Some women engage in prostitution as a source of income in the streets when there are not many other viable options. Baldwin stated simply the benefit that networking brought to the community: “Connected me with certain individuals”. It is this connection that Baldwin and others acquired through their street gang experiences that is a useful fund of knowledge in many areas outside of street gangs.

**FOK 5: Wisdom/Critical thinking.**
Wisdom and critical thinking were acquired by most of the research participants through their experiences in the street gang. Wisdom acquired from street-gang experiences might be considered street smarts in some contexts. Nine participants highlighted wisdom acquired from their street-gang experiences. Critical thinking skills are applicable in many areas of life inside and outside of street-gang experiences. Huey demonstrated learning the critical thinking skill of analysis through his description of planning a drive-by shooting. Gaining critical thinking skills through planning a drive-by shooting may seem unusual, however, these events are the social context of the lived experiences of the participants. Discrimination based on race, ethnicity, class, and other aspects of identity and the factors that lead to a sense of belonging within a street gang lay the foundation for street gang participation. Street gang life may be difficult to understand for individuals with limited personal experience in these circles, yet it is the infrastructure of the lives of the participants whereby drive-by shootings are a part of life. There are funds of knowledge such as critical thinking that are gained from these experiences that are strange and hard to understand for outsiders looking in.
I just analyze everyone around me. Anything around me I analyze it first. That's like when we do a drive-by, I always was the one to be like ok, this is the way we come in and this is the way that we leave, but we can't go at this time because it's too full at this time. It's situations like that. The main thing is I was a good analyzer.

It might be shocking to consider how one can acquire skills in analysis through planning out a revenge homicide. However, strategy is involved in this activity as the planners also consider their own safety and that of their peers as they engage in this risky endeavor. Surviving unscathed from a drive-by shooting entails careful planning, fortune, and engagement of other funds of knowledge such as hyperawareness. Huey remarked that he learned to use his critical thinking skills when evaluating many parts of his life. Booker commented on having an ability to apply his street wisdom to work towards reducing crime.

I wanted to go into law enforcement. I always wanted that job as a kid. I wanted to get bad people. I knew so much about the street. If I were to put on a uniform, I could stop a lot stuff going. ... I know what to do so that people won't crack into my system. If I don't get into law enforcement, I want to go into network security.

Booker felt that he could prevent crime because he had cultivated an in-depth understanding of the street society through his personal experiences. He mentioned that he aspired to be a police officer even as a young child. He got involved in some activities that resulted in him spending time in prison. Yet, he felt that the wisdom he gained could be useful in halting street activities. Booker also expressed gaining wisdom that is helpful in
reducing crime. Mohandas spoke about knowing the difference between the streets and the general society. A few participants remarked on this aspect of adapting to one’s environment, which was a subtheme within wisdom and critical thinking.

There is a difference. When you are in the streets or you are in a corporate world. There is a difference so you learn to differentiate from the two worlds. There are different rules for civilized or corporate world. You gotta learn the rules to the street life. There are different rules for the civilized life and you gotta learn that also.

Mohandas’s experience with code switching was found among a few of the participants who learned how to shift their behaviors, clothing, and speech. For example, one would change the jargon of one’s speech patterns to adjust between a home environment, a workplace, or the street life. I described code switching in chapter two. Mohandas’s comment revealed that one must know the rules in order to participate in either environment. Participating in both the street gang setting and alternate areas in the general society such as school or work necessitates understanding both environments. Baldwin also described an experience with code switching as he vacillated between the streets and his college environment.

After the middle of 10th grade, I severed as much as possible from the gang. I turned into a geek. I started getting involved in football, drama, soccer, and basketball. When I wasn’t practicing I was president of the engineering club. ... I would choose which parts of me to be. The person I was at home was not who I was in church or the streets. ... Yes, I learned that I’m versatile waking
up at 7 and going to classes from 8 to 6 and then coming down and almost automatically fitting in with gang members.

Baldwin described attempting to leave the street gang at one point, but then coming back to participate in street gang activities. He learned to access whatever was needed to succeed in either environment. Baldwin accessed the aspects of his identity in order to fit into his current environment. Sometimes, it was connecting with his role as a studious scholarship recipient at a private university, while at other times, he reconnected with his peers in the street gang. Baldwin was accepted to a private university with a full scholarship, yet he had to leave and come back to the street gang once the scholarship funding was unexpectedly removed. Three participants shared their street-gang wisdom in learning how to resolve conflicts. Bunchy spoke about learning how to deescalate a potentially volatile situation through the wisdom and critical thinking that he gained.

They taught me how to handle certain situations. ... Some situations you have to walk away from. Some situations you don’t have to use violence and use a lot of profanity. Some people be trying to piss you off and you gotta know how to handle it. You gotta say alright and just walk away. And some people you gotta use violence cause they don’t get it. Then they get it and they gone out their way. I didn’t use violence a lot. I just talked to them and leave them like that. I just give them a little speech and just move away. Only like twice I had to fight somebody.

Bunchy refers to his street-gang experiences and acquiring the wisdom to know how to resolve a conflict. Bunchy described understanding when to leave a situation that could become dangerous or harmful. He also described accessing violence in some
situations, but he describes this as a rare phenomenon. Mainly, Bunchy acquired verbal communication as a means to resolving conflict. Eli also endorsed the idea that it was important to know what to say and to be fair when interacting with others. “How to hold yourself. No matter what situation you in, you know how to get out of it. ... One thing I learned communicating with people you gotta be fair. You gotta give them something so that you could receive.” Elie’s wisdom is evident in his understanding of preparation and informed communication. It is easy to see how this wisdom in communication and conflict resolution learned by both of these individuals could be helpful in many areas of life outside of street gangs. Desmond also expressed a similar sentiment as Elie and Bunchy in his acquired wisdom and critical thinking.

For me turning the other cheek is trying to live out longer. Outdo the negativity, try to keep it positive, try to keep it simple. ... Some people that I know will put a gun to somebody's face and say “Where’s my money?” Me on the other hand, I learned how to just let it be. Charge it to the game. When we charge it to the game, it is what it is right there. Later on if you remember me. Just go ahead and hand it to me. I’ll let em know you owe me money and if he says he aint got it, I’ll take his word for it. I won’t never let it get to me. ... They [the gang] kinda gave me some of the talent that I got now. I done grew up with some talent. I started rapping a lot.

Desmond has learned to reduce conflict by avoiding situations that may present themselves as harmful. He also shared his acquired wisdom that it is important to let go of material attachment to money. He stated that he didn’t let the loss of money bother him. Finally Desmond used his street-gang knowledge to compose lyrics and perform songs.
about his experiences. Many people may not think of street gang members as having acquired wisdom in resolving conflict. However, the ability to preserve and extend one’s life within street-gang life requires advanced wisdom in conflict resolution. Finally, just as Desmond did, Stokely also expressed himself lyrically through his acquired wisdom. He first spoke about how the streets influenced his peers and then he remarked on what he learned from his own experiences with his affiliation to a street gang.

It was a good experience especially for people that grew up on the streets because it is the streets that traumatized a lot of people. ... I started doing music and talking about my experiences. ... In my song, I talk about what happens because you have all these material things but then you get caught.

Stokely reflected on how the desire for material wealth affected choices to engage in illegal means to satiate these desires. Stokely’s music has become popular. He shared what he learned through his music with others, which has an impact on his listeners in the community. Bobby also learned to motivate others into action through his street-gang experiences. “I’ve learned that I’m a good leader. I can help a person turn their life around. Feel that I’m a good speaker.” Bobby learned to use language to inspire others. Many participants remarked on acquiring wisdom and critical thinking within the context of the street gang.

**FOK 6: Business savvy.**

Several participants identified experiences that were helpful in business endeavors. These business savvy skills were acquired through financial pursuits and through their engagement in street sales. Huey described how he increased his income through using clever business strategies.
Within [name of gang], my brothers and my older homeboys they used to sell dime bags [$10 of product]. They always had customers that would come up short or with a whole bunch of change. ... I would tell them to send the customers to [name of gang]. I was taking all the customers that couldn’t pay $10 for the crack rocks. I was selling nickel bags. While my brothers was selling dimes, I was selling nickels. My crack was half [pause] well, damn near the same size as a regular dime rod. They was sending all those customers to me. I started booming, making a lot of money in one day. I had my cousin, he did the same thing so we made our $5 crack rocks the same size as the $10 bags...Everybody in NMB [area of town] was coming to the [name of gang]. With that, I was still in high school. ... Eventually, I stopped going to school cause I was making $3200 a day, $3200 in 8 hours.

Huey’s business savvy enabled him to increase his profit and monopolize the street sales market as a high school student. He didn’t see a need for school anymore because he was increasing his financial capital outside of school. Huey used his business savvy in a legal endeavor through investing in nightclubs. He also recently used this fund of knowledge to improve his business. Bobby also shared what he learned about business from his experiences in a street gang.

You learn through other people. If you see someone that does something like that, then you want to imitate it. I’m pretty sure that we all have the same ideas. We speak and talk about making our family lives better. We feed off that energy. ... The only thing you learn is what’s around you. ... I want to be a bigger business owner where I won’t have to work.
For Bobby, learning from his peers who were making money was a way to increase his business savvy skills. Bobby learned to increase his financial capital through his business savvy skills learned from his peers within the street gangs. He also acknowledged that many people have similar goals. Baldwin also described developing a strong work ethic, which is part of the fund of knowledge of being business savvy.

If you want something you have to work hard for it and you have to be prepared to take risks. ... Yes, patience, because sometimes you have to wait a long time. ... It keeps you alive and away from unnecessary fights. ... Knowing how to talk to a person and getting your idea across and you know whether or not you will do business. I learned that in the university, but it was chiseled in the gang.

Baldwin describes how working hard helped him achieve his goals. This may not seem like a concept associated with street gang members engaged in street sales. Consider the amount of time that an individual spends on the street corner selling drugs and the dangers associated with this occupation, and it may be easier to visualize how an individual engaged in street sales develops a strong work ethic. Baldwin also recalls that patience was learned within the context of his experiences in the street gang. Patience and hard work are both aspects of being a successful business savvy individual. Finally, Baldwin mentions the idea of successful communication that he acquired through his street-gang experiences. Useful communication skills helped him develop the ability to conduct business with others. In the street gang, communication is acquired through engaging in street sales or other aspects of street gang life.
Bunchy remarked on the idea of hard work and patience as important skills learned in the street gang. “I learned to be a hard worker and be consistent. Say if you work one day and you don’t work the next day, they would come and tell you that you gotta work everyday.” Bunchy also learned these skills through his street sales and thus acquired an ability to be business savvy through these experiences. Desmond also remarked on learning patience through his time as a street-gang member: “I learned patience over the years. I can’t say all the years that I’ve been growing, but I’ve been learning to deal with waiting and learning to be patient.” Desmond’s ability to be patient was a useful business tool for his interactions with others when engaging in street sales. It might be difficult to conceive of patience as a fund of knowledge when considering the images put forth by the media about street-gang members. However, picturing the length of time on a street corner or waiting for the right opportunity to make one’s move may help generate understanding of the natural development of patience. Booker observed that he learned business savvy skills through making mistakes with his business endeavors. Learning from mistakes is an important part of accomplishing success in a business. “The first couple of times that I started doing the fraud, I made mistakes. Then my friend corrected me. Our social network was about business. ... The first $50,000 I saw. I made it in like a week.” Within his statement, Booker affirms that his street gang's mission is about growth of business. The picture that I’m trying to paint about the street gangs is one of additive value of the funds of knowledge acquired as opposed to a deficit model through the perceived detrimental activities associated with individuals in gangs. Through the words of the individuals involved in the street gangs, I have presented the acquisition of the funds of knowledge. Next, I will describe how the individuals transferred their funds of knowledge.
Finding 3 (RQ3a & RQ3b): Transfer of the Funds of Knowledge

The six funds of knowledge identified in this research as hyperawareness, resilience, money management, networking, wisdom/critical thinking, and business savvy featured prominently in all of the data shared by the majority of the participants. In some cases, the transferability was related to attaining a personal goal and in other cases it was used to benefit the community. Funds of knowledge in *aspirational achievement* are the attainment of personal goals, such as acquiring employment or participating in an educational institution. Additionally, this aspirational achievement manifests by successfully participating in a program, such as correctional boot camp. The funds of knowledge were also beneficial to the community, which I have defined as *community value*. The extended community is defined by any of the following: the members of the gang, the local neighborhood, and the Haitian diaspora in Miami.

I have organized the following discussion to first identify which funds of knowledge were transferred for aspirational achievement. I found that all of the funds of knowledge transferred for the goal of aspirational achievement. I then identified the funds of knowledge that transferred for community value, which include money management, networking, and wisdom/critical thinking. In chapter five, I will discuss some of the ways that the funds of knowledge would be beneficial to the individuals and the greater society if opportunities for the transfer are made available to individuals in street gangs. Table 3 below details the participant, the fund of knowledge acquired, and the funds of knowledge transferred both for aspirational achievement and community value.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Fund of Knowledge (FOK) Acquired</th>
<th>FOK Transferred for Aspirational Achievement</th>
<th>FOK Transferred Community Value</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Resilience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stokely</td>
<td>Resilience, Money Management, Networking, Wisdom/Critical Thinking, Business Savvy</td>
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<td>Wisdom/Critical Thinking</td>
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<td>Martin</td>
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<td>Elie</td>
<td>Hyperawareness, Wisdom/Critical Thinking</td>
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FOK 1: Hyperawareness transfer for aspirational achievement.
Martin remarked that he didn’t feel a sense of belonging in a college environment because of how he defined himself as a street gang member and the meaning that he made of his identity within this role. It is important to be aware of the aspirational achievement that Martin acquired through his street gang experiences and how he utilized his fund of knowledge in hyperawareness to achieve success at work.

Martin’s hyperawareness helped prepare him for whatever challenges he might face in the streets. He transferred this hyperawareness at his job when he interrupted an altercation between his co-worker and his customer. “Protection helps at work. A couple of years ago, my customer was acting all crazy. The instinct to protect my co-workers comes to you cause I think this is my territory.” Martin’s ability to read people helped him predict what behavior and respond accordingly in order to help his co-worker and strengthen his work performance enabling longevity in his position. The ability to retain the same job for almost four years represents an aspirational achievement. Furthermore, Martin plans to open his own food truck business one day, which was influenced by his experiences working at a restaurant in Miami for the past four years. Therefore, Martin used his hyperawareness fund of knowledge at his work, which helped him gain the admiration of his co-workers and his boss but would also benefit for achieving his personal aspiration.

Baldwin also described transferring his hyperawareness fund of knowledge for aspirational achievement. One way to look at Baldwin’s transfer of hyperawareness is to consider his success in a local correctional program, which is a rigorous and difficult program. Hyperawareness contributed to his success in the program as his ability to read others and have a heightened awareness of his surroundings helped him manage
challenges that might have sent him on a different path. For example, some participants do not complete the program because of violations such as fighting or lack of compliance. Baldwin used his hyperawareness to maintain control of himself in potentially volatile surroundings. Another measure of aspirational achievement for Baldwin was through his engagement with the business management advisor who helped Baldwin to tap into his own creativity.

I go to meetings and I know who I can trust to business with. Actually boot camp hasn’t been too bad. I’ve come up with 6 or 7 ideas that I can do outside of here. I would learn who has potential. I’m not going to do business with people who are incompetent.

Baldwin remarked on generating ideas from his meetings with the business advisor in the correctional program. Baldwin’s ability to read people helped him in the streets as he knew who to trust. Hyperawareness helped him generate business ideas with an advisor that may be successful because he has learned to read others. Although he hasn’t yet pursued all the ideas, the ability to creatively come up with potential business endeavors is an aspirational achievement because he was able to use his acquisition of this fund of knowledge in hyperawareness to generate a plan.

Desmond’s hyperawareness skills kept him safe amidst potential bodily harm because he could read body language and intuit potential danger. Danger and death are real possibilities within street-gang life and therefore hyperawareness is necessary and useful. I also witnessed Desmond use his hyperawareness to avoid danger when I brought this individual to retrieve his personal belongings from the house where he had been residing until his friends were shot. He checked out the scene to be sure that the shooter was not in
the area before retrieving his personal belongings. He describes how he escaped death, which unfortunately was not the case for his friends who met their early demise through homicide. Desmond remarked that he was living at the house where his friend was recently murdered and he used his hyperawareness to avoid bodily harm.

The other day when the house got shot up, I seen them two cars trailing each other. Tuesday was when my boy died on the block. I was there a day before. I guess they was supposed to come hit up the house that I was at. ... It’s crazy because it’s been a beef going on for years. It’s not gonna die down. ... But I knew that they was gonna. It was so obvious to me and I sensed it. And I’m telling people to be careful and when these boys told me that was leaving to go do this and that and the two was left in the house to play video games. That’s where the lacking was right there. Like nobody was on point or watching outside or nothing. ... I would read somebody then and there. I could read what their intentions were. Some people it was hard because they know how to do it too, so they manipulate a mind. ... If I didn’t know you, I would have been asking you more questions, but since I knew you and I remembered you, I was like ok.

This example shows how his hyperawareness was valuable within the context of street-gang life. It’s important as an example of a transfer because Desmond asked me to take him back to the scene to get his clothes and this is where I observed Desmond using his hyperawareness skills to make sure that it was safe enough to go back to the place where his friends were murdered. Desmond also shared that he used his hyperawareness to identify whether or not I was someone that he could trust. He used his hyperawareness
both in the sense of assessing the physical surroundings and to read my intentions. To illustrate, when I first picked him up to complete the interview, he gave me directions to a neighborhood. When I got there and didn't see him, he identified my car and advised me that he was coming out of a black truck. The use of reading people is something that he used outside of the context of street gang life as he engaged in the interviews with me for this research.

**FOK 2: Resilience transfer for aspirational achievement.**
Resilience transfer was observed when a successful transition was made into college or a workplace. Booker experienced a number of challenges such as losing friends to death, yet he was able to attend college and successfully participate in a local correctional program. “I finished high school. I graduated from [high school] and then I went to [a local university] and studied law enforcement.” Booker expressed that he went on to higher education and that his major area of study was law enforcement. Overcoming the loss of friends and attending college was a successful transfer of resilience for Booker in achieving an aspirational goal. The transfer is derived from the strength and ability to participate successfully in another area of life despite many hardships. Nelson also used his resilience and to successfully secure a job at a car dealership. He expressed his how his resilience helped him acquire work.

My challenges mold and shaped me. I learned that wisdom is from my experiences. ... Now, I just work. I go to work and come home and relax. I’m a house body now. I don’t deal with the streets. I don’t go out at night.

Nelson stated in his comment that his challenges have influenced his identity and how he finds his place in the world. He was able to move past his incarceration and the
burdens of paying bills as an adolescent while his mother was ill. He learned to take responsibility through his experiences. He has been working at a car dealership for the last couple of years, which shows a successful transfer of resilience for achievement of an aspirational goal. Stokely also attained work despite his challenges.

Then eventually I got called by a job. Now I work at [a rental car company]. ... Everything is good. I’m working and I soon start college for collision repair. I been going down the right path lately.

Stokely, like Nelson and Desmond attained work as a result of his transfer of funds of knowledge in resilience. Stokely’s employment helped him to remain focused on providing a better life for himself and his son. He also applied for and was accepted to a training program to become a certified mechanic, which demonstrates his ability to transfer his resilience that he attained during his street gang experiences outside of this environment. On the other hand, Mohandas described how his resilience helped him to step into other avenues and become a strong man despite seeing so many of his close friends lose their lives to the streets or endure long-term incarceration. However, it is the resilience to move past death and incarceration of many of his close friends that allowed Mohandas to attain work and shift his career life into an alternate path from the streets.

I’m greater than most people think. I’m greater than I think. I can do things if I put my mind to it. I can accomplish a lot in life if I do what’s right. ... Yeah, it shaped my mindset. It shaped my view of things. It shaped me to be a better man today.

Like Booker, Mohandas lost many of his peers to incarceration or death, yet despite these setbacks he acquired a job as a youth counselor. He expressed confidence as he spoke
about his accomplishments as a mentor in his community. He felt that his experiences in the gang helped mold him into the man. Bunchy has transferred his fund of knowledge in resilience learned from his street gang experience to help him survive the local correctional program.

Back then, I was hard-headed, knuckle head. I didn’t want to take nothing from anybody. I did have confidence in myself. I felt I could accomplish anything back then. Now I see, it’s about what you need, not what you want. ... Now, I’m trying to get on the right path. ... My heart is not for robbing or killing people or holding guns and stuff like that.

He remarked that he was previously stubborn, but over time that behavior led to him having confidence in himself. He gained resilience through overcoming loss in his life and he used his ability to overcome challenges to survive in the correctional program. He remarked that he is following a positive path in life and that he has learned that he isn’t interested in participating in violent crime. Bunchy's ability to overcome his own challenges and change his path from some of the negative aspects of street gang life demonstrates resilience. Bunchy’s resilience transfer comes from his ability to survive in a correctional rehabilitative program despite the challenges that it poses mentally, physically, and emotionally.

Huey also remarked on his survival while being imprisoned, although he was not presently incarcerated. The trials that arise while in prison are difficult to endure, yet Huey’s fund of knowledge in resilience helped him to successfully finish out his sentence and re-enter society outside of the prison walls. “Now, I’m humble. There’s certain stuff I won’t do cuz I already know it’s not worth it. I’m not gaining nothing from it.” Huey now
has a thriving business. His resilience contributed to the success and sustainability of his business. Huey’s gain is an aspirational achievement because he has sustainability in his business, which he accomplished after developing a fund of knowledge of resilience.

It’s important to note that for many of the participants, it isn’t the resilience alone that is the sole ingredient in developing a business or attaining a job. Opportunities to build businesses including all the necessary tools must be accessible in order to make use one’s resilience to overcome obstacles and successfully manage and sustain a trade. Bobby transferred his resilience by launching and maintaining a landscaping business. “I started 4 years ago. ... I started cutting grass. ... Yeah, after this then I’m going to go into buying land and properties.” Bobby was able to use his resilience developed from his street-gang experiences to persevere amidst barriers that came his way such as losing vision in his eye. However, the resilience was a necessary part of generating businesses, sustaining employment, and transitioning into a higher education environment.

Martin also remarked on his ability to use his resilience fund of knowledge in attaining work. He experienced the loss of his mother when he was 17. He also didn’t have legal status in the U.S., so he faced the barrier of gaining documentation as a teen without his family. Martin spoke about work and how he came into that opportunity.

I thought about getting a job. Then someone asked to see my resume. They asked if I had ever worked before. I was thinking in my head I worked on the block. The guy was like you have no work experience. He never gave me the job. Then two years later I saw him. He asked if I remembered him. I said yeah, now I’m the top guy in my job. I don’t want everyone saying cause he has dreads and tattoos that he can’t do the job. Everybody needs an
opportunity to do something. You gave that person an opportunity to take it, they will take it if they are motivated.

Martin remarked on persevering and attaining work despite doubt from others and challenges in acquiring employment. His poignant remark about everyone needing an opportunity is aligned with the impetus for this research study. He overcame many obstacles and that ability as a fund of knowledge helped him to transfer his resilience into a work opportunity. Finally, Desmond used his resilience to survive, and find work even when he was homeless. “Basically, I don’t have a home now, so I’m everywhere. But it’s not like I don’t take care of business. I cut out the negativity. I always try to find a side job if I gotta promote a club for artists or rappers.” Survival may not seem like an aspirational achievement. However, survival is a gain amidst challenges such as death, robbery, assault, and discrimination. The ability to keep pursuing goals even when you don’t know where you are going to sleep each night is a grand transfer of resilience.

**FOK 3: Money management transfer for aspirational achievement.**

Several of the participants acquired skills in money management. It is easy to see how this fund of knowledge in money management can be used in other areas outside of the context of street gangs to achieve aspirational goals in work or school. Many participants transferred their money management skills to budgeting for items they wanted. Bunchy shared how he used his money management to save for a big purchase. “Save your money cause you never know when you are going to need it. ... When I was 20, I got my car cause I worked so hard.” Bunchy was able to buy a car by using his money management fund of knowledge. Huey and Bobby also shared that money management helped them each to build their own business. Huey expressed “As far as the t-shirts, yes I
work with parts of the city.” Huey refers to the screen-printing business that he has maintained for the last five years. I have corresponded with Huey after the interviews and learned that he has continued to build his business. Bobby also shared that his money management skills have helped him attain aspirational goals.

Bobby: I saved every penny

Researcher: Is that how you started your own business?

Bobby: Yes.

Both Bobby and Huey have booming businesses now. Both have achieved an aspirational goal by using their money management fund of knowledge to develop and sustain a business that each had built. Again, it is not only money management that helped them to attain the business, but the combination of various funds of knowledge that they both used to strengthen their companies.

**FOK 3: Money management transfer for community value.**

The FOK in money management, as I’ve observed in this research, often occurred to benefit the community. Two participants shared good examples of how they utilized their money management fund of knowledge to help the greater community. Desmond helped his family members overseas by sponsoring them. Desmond needed productive money management skills in order to budget the money needed for travel documents.

Some of us in our gang, we still got family that’s fighting for their papers and stuff. We be having to go overseas to sign for them. That’s how I got my auntie in. Right, I had to sign for my auntie and my uncle to help them. So far we got them here and some of them got their own papers.
Desmond’s money management was used for the benefit of his greater community. His family members are the immigrants that he has sponsored so that they can come to the U.S. and work towards documentation and citizenship.

Booker shared an example of how he used his money management fund of knowledge to directly impact those he cared about in the community.

If we would see somebody who needed money, we would help them out. We would give a bum on the street $100. Just something to show our parents or friends that we could help out. There were some of our friends who would be around us. We would give our friends money just to buy shoes. ... The most I ever did was help get people computers or laptops. I would send my family money in Haiti. ... I went to the local park and gave them money. They have a flag football team.

Booker expressed offering money to homeless people as a way to show friends that he was helping the community. He also expressed purchasing gifts for friends and helping to financial support his family in Haiti. Finally, he shared offering money to the local park to support the creation of a football team. Booker himself loved football, so he was able to use his money management fund of knowledge towards benefitting the community with a contribution that he was passionate about.

**FOK 4: Networking transfer for aspirational achievement.**
Several research participants attained aspirational goals, including legal employment, through utilizing their networking fund of knowledge. Mohandas expressed how networking helped him find work and become a mentor for kids in the community. He was the victim of prejudice and was well attuned to recognizing and responding to bullying
when it occurred with the younger kids in his community. Therefore, it was a natural transition that he learned from his own experiences in networking to share his social and cultural capital with others in his community.

I was referred to this job through another program networking. I learned that you can be part of a crew and do positive. It’s a good thing to stick together, but you also gotta be positive when you doing that. ... I have a clear understanding where I’m able to use those things to I’m able to help young people that I come across that need my help.

Mohandas was hired at one job and used his skills to attain another work opportunity. He shared earlier how he learned networking skills from his street-gang experience. He was directly able to transfer this fund of knowledge into an economic and career opportunity for himself because he demonstrated his skills as a youth counselor.

Martin also used the networking fund of knowledge to attain work. He is still in this job currently. “When I got the job at [restaurant], it was like networking and me selling drugs. I needed to put a smile on my face.” Martin shared how he directly transferred his networking fund of knowledge to help him secure a job.

Huey shared earlier that he has used his networking to help him gain city contracts. Bobby shared that he recently increased his business by gaining 10 new contracts. “I closed a big business deal for my landscaping company. ... 10 commercial properties ... got to give thanks to the man above. .... Of course you gotta be there for those who been there for you since day one.” Bobby expressed that networking has helped his business grow to a sizeable profit. He also mentioned that it was important to be there for his friends, which refers to his loyalty of his gang. Desmond utilized networking to learn construction skills.
Yes, I learned contracting and tiling and putting up windows from these apartment complexes back in the hood. He told me if I wanted a job to come holler at him. ... I learned that from this papi. We call a papi a Spanish person. An older Spanish guy. I was helping him put in doors at first. He was teaching me how to put in drywall and tiles. ... Where I was staying at, there was an apartment complex that was under construction. ... He needed somebody to come work and help him out. So throughout the time that I was helping him out, I was learning and then I got deep into it, so we did the whole apartment, the balcony doors. We sealed cracks in walls from roaches and rats and stuff. I was learning tile and windows.

He learned how to perform general labor and skilled labor by using his networking fund of knowledge. A significant part of networking as a fund of knowledge is to understand how to use the social capital in one’s life for attaining opportunities. Like Desmond, the participants in this research were able to appropriate social capital to different degrees to attain work; specifically, an apprenticeship enabling him to develop useful skills that he has continued to use outside of his street gang.

**FOK 4: Networking transfer for community value.**

Many of the individuals came together to help out the community by giving their time, money, and support to the community. The help to the extended community is not something that is portrayed on the nightly news or in the movies depicting street-gang members. Yet, helping the community requires networking with others to offer needed resources to benefit the community. Bunchy expressed that the street gang would purchase items for the community during holidays.
They gave out turkeys and Christmas presents. They gave out toys for the kids. They was giving out money too. Each kid they was given $40 and then $100 to their mom. ... They would protect the neighborhood. If they see somebody breaking in the house, they would get that person.

Bunchy described how the street gang came together to organize events to give out food and presents at holidays. He also stated that the street gang would protect the community by intercepting home invasions. Both of these activities are of benefit to the greater community and require coordinated efforts to make it happen. Bobby also validated the street gang’s effort to donate gifts, school supplies, and concerts to the neighborhood.

We did toy drives, gave away school supplies for kids, free concerts for kids, and we spoke to a lot of kids. ... I feel like we protected some of the kids in the neighborhood, like the ones that looked up to us. ... I think we touched a lot lives. We put a lot of kids on point about a lot of things that we go through.

Bobby mentioned that the street gang would speak to the kids. He is referring to speaking to the youth of the community in a counseling/mentoring role. Many participants stated that the younger kids looked up to the street gangs for guidance and presence in their life. Huey reiterated both Bobby and Bunchy’s comments about supporting the community through organized events where gifts are dispersed.

We do it all the time, turkey drive, black live matters and those marches. ... If somebody’s car got broken into and we knew them, we would get it back. We would tell the person that the broke into the wrong car. If we knew you, you already got protected.
Huey mentioned participating in marches and events to generate awareness of discrimination. I will discuss some possible areas of future research in chapter five and highlight the issue of organizing as a gang for issues of social justice. It’s important to note that the street gang protected and supported its neighborhood by utilizing the networking fund of knowledge for community value. The loyalty and compassion for the neighborhood is evident through these actions conducted by the street gang that benefitted others in the extended street gang community.

Martin offered a reason for why the street gang would need to protect the community. “The police would take awhile to get there. We already helped the person that needed help. The gang protected the neighborhood.” The protection of the community requires coordinated effort of networking with others and working as a team. The literature (Klein, 1995; Venkatesh, 2008) also supports this contention that the gang embodied the role of the police to protect their loved ones within the extended community of the street gang because the police were not a reliable resource to the community. Finally Mohandas remarked on being able to use his networking skills to work as a team with others in the community when he was the victim of prejudice and stereotyping.

We got picked on a lot. People would pick fights with us. People would pick on the way our culture dressed. Some of us began to fight back in different ways whether it was physical or with words. We used to whip them too. That was a teamwork aspect of being in a gang.

Somebody try you, you gotta do something.

Mohandas mentioned the idea of fighting as a group when facing teasing or bullying. His comments on the manner of responding to the discrimination may strike some as
violent or extreme. The fund of knowledge is the awareness that he developed through his experiences as a target of discrimination based on his identity as a Haitian and the ability to engage with peers to combat bias based on stereotypes. He has an awareness of stereotypes, bias, and discrimination towards Haitians as I mentioned earlier. There is a day when their peers in the community discriminate against individuals on “Haitians versus Americans” day. Mohandas’s experience with prejudice mentioned here shows that he continued to fight for his community outside of the context of the street gang as he was targeted because of his Haitian ethnicity. Networking with his peers to respond to bullying and prejudice was useful to benefit the greater community.

**FOK 5: Wisdom/Critical thinking transfer for aspirational achievement.**

Several members acquired wisdom and critical thinking from their experiences in the street gang that they were able to transfer to other areas of life. The transfer of the wisdom/critical thinking fund of knowledge occurred most often in work and higher education. Booker shared an example of using his wisdom fund of knowledge to help him gain admission and attend college. “I applied to college and I got accepted. I was there for a year and half.” Previously we learned that Booker had studied law enforcement in college. He applied his wisdom gained from the streets directly to his major area of study. Huey used his wisdom to help him with self-preservation.

There was this guy who came with a business plan to my brothers. I felt like it was stupid. He was telling me that he need $30,000 to run this business. I knew he wasn’t gonna do it. I could tell he was a crook. If somebody try to come, they gonna try to get as much as they can out of me. People that age
with that type of money. They was just gonna get over on me and take advantage.

Huey protected himself and his boys in the street gang from being swindled out of their savings. He has street smarts that provided insight about a false business deal he was being offered.

**FOK 5: Wisdom/Critical thinking for community value.**
Previously Desmond and Stokely also recalled using wisdom of the streets to assist them in their career ventures; both used their street-gang knowledge to compose and perform lyrics. Rapping was an example of a way that their wisdom was acknowledged and how a transfer of their wisdom into their music careers occurred. Desmond also mentioned that he gained ideas from his life experiences on the streets. “I got some of my ideas from the streets for the lyrics.” Desmond is using his wisdom to work towards financial gain as he has been paid for performing his music in front of others. Stokely shares “I’ve talked to a lot of people and I let them know what happened to me. I feel like my story touches people. I want everybody to know my story and what happened and what made me this way.”

Stokely expressed that he has learned from his experiences and wants to share his story with others through his music. This fund of knowledge benefits the community and especially with others who look up to the elders of the community. Vigil (2003) remarks on this discourse of tenured individuals involved in street gangs guiding their younger members. Stokely isn’t an elder, but many kids in the Haitian community are taught to respect and listen to the elders because of their acquired wisdom throughout their life.
Baldwin shared his experience of transferring his wisdom by helping a youth from the community. Baldwin shared an example of helping his nephew once when he was bullied.

If a bully sees a big gun tatted [possessing tattoos] up telling him not to mess with his little brother, the bullying would most likely cease effectively. I did it with my nephew. He pointed out who was bothering him and I just told him to leave my nephew alone.

Baldwin used critical thinking specifically to help his nephew when he was bullied. Baldwin didn't mention using physical tactics to scare the tormenter. Rather, Baldwin's presence as an elder in the community helped to inspire the bully to leave his nephew alone.

Bobby also shared that he transferred his wisdom from the streets in helping younger kids. “From going to the conferences. Speaking in front of crowds. I like speaking. I like being involved.” Bobby mentioned that he shared his wisdom from the streets when at conferences. He was working in the social enterprise aspect of a non-profit when he was also asked to add public speaking on to his job duties because of his experiences in the streets. This public speaking was beneficial for many youth who looked up to Bobby and listened to his wisdom.

Mohandas also spoke for kids at his job in his role as a youth counselor.

Be positive. Work with youth. I'm a youth counselor over here...I learned how to use it and apply it. I help kids to apply it in their life. I can relate to them and be transparent with them. I just help them as much as I can. ... Being an educator and being a mentor define who I am. ... Kids look up to me. Some
kids consider me their mentor. ... I help kids a lot of kids with their schoolwork. I’m involved in the school system. I help kids with school.

Just as many of the participants mentioned and as the literature demonstrates (Vigil, 2003), younger children admire and respect the words of individuals a little older than them as well as elders in the community. Mohandas shows again here that he was able to transfer his wisdom to the community because the kids admired and respected him for who he is today and his more violent days when he was heavily involved in street-gang activities typically portrayed on the news.

Huey reflected on sharing his wisdom with younger kids just as Mohandas had done. It was also beneficial for himself in his career as it was done in the context of his job. Moreover, it was a great benefit for the many children who admired Huey and respected his wisdom.

With people like me that people know, when they find out the type of life that I lived, they listen to me. ... One of the kids was in the gang called [name of gang] and he knew where I was from you know [name of his gang]. He was all like ready to fight. After he realized which [name of gang] dude I was and was from [area in Miami] and when he seen my cars and heard about me through the streets, he got comfortable. Just you talking, I got to know you and I could be your friend. Just a ten-minute convo turned into him asking for my number. ... The high school would call me to be a peacemaker. ... With people like us being older, we give the younger cats something to live up to and listen. When people hear that you got shot up and you survived, they respect you. ... When stuff going on in the neighborhood, they would call me on my
cell phone and say, ‘Could you come in and talk to the kids? Try to calm them down. They bringing guns to school’. ... One of the kids call me and asked me to come to the school because he said they were trying to lock him up. They was trying to lock him up cause they said they found a gun, but they didn’t have a gun. ... I kept going back to the school talking and keeping them in school and they didn’t even suspend the kids.

Huey’s street-gang reputation provided the stimulus for him to mentor the youth in the community. Huey used his wisdom fund of knowledge to benefit the community through sharing his experiences. He also enhanced his public speaking skills through the experience of sharing with younger kids through his job and through his experiences at his old high school. He used his street wisdom to help the youth in the community and the students understand their rights and acted as the role of a mediator. This wisdom/critical thinking is a skill that enhanced his work opportunities, but also helped the youth of the community.

Desmond also used his wisdom for the benefit of the community by sharing his street-gang knowledge and motivating members of the community. Recall that Desmond has a talent in composing lyrics and was able to inspire others through is lyrical strength.

I encouraged them to let them know that this ain’t the life for them. School is where it’s at. You want to be a real gangster, stay in school. ... That’s a real G right there if you stay in school and handle your business. That’s the top priority. ... A lot of young people, like my little cousins, my little kids. Even people that was older than me that was like ready to quit. I gave them strength.
Bobby, Mohandas, Huey, and Desmond were all able to dispense their wisdom of how to respond in various situations that occur in the streets to the youth of the extended street-gang community. Desmond also mentioned that he would inspire older individuals who might have given up hope in life. Contrary to what is shared in the media, many research participants wanted to help the youth in their community to avoid the dangerous parts of street-gang life.

**FOK 6: Business savvy transfer for aspirational achievement.**

A couple of the participants shared examples of how they transferred their business savvy fund of knowledge for aspirational achievement. Both Desmond and Huey developed exceptional business savvy skills through street life entrepreneurial endeavors. Each of these two individuals used these skills in their work experiences outside of the street gang.

That’s like with [his place of employment] when I was doing the t-shirts. I had to analyze everybody their strong suits and their weak points. I had to micromanage everybody’s attitude. That’s just like when I was on the block. There’s ways you can talk to this person, but you can’t talk to the other person that way. I knew how to get anybody to move. I knew who to talk to when it was time to move on something. ... When I was 19, we had like 350,000. With club promoters, I used to put up money for them to rent out the club and they fill up the club and I would get half of the profit. I did that a lot with all the clubs. And then my regular homeboys when they turned into club promoters, they already knew me so they would invite me out. And when we go out, we used to pop a lot of bottles. That’s when you get popular on the back note besides doing illegal stuff. ... Those years was calm for us in
the gang. When we got hired and everybody was working 9-5, everybody was calm. Nobody was going to jail. ... In any position you get in, you can use your street smarts, common sense.

Huey shared that he learned how to use his skills in managing individuals in the street gang at his place of employment when he was the shop manager. He shared a direct example of learning these business savvy skills on the street and then utilizing them at his workplace. This is an aspirational achievement because it helped improve his role at the business where he worked and he attained recognition for his role through his leadership. He also shared an example of how he invested his money in a legal venture in order to increase his financial capital. Although this money was from his street sales, he was able to find an opportunity to incorporate himself into a legal venture, which is outside of the street-gang context. Desmond also shared that he used his business savvy fund of knowledge to remain employed.

Once I get everything on a thinking sheet, I just line it up to where it needs to be. Me turning the other cheek, if there’s some trouble here, I could walk away from it if it’s that easy. ... At a job place and I get into it with an employee and I learn how to say sorry and shake hands and just keep doing what I do even if it wasn’t my fault. I learned to deal with people that’s around me. ... I don’t have to get pushed over the edge. I don’t let it get to me, especially when it’s simple and I feel like a child could get over it.

Desmond learned conflict management skills through the streets and transferred this directly into his job in order to retain employment when he encountered problems with co-workers, which is an application of business savvy because he applied professional
practices for his own job longevity. Finally Baldwin expressed that he was able to use his business savvy skills when engaging in business ventures.

Understanding if understanding is a skill. I’m a lot more able to explain and describe something a lot better than in the past. Now, I know how to go from talking and being a business person to being in the streets.

In Baldwin’s example, he learned to act appropriately in the corporate world. Recall that he was able to vacillate between being in a street gang and being a college student. Here he uses this skill of code-switching in order to understand and apply the appropriate behaviors in order to succeed in business deals, which is a subset of the business savvy fund of knowledge. Baldwin has used his business savvy to speak with an expert from the boot camp so that he could create business plans once leaving the program.

Finally Bobby was able to increase his clientele in his landscaping business. “I got 10 contracts for my landscaping business. That’s 10 contracts at $30,000 each.” Bobby’s ability to increase his revenue and gain contracts was developed from his business savvy skills learned within the street gang.

**Summary of the Findings**

There are three major findings in the research. Each major finding correlated to a different aspect of the research questions. There is only one overarching research question with three areas of sub-questions, providing a better focus to the overarching question. The first finding, the sense of belonging, was felt through protection, emotional support, and a sense of family. Acquiring a sense of belonging in the street gang shaped the identity of the research participants. It is the sense of belonging in an alternative environment that was needed to transfer the funds of knowledge acquired. The second finding is the six funds of
knowledge were identified as major themes in this study. The funds of knowledge are hyperawareness, resilience, money management, networking, wisdom/critical thinking, and business savvy skills. The third finding is the funds of knowledge identified in this research that were transferred for aspirational achievement, community value, or both. In chapter 5, I will highlight areas where funds of knowledge could be transferred if the opportunities were made available. It is the opportunities that policy makers, educators, community professionals, employers, investors, and other stakeholders offer that can change the course of life for individuals in gangs as well as the greater society.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

My intention with this research study, to clarify any possible assumptions, is to generate a public awareness that there are positive outcomes such as acquiring funds of knowledge within street gangs, which are useful and transferable outside of street gang life. Additionally, it is my hope that policy makers, educators, community based professionals, employers, and all stakeholders will have an additional perspective of the strengths of gang members and, with this newfound perception, will consider offering opportunities that are not currently widely available to street gang members. In particular, I hope to shed light on opportunities that stakeholders could provide that will shift the life path of individuals in street gangs while simultaneously generating positive benefits for the greater society. These are the outcomes that I wish to inspire through this research.

This final chapter identifies the potential implications of this research for practice and policy. I make recommendations to the stakeholders that may have an opportunity to change the negative perceptions and stereotypes directed towards individuals participating in street gangs. It is a crucial step, as reducing stereotypes and bias can lead to a reduction in discrimination towards individuals in street gangs. The newly gained perception of strengths of street gangs can create positive change in the greater society by offering accessible opportunities to these individuals involved in street gangs. I describe the implications for this research including the contributions of this study to the literature on street gangs, funds of knowledge, and sense of belonging. I also identify the limitations of this study, which are helpful to generate ideas for replicating and improving this study in the future. Ideas for future researchers seeking to endeavor a similar path in investigating the funds of knowledge in an alternate context are suggested. I noted the benefits for the community, including how I used my skill set to advance opportunities for the participants.
and others in the extended street-gang community. Finally, I conclude this dissertation by crystalizing the key benefits of my findings to the extended community of individuals involved in street gangs and the greater society for inclusivity and movement towards a harmonious society.

**Implications for Practice and Policy**

Earlier in the dissertation, I discussed the identity formation (Burr, 1995; Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014; Vygotsky, 1978) in the conceptual framework. The sense of belonging influences one’s identity such that if an individual feels that she/he belongs in a place, that may have an impact on who they feel that they are in this newly acquired context. A street-gang member might find a sense of belonging in a corporate or professional workplace and subsequently adopt the culture of this new workplace and this culture, in turn, becomes part of their identity. To illustrate, I highlighted an example in my findings of a street gang member who became a youth counselor. In order to make that transition to youth counselor, the street gang member was able share wisdom from his experiences with the youth in the community to offer a realistic picture of street gang life. Below I discuss the findings and the implications for employers, investors, and policy makers.

**Employers.**

Employers offering opportunities to street gang members who have skills relevant to their workplace might find that they have helped this individual assimilate into a workplace that is perhaps safer than street-gang life. Though one may question, why an employer would offer an opportunity to an individual who has a criminal background and identifies as a street gang member. In my former work, I attempted to motivate employers to hire street-gang members and ex-offenders by suggesting that everyone deserves a
second chance. At times, particularly when I was speaking to an employer that may have been formerly fortunate to have been given a second chance, I was able to persuade the employer to offer an interview to the street gang members participating in the community-based organization where I worked because they had participated in a job skills training program. However, many times the employer policies prohibited hiring individuals with criminal backgrounds. Additionally, employers raised concerns about potential danger to the business and their existing employees. Many times candidates were not hired because of the policies prohibiting employment to individuals with criminal backgrounds, as well as the general stereotypes regarding street gang members. Yet, it is clear in my findings chapter, that street gang members have many strengths that are applicable to a place of employment. These funds of knowledge are additive skills that the street gang member could bring to their place of employment.

**Investors.**

Another group of individuals within the dominant society that may have an impact on individuals in street gangs, if considering the findings of this research, are business investors. Many of the participants, such as Huey, Bobby, and Baldwin, expressed an interest in creating a business or expanding their business. The question again is why would an investor want to support a street gang member with a criminal background. Yet, as my research has confirmed and challenged the social stereotypes, there were numerous funds of knowledge reported in chapter four that were successfully transferred for individuals in business endeavors. What would be helpful for these individuals in street gangs is to receive training, which would teach how to obtain permits, licenses, and other skills needed for conducting a successful business through a lawfully accepted endeavor.
Many research participants demonstrated that they already increased their economic capital and had created successful businesses, yet the barriers of policy, rules, and regulations still exist for these individuals holding criminal backgrounds. An idea that needs to be explored in future research is investigating if loans and support provided to individuals with criminal backgrounds would yield a productive product for both the individuals and the investors.

**Policy makers.**

Finally, policy revisions and amendments are necessary in order to lift barriers, which prevent many street gang members from obtaining employment. Many private companies have bans on employees who have had criminal convictions within the last seven years. At times, simply having been arrested bars one from obtaining a job interview. If employer policies were modified to offer conditional employment to individuals with criminal backgrounds, many individuals identifying as street gang members would have opportunities to work within an alternative context outside of street-gang businesses.

Policy makers also impact on the education opportunities that each youth receives, and in the case of street-gang youth, education policy becomes another venue for discrimination. Recall the example of Huey who had received a full scholarship to a private and prestigious university. Huey was ready to leave Miami and attend this university with his full scholarship. However, Huey was unable to attend the university because of the time that he had spent in prison. His criminal background barred him from using the scholarship. It is not a helpful practice to deny intelligent individuals academic opportunities because of a criminal background. In Huey’s case, it wasn’t a public university, but a private one that removed an offer of a scholarship because of his prison
time, yet policies prohibiting access to opportunities in higher education need consideration and revision. Many other individuals are barred from receiving financial aid due to drug convictions. Prison education is one area where these funds of knowledge could be investigated and incorporated into a job skills training or career services program. The school to prison pipeline highlights the disproportionate racial and ethnic ratio of individuals arrested and saddled with convictions. Several participants in this research shared their experiences of discrimination exhibited by non-Haitian peers and law enforcement officials who engaged in racial, ethnic, and SES bias. Many participants were accused of criminal activity based on race, ethnicity, and gathering together as a group in their neighborhood. Policies at educational institutions, which allow students to attend without restrictions based on a criminal background, offer opportunities to individuals like Huey, Martin, Baldwin, and Bobby to make a life change and utilize funds of knowledge in an academic setting.

**Implications for Research and Literature**

At the core, this study contributed to the literature because I looked at an unconventional application of the funds of knowledge. I was able to conduct these interviews and gain a strengths-based assessment in part because of the approach that I took to the topic. Perhaps more important to gaining a more robust understanding of street gangs was the appreciative inquiry approach employed in the interview process. The AI format is an important piece in conducting successful interviews when a researcher is seeking out a strengths-based aspect of a community that is often narrowly viewed as only possessing deficits. The findings of this research centered on two core research areas: the
sense of belonging and the funds of knowledge. An in-depth understanding of the sense of belonging was explored within the context of the street gang.

**Appreciative inquiry format.**

I chose to use an appreciative inquiry format when conducting the interviews, which generated a positive environment for recalling the experiences within the street gangs. As a researcher who is not part of the community that I studied, the individuals being interviewed may have perceived that I would have negative perceptions and stereotypes of their involvement in street gangs. My prior experience working with the community helped me to gain entry because individuals within the community vouched for me and laid the foundation for trust. I believe participants were able to trust me because of the reputation I had cultivated with the community. Venkatesh (2008) demonstrated that trust is gained through transparency in one's objective and spending time learning about the street gang lifestyle from a closer view. I had established my sincerity for creating an awareness of the strengths with the participants at the onset of the interviews. As it is a conversation between the participant and myself, I attempted to create the best environment for building authenticity with the participants. However, participants may have decided not to share some pieces of information with me because trusting someone falls on a continuum. My objective was transparent and positive so the AI format helped to participants accept my research as an additive to the current narrative about street gangs. It also served to show the participants who didn’t know me that I might be helpful to the community.
Sense of belonging in the literature. 
The sense of belonging has been explored throughout the literature in various contexts including research on street gangs (Ruble & Turner, 2000; Venkatesh, 2008; & Vigil, 1998, 2002, 2003). This research contributes to the literature on the sense of belonging because it contextualized the experiences of the individuals and described how this sense of belonging was obtained for individuals participating in a street gang.

Ruble & Turner (2000) suggested that a sense of belonging influenced the identity of individuals within gangs. The current research study contributes to this literature because it highlighted three specific ways that the 14 research participants felt a sense of belonging within the context of a street-gang: protection, emotional support, and family. Venkatesh (2008) described his experiences conducting an ethnographic study of street gangs in Chicago’s south side during the 1990s where he identified the family role that the street gang played for its’ participants. My research study also supported the finding that the street gang was a family and sometimes the only family to the individuals involved in street gangs. Vigil (2002) highlighted the marginalization of the individuals involved in street gangs and identified the “street identity” as part of the multiple factors leading youth to participate in street gangs. Individuals in this research shared many challenges based on labels and established a sense of belonging within the street-gang culture based on aspects of their identity.

Although I found many areas where these individuals have found ways to transfer their funds of knowledge, I expect that there are many more avenues of transferability if stakeholders, educators, and policy makers offered opportunities to these individuals. Educators and community professionals might consider how these individuals are treated within the classroom and community programs. Perhaps offering opportunities to share
their funds of knowledge with their peers through relevant student learning might strengthen the classroom engagement for all students. Most of the participants in this research were able to graduate high school. However, nearly all of them had dropped out at some point. Educators can nurture the skills of these students by exposing them to opportunities where their talents might be utilized. Policy makers might consider the laws that bar employment opportunities for those with criminal backgrounds as this is one of the biggest challenges for street gang members trying to find legal employment once leaving behind illegal work. Finally, employers and business investors might consider investing in the business ideas of these individuals with the knowledge that they have built and successfully sustained businesses in the underground world. Some participants revealed what they hoped to accomplish in the future pertaining to employment and opportunities outside of street-gang life. These suggestions in this chapter are drawn from the words of the participants such as Martin, who expressed a desire to gain more opportunities. “Back then, my goal was to stay alive... Now I want to open a food truck... We used to see them and be like oh wow you got a degree because somebody believing in them and somebody invested their time.” The most poignant part of his comment is that he wanted someone to believe in him. Martin, like many of the participants sought opportunities, but lacked awareness and social capital that might help him to find upward mobility in his career.

Yosso (2005) suggests that there are various forms of capital that facilitate opportunities. In this research, the opportunities to access capital and use the funds of knowledge may help individuals in street gangs shape their life paths in beneficial ways for themselves and the extended community. Accessing capital can influence the lives of the
street-gang individuals in future endeavors as they develop a sense of belonging and uncover a new identity. For example, consider Huey who used his business savvy fund of knowledge, which he acquired in part through leading the street gang. He mentioned managing the street gang in the same way that he managed his team at work. After seeing how this fund of knowledge was relevant in legal employment, he developed an awareness of himself in this new role. He also observed that networking was important to accomplishing goals. Using both the business savvy and networking, he could seek to uncover additional opportunities where he will have greater access to economic capital. In order for the capital to be available, the gatekeepers have to offer a key to unlock the door to opportunities of greater significance.

**Funds of knowledge in the literature.**

The current study offers a new perspective on the utilization of funds of knowledge by identifying a vulnerable population no previously connected to the funds of knowledge literature. For example, the seminal work on funds of knowledge only center on students in K-12 schooling (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992): work on the role that the funds of knowledge have on identity has been published (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014). Focusing on formal education is an area where the fund of knowledge theory has been applied, but non-formal sectors are areas that need investigation. Therefore, this research provides examples of how the funds of knowledge were transferred to help individuals involved in street gangs access another environment and an alternate part of their identity.

Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez (1992) found that skills that immigrant youth had learned from home were of value in helping the students achieve success in the classroom because the value of these funds of knowledge was brought to light. As a marginalized and
stereotyped group, individuals in street gangs similarly had skills that they had acquired in the street gang, which were used in areas outside of street gang life. This new finding of the funds of knowledge that were transferred provides a reason to value these skills in alternate areas and can reduce harmful stereotypes of individuals in street gangs, which fuel discriminative attitudes and practices. Alternatively, individuals in street gangs may find open doors to education, employment, and ultimately safer lives by accessing opportunities with their funds of knowledge.

Esteban-Guitart & Moll (2014) discovered that the funds of knowledge also shape the funds of identity. Specifically, when individuals access their funds of knowledge, this in turn influences their identity. In my research, I observed that when the research participants felt a sense of belonging, it influenced a new part of their identity and it was the funds of knowledge that served as a toolbox in which to draw when embarking into a new environment. The current research study supports the idea that the funds of knowledge, when accessed, can influence identity. In my dissertation, I looked at how the funds of knowledge were obtained through a non-formal education. By non-formal education, I am referring to education outside of the borders of compulsory schooling through primary and secondary education. Additionally, the population I observed may not traditionally be considered as possessing any useful skills outside of street gang life.

**Limitations of the Research**

Limitations in qualitative research typically include researcher bias and generalizability to a larger population (Creswell, 2014). Earlier in the introduction section “Locating the Researcher in the Research”, I also described my researcher bias because I did have an awareness of the marginalization of these individuals. In this study, researcher
bias informed the interview questions with the participants. I had a goal of discovering the answers to my research questions and my interview protocol reflected this objective. As I am aware of experiences of marginalization with the sample population, my interview protocol contained a couple questions asking about the challenges of the participants. The questions about challenges were used to understand how the sense of belonging may have been felt within the street gang. It may be that some of the participants do not identify experiences of marginalization or belongingness leading them to be involved in a street gang. I maintained a curious process of inquiry by using member-checking within the interviews in order to understand the perspectives of the participants. I counteracted the limitation of researcher bias by not specifically including marginalization as a part of my research question.

The researcher bias also played a role in the methodology because there was not another researcher to review my coding of the data and provide triangulation of the data. I used an AI approach and an interview protocol to seek to uncover the answers to the research questions. The participants did share their experiences of marginalization during the interviews. Additionally, the AI paradigm created a comfortable atmosphere for the participants as they recalled all their experiences within the street gang. An independent coder might have found discovered other findings through the data. The sample selection was obtained through my contacts within the community. It was conducted this way because I had an opportunity to access this population in Miami and this might not have been readily available in places where a researcher has no established relationship with the community. My previous connection with some of the participants was through my
relationship as a community worker. I did not formerly investigate funds of knowledge of the individuals through previous encounters.

The generalizability to a larger population of street gangs is limited by the experiences that are specific to the culture of Haitian gangs in Miami and the sample size of 14. The sample selection does limit the ability to replicate the data for other researchers who don’t have access to a street-gang community. Only one female participated in this study, which narrows the findings to a male-dominated voice. In this study, the fund of knowledge is limited to the geographic space in south Florida and the specific out-group of Haitian street-gang members as a discourse. Finally, the short time period of the study only offers a snapshot of the group studied and their answers are reflective of how they recall their experiences at the times that they are interviewed.

Research Contributions to the Community

In this research, I obtained data from the participants, but I also wanted to be accountable to the needs of the participants in order to appreciate their willingness to share their experiences with me. I offered help with resumes, cover letters, or whatever other resources that I could connect the individuals to within the community. I completed resumes for individuals, cover letters, and connection to community resources for the participants. In addition, I purchased coffee or lunch for individuals offering their time especially as many of the interviews went over one hour.

I intend to share the results of this research with the participants whose information I obtained. I also share aim to share the research with the community leaders, educators, and non-profit directors who work with this population so that they may
consider ways to incorporate some of the suggestions or increase their own awareness of the funds of knowledge of individuals involved in street gangs.

My research study could have long-term impact on the street-gang community as stereotypes are diminished and subsequently opportunities arise for these individuals in ways that create better life paths in employment, education, and sustainable lives. For example, reversing the practice of barring individuals from receiving financial aid because of a drug conviction is an example of a policy change that could open doors to higher education for many individuals involved in street gangs and ultimately lead to changes in longevity of life and lifestyle. The skills that the individuals have learned within street gangs are funds of knowledge that can serve these individuals in endeavors outside of street life by providing fulfilling experiences and improved life quality.

**Future Research**

Future research might use the funds of knowledge discovered inductively through this research as a baseline to find out if the themes are consistent among different populations geographically within the United States and outside of the United States. Also, future research might seek to include more women in the studies and get the perspective of those who might have been pivotal people in the lives of the participants as they joined gangs. Finally, I did observe many participants sharing experiences of discrimination based on race, ethnicity, and cultural attributes relating to identifying as Haitian or as a street-gang member. I did not find many examples of the street gang working together to combat any discrimination. Future research might look for ways that the street gangs were able to unite for issues of social justice as a group similar to the ways that the Black Panthers generated awareness for human rights during the Black Power movement. I hope to
continue to uncover the funds of knowledge across many cities and with racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse individuals involved in street gangs.

Conclusion

Strengths-based models for studying individuals participating in street gangs are lacking in the literature as I have demonstrated. This study highlighted strengths found within the context of gangs that were not previously recognized or celebrated. I suggest commending skills learned within street gangs because these funds of knowledge were transferred to areas outside of gangs. It is the stories of these fourteen individuals that provided the data and answers to my research questions. These individuals have lived with stereotypes, bias, and discrimination suggesting that they are less then human or unworthy of inclusivity in society. I embarked on this research because I was passionate about sharing an alternate picture of street gangs, which highlighted the strengths, talents, and abilities that I knew existed and thrived in their world. Yet, many in the dominant society do not perceive these strengths, known as the funds or knowledge. It is my hope that I have generated an understanding of these funds of knowledge such that employers, educators, stakeholders, and gatekeepers in all walks of life will pause and reconsider their own bias, which may have hindered them from offering opportunities to individuals who are part of street gangs. It is not the “bleeding heart” perspective that I seek in those that have the ability to offer opportunities, but a new awareness of the strengths that these individuals have obtained through their experiences. It is my hope that my audience will recognize and offer opportunities for these individuals rather than working to dismantle and dismember the street gangs, which have been a source of strength, family, and funds of knowledge for the individuals involved in street gangs.
My research, however, does not pretend to be ignorant of the idea that there is some inherent violence and criminal activity within street gang life. It is this danger and crime that repel much of the population when conjuring an image of a street gang member and this image is fueled by stories on the news. The dangers of street-gang life make it an undesirable option for many individuals seeking to escape disenfranchised situations, which are often characterized by poverty, discrimination, and danger. Yet, street gangs are an option because they are seen as a viable solution to the structural inequalities already present in daily life for many youth living in vulnerable situations.

Generating an awareness of options outside of street gangs that are viable paths for these individuals to embark on provides a choice in how they might find an alternative path. In order to offer individuals involved in street gangs new ways to harness the strengths inherent within the unity, loyalty, and family, it is imperative that there are opportunities available to use their funds of knowledge and shape new realities of their identity in another environment. Street gangs can band together and work against discrimination, or continue to be a resource to their community through the practices of protecting and providing for the community that they are engaged in currently.

The overarching finding within this research is the awareness generated of the skills possessed by individuals participating in street gangs and how these were useful in alternative contexts. Overall, I believe that offering opportunities which help these individuals strengthen and utilize their talents in alternate environments will improve the society overall because these individuals can use their skills in productive environments where they are supported emotionally, financially, and through resources needed to maximize their talents. Currently, the talents of these intelligent individuals are lost to
early death and incarceration. I suggest that it might be more productive to harness and employ that talent in the various fields where unimaginable advancements in medicine, engineering, technology, or education may blossom. Street gangs provide numerous benefits for the individuals participating in them as well as the greater society, yet both the street gang as a group and the individual participating in these social networks are demonized. As a researcher, I am seeking to shed light on these strengths that the individuals acquired in their experiences. Many times, it is the external program that comes in to develop the marginalized or “at-risk” community with solutions that have been put forth from an outsider perspective. As a privileged individual through my participation in higher education, I seek to utilize my position to offer a perspective of the strengths of street gangs because I had an opportunity to see the talents of these individuals. I utilized the endeavor of my dissertation study to understand these talents in an in-depth manner and to provoke a new awareness of the humanity of street gangs.
References:


Gordon, J. (2002). From gangs to the academy: Scholars emerge by reaching back through the critical ethnography. *Social Justice, 29(4)*.


Miami-Dade Police Department. retrieved from 12/3/16:


Appendices

Appendix A

Informed Consent Form for Transferable Funds of Knowledge Study

You are being asked to participate in a research project conducted by Christine Keaney, joint doctoral student in the School of Educational Studies at Claremont Graduate University (CGU) and San Diego State University (SDSU). Faculty advisors for this project are Gerald Monk, PhD, co-chair SDSU; Thomas Luschei, PhD, co-chair CGU; Joey Nuñez-Estrada Jr., PhD, member SDSU; Will Perez, PhD, member CGU.

Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to discover if the skills, talents, and abilities learned by youth affiliated with street gangs are useful in alternate environments. Examples of alternate environments include work and academic settings where an individual pursues career and educational goals.

Participation:

I will ask you to share some of your experiences through a conversational interview. I will ask some predetermined questions to you during our time together. There will also be an opportunity for you to share additional information about your experiences through the evolution of our interview sessions. It is my hope to offer you a platform to share your voice as a person affiliated with street gangs in Miami including the barriers experienced as well as the skills that you have developed within the street-gang culture. The interviews will be audio-recorded (not visually-recorded). Each session will take about 45-90 minutes of your time.

Risks & Benefits:

The risks you run by taking part in this study are minimal. I do not anticipate any foreseeable harm or risks to the participants in the study. The researcher will not ask you to disclose any involvement in criminal activities; rather the nature of the study is on the positive skills acquired while affiliated with a street-gang culture. You may decline to answer any questions.

I do not expect the study to benefit you personally except by generating awareness of new ways to attain career and educational goals. You may also find it rewarding to share your perspective and experiences with the research community. This study will benefit the research community by offering new insights about individuals involved in street-gang culture. Specifically, research focusing on the strengths of street gangs is an area that has not yet been explored within academic research. Understanding the skills and strengths of
street gangs might offer a new perception of these individuals’ and reduce the negative stereotypes of street gangs.

**Participation:**

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may stop or withdraw from the study at any time or refuse to answer any question at any time without any repercussion. Your decision not to participate in any part of the study will not impact your future or current relationship with SDSU, CGU, or myself.

**Confidentiality:**

Your individual privacy is maintained in all publications resulting from this study. I may share the data that is collected with other researchers and my advisors. However, I have not included any identifying information, so your identity cannot be revealed. In order to protect the confidentiality of your responses, I will assign a code name to notes and audio recordings from our interview sessions. During the research process, the notes and audio recordings will be stored in a locked and secure location to maintain security. Your name is not connected with your responses. Your confidentiality is assured in this study.

**Questions:**

If you have any questions about the study, please direct them to me. The best way to reach me is through email at Keaney_C@yahoo.com. I can also be reached by telephone at 305 281-3293.
Statement of Consent: Option A

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understand the information provided above, have had an opportunity to ask questions, and agree to participate in this research. You indicate that you agree to have the interviews audio-recorded.

______________________________________________
Participant’s Name

______________________________________________
Participant’s Signature

_______________________
Date

Christine Keaney

Researcher’s Name

______________________________________________
Researcher’s Signature

_______________________
Date

Or:
Statement of Consent: Option B

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understand the information provided above, have had an opportunity to ask questions, and agree to participate in this research. You indicate that you do not agree to have the interviews audio-recorded, and therefore only notes will be taken by the researcher during the interview.

______________________________________________
Participant’s Name

______________________________________________
Participant’s Signature

Christine Keaney

_______________________
Date

Researcher’s Name

_______________________
Date

Researcher’s Signature
Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Part I: Demographic Information

Participant Information:

1. Code name
2. Ethnicity
3. Race
4. Sex
5. Date of birth
6. Birth location
7. Birth location of parents/guardians
8. Gang affiliation

Part II: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

*Street-gang: label from the dominant society that describes a group of individuals connected through a common bond; Typically groups are associated with activities that are criminal or violent in nature

*Social Network: Defined as a gang or social group that is used for communication and support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A. Sense of Belonging-Identity</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Tell me about yourself.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Tell me how you got involved in your social network.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What is your affiliation with your social network?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Describe a typical day for you within your social network?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. What are some challenges that you face daily?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Are any of these challenges connected to any part of your identity?</td>
<td>Passmore, Lewis, &amp; Cantore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. What drew you to become a part of this social network?</td>
<td>Gergen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. What defines your identity?</td>
<td>Allport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. How do you think the dominant society perceives you?</td>
<td>Allport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. How would you like the dominant society to view you as an</td>
<td>Allport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Source</td>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. How would you like the dominant society to view gangs?</td>
<td>Allport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. What do you like about participating in your social network?</td>
<td>Passmore, Lewis, &amp; Cantore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Have you faced any challenges by being involved or affiliated in this social network or your group of associates?</td>
<td>Allport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. What have you most enjoyed about being a member of this group?</td>
<td>Passmore, Lewis, &amp; Cantore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. What have you learned about yourself from being in this group of friends and peers?</td>
<td>Busche</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. What have you most enjoyed about being a member of this peer group?</td>
<td>Busche</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. What words would you use to describe your experiences in this social network?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### B. Funds of Knowledge: Aspirational Goals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What are some personal goals that you strive for now?</td>
<td>Passmore, Lewis, &amp; Cantore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What were some of the hopes and dreams that you had as a child?</td>
<td>Cooperrider &amp; Whitney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Have you learned anything from participation as a member of this group that will help you in your future goals?</td>
<td>Passmore, Lewis, &amp; Cantore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. If you could be anything you wanted to be, what would that be?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. What would you like to attain in life?</td>
<td>Passmore, Lewis, &amp; Cantore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. How would you envision your ideal life path?</td>
<td>Busche</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. What changes in your life would improve your life quality?</td>
<td>Cooperrider &amp; Whitney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. What are some of the skills you think you need to get where you want to go?</td>
<td>Passmore, Lewis, &amp; Cantore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Are there skills that you learned from your social network?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Is there a career goal that you have? Describe it for me.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Is there a higher education goal that you have? Describe it for me.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### C. Funds of Knowledge: Community Engagement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What skills have you acquired to accomplish your goals?</td>
<td>Passmore, Lewis, &amp; Cantore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What are some things that your social network could do to improve life for the community?</td>
<td>Passmore, Lewis, &amp; Cantore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. What are some actions that others in your social network have done to help you accomplish your goals?</td>
<td>Passmore, Lewis, &amp; Cantore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. What are some actions that you have taken to help the surrounding community?</td>
<td>Passmore, Lewis, &amp; Cantore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. What are some things that you would like to see others in your social network do to help you the community?</td>
<td>Passmore, Lewis, &amp; Cantore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. What are some goals you have to improve the surrounding community?</td>
<td>Passmore, Lewis, &amp; Cantore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Describe some ways that specific people that you know have benefitted from the social network.</td>
<td>Passmore, Lewis, &amp; Cantore</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### D. Transferability of the Funds of Knowledge

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What are some things your associates have done to improve life conditions for the surrounding community? Are these actions useful in other areas?</td>
<td>Passmore, Lewis, &amp; Cantore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What are some actions that you have taken to help the surrounding community? Are these actions useful in other areas?</td>
<td>Passmore, Lewis, &amp; Cantore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What are some things that your social network has done to improve life quality for themselves as a group? Are these actions useful in other areas?</td>
<td>Passmore, Lewis, &amp; Cantore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. What are some things that your social network has done to improve life quality for themselves individually? Are these actions useful in other areas?</td>
<td>Passmore, Lewis, &amp; Cantore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Has the social network improved the surrounding community? Are these actions useful in other areas?</td>
<td>Passmore, Lewis, &amp; Cantore</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>