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ASIAN GANGS IN THE UNITED STATES: A META-SYNTHESIS

by

Sou Lee

B.A., University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire, 2013

A Thesis
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Master of Arts in Criminology & Criminal Justice

Department of Criminology & Criminal Justice
in the Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
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THESIS APPROVAL

ASIAN GANGS IN THE UNITED STATES: A META-SYNTHESIS

by

Sou Lee

A Thesis Submitted in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the field of Criminology & Criminal Justice

Approved by:

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SOU LEE, for the Master of Arts degree in CRIMINOLOGY AND
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TITLE: ASIAN GANGS IN THE UNITED STATES: A META-SYNTHESIS

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Christopher Mullins

The purpose of this study is to gain a holistic understanding of the Asian gang phenomenon through the application of a meta-synthesis, which is seldom utilized within the criminal justice and criminology discipline. Noblit and Hare’s (1988) seven step guidelines for synthesizing qualitative research informed this methodology. Through this process, 15 studies were selected for synthesis. The synthesis of these studies not only identified prevalent themes across the sample, but also provided the basis for creating overarching metaphors that captured the collective experience of Asian gang members. Through the interpretive ordering of these metaphors, a line of synthesis argument was developed in which three major inferences about the Asian gang experience were made. First, regardless of ethnic and geographic differences, the experiences of Asian gangs and their members are similar. Second, although extant literature has applied different theories to explain gang membership for individual ethnic gangs (e.g. Chinese, Vietnamese), this synthesis revealed that the dominant theory for explaining the onset and persistence of Asian gangs is Vigil’s (1988) multiple marginality theory. Finally, in comparison to the broader literature, Asian gangs are more similar than they are different to non-Asian gangs because of their overlap in values.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my family and loved ones. My parents deserve the first acknowledgement, as their support and words of wisdom continually motivated me to complete this project. Through all their struggles and adversities, they always managed to provide the best opportunities for me to grow as a person, and for that, I am eternally grateful. My brothers and their families deserve recognition for their constant encouragement. Through all the hardships and stressful times, they were always available to listen and dispel any doubts that I may have had. In particular, I would like to thank my two loving nieces Jada and Olivia for always believing in their “uncle Sou”. Lastly, I would like to dedicate this work to Der Yang for all her love and support. You pushed me to pursue higher education when I was uncertain about my future. Without you, none of this would have been possible.

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I want to acknowledge Dr. Christopher Mullins for his guidance and support throughout this project. He fostered my growth as an academic by providing me with the freedom to pursue my ideas and interests. Not only did he provide me the tools necessary to complete this project, but he has also given me sound advice and wisdom that I will always keep. From day one, he always had my best interests in mind and I could not be more grateful for such an honest and supportive teacher, mentor, and friend. I would also like to extend my gratitude to Drs. Bryan Bubolz and Raymund Narag for their patience and guidance on this project, but also for their commitments to me as an individual. I also want to acknowledge Charern, Heath, and Maranda for the support and love they have shown me these past two years. Through the conversations, dinners, and drinks, you three have made my stay here more comfortable and I truly appreciate it. Last, I would like to thank all my fellow graduate students for helping me through this journey. Thank you all for the memories!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In 2012, there were an estimated 30,700 gangs and 850,000 gang members throughout 3,100 police jurisdictions known to have gang problems. This represents an upsurge in gang prevalence since 2011—nearly a 30,000 increase in the number of gangs and 800,000 increase in the number of gang members (Egley, Howell, & Harris, 2014). Additionally, gang-related homicides have also increased at the national level, partly due to the increase reporting procedures of many law enforcement agencies. Even though there has been a massive increase the prevalence of gangs, gang activity remains concentrated in urban areas (Egley et al., 2014).

It is easy to perceive gangs as an issue associated with the “ghettos” and minority populations. However, this is a superficial understanding of a much deeper problem rooted in American society. For instance, the fact that black and Hispanics are overrepresented in gangs highlights the potential existence of macro social forces that disproportionately impinge on minority men (e.g. institutional racism). Thus, the study of gangs is important for several reasons. First, it not only provides insight into the adversities experienced by young people, but also provides context about societal values and how its goals are achieved. Second, gangs inform us of the relationship between young people and the social institutions they interact with. Finally, gangs and its members are heavily involved in criminal activities and pose a considerable risk for law enforcement authorities. Thus, it is not surprising that they are one of the most difficult groups to manage in correctional facilities (Curry, Decker, & Pyrooz, 2014).

As noted earlier, blacks and Hispanics are overrepresented in gangs and consequently have received the most attention in gang research. In comparison, there has been very little empirical examination of Asian American gangs (Jang, 2002). This may be attributed to the “model minority” stereotype applied to Asian Americans in that they have lower rates of criminal activity and almost no juvenile delinquency (Kobayashi, 1999). Thus, it is entirely possible that the lack of interest in Asian gangs among researchers stems from the low visibility of Asian Americans in official crime statistics. However, “their low criminality itself warrants systematic examination of Asian Americans, as much as high criminality warrants the study of other racial/ethnic minorities” (Jang, 2002, p. 648). Furthermore, even within the limited scholarship on Asian gangs, Chinese and Vietnamese gangs have received the most attention, neglecting other Asian ethnic groups (e.g. Hmong and Cambodians).

Unfortunately, much of the early investigations on Asian gangs have come from media and journalistic accounts, which have sensationalized their emergence and characteristics. As a result, early conceptions and depictions of Asian gangs were often inaccurate and exaggerated (Chin, 1990; Joe, 1994b; Mark, 1997; Tsunokai & Kposowa, 2002). In particular, Asian gangs have often been linked to organized crime groups, such as the Chinese Mafia and Japanese Yakuza (Bresler, 1981, Kaplan & Dubro, 1986) even though empirical investigations have not found support for these claims (Joe, 1994b; Toy, 1992a). Thus, it is not surprising that in comparison to black and Hispanic gangs, the current state of empirical knowledge on Asian gangs is particularly vague and underdeveloped.

Although Asian gangs arguably constitute only a small percentage of gangs and gang activities (Knox & McCurrie, 1996; McCurrie, 1999), there is value to examining different ethnic and racial gangs because they,

> bring to their gang participation diverse and often culture-specific motivations, perceptions, behaviors, and beliefs” such as the “meaning of aggression; the perception of gang as family; the gang as an arena for acquiring status, honor, or “rep”; the gang’s

> duration, cohesiveness, and typical and atypical legal and illegal pursuits; its place in the community—these features and many more are substantially shaped by cultural traditions and mores. (Goldstein, 1991, p. 244)

Additionally, although most gangs are influenced by universal factors that transcend race, such as the role of community/social disorganization (Thrasher, 1927), the gang experience is unique and distinct to that racial group (Perkins, 1987). This is especially true for Asian gangs due to their history of immigration and portrayal as the model minority. Thus, it is vital to further explore how the Asian culture and historical traditions affect the Asian gang experience. In summary, to gain a holistic understanding of gangs in the United States, it is imperative to examine Asian gangs and the factors that may be unique to their formation, organization, and general characteristics.

There are important reasons to advance our understanding of Asian gangs and fill in the empirical gap that exists (Davidson, 1996; Jang, 2002; Joe, 1994a; Joe, 1993; Shelden, Tracy, & Brown, 2013). This study will to contribute to the literature on Asian gangs by employing a qualitative approach due to the lack of Asian gang research. This approach is best suited for gaining additional insight on Asian gangs for several reasons.

First, qualitative approaches are particularly useful for research that is exploratory or descriptive (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). This examination will develop a thick description (Geertz, 1973) of Asian gangs, which will allow for more in-depth interpretations and a holistic understanding of the phenomenon (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Second, the absence of Asian gang research makes a qualitative approach an even more attractive option. This is because qualitative research is better suited to explore ignored populations and areas that have not been thoroughly researched (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Thus, this method of analysis will provide better understanding of the unique experiences and complexities associated with Asian gangs and gang members. Third, through examination of Asian gangs within the qualitative paradigm, it is possible to discover relevant variables that can be used for quantitative assessment (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). This is especially important due to the lack of consensus in the literature on gang formation and characteristics (Tsunokai & Kposowa, 2002). In summary, a qualitative approach to understanding Asian gangs is best suited due to the lack of research coupled with the exploratory and descriptive nature of available research.

Within the qualitative approach, this study will utilize a meta-synthesis methodology. This method is used for synthesizing qualitative studies to gain a deeper and more holistic understanding of a phenomenon (Finfgeld, 2003; Sandelowski, Docherty, & Emden, 1997). Furthermore, although it has been heavily utilized in other fields (e.g. nursing), it has been virtually absent within the criminology and criminal justice field (Wholl, Palacios, Cochran, & Sellers, 2013). To date, there have only been two published meta-syntheses within our discipline (Martinez & Abrams, 2013; Wholl et al., 2013). Additionally, a meta-synthesis on Asian gangs is especially salient because there has been no study to examine if a common theoretical foundation exists to explain Asian gangs of different ethnicities and contexts (Tsunokai & Kposowa, 2002). The meta-synthesis proposed here will synthesize studies on different Asian ethnicities (e.g. Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, etc.) in different geographical contexts (e.g. Northern and Southern California, New York City).

In extending our understanding of Asian gangs through a meta-synthesis, this study will investigate one primary research question: What is the Asian gang experience in the United States? This is an important inquiry because past research on Asian gangs have been little “islands of knowledge” (Walsh & Downe, 2005, p. 205) in which there has been no attempt to understand the collective experience. Although this question is quite broad, it is justified due to the lack of empirical research and literature. In other words, a specific inquiry may produce a less rich and less holistic understanding. Additionally, a specific research question will ultimately limit the number of studies included in the meta-synthesis. Although this would not be an issue in regards to ethnographies (which naturally provide rich and in-depth information), there simply are not enough ethnographies on Asian gangs to justify a limited sample size.

In summary, a meta-synthesis will reveal the Asian gang experience in the United States by examining multiple accounts of this phenomenon. Furthermore, this study will contribute to the empirical gap that exists by utilizing an innovative methodology that is has been virtually absent in criminal justice and criminology research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Although gangs have been studied since the early twentieth century, there has been no consensus on the definition of a “gang” among researchers and criminal justice agencies (Curry et al., 2014). However, there are general elements or characteristics that are often associated with the constitution a gang. The first, and most commonly acknowledge definition, is that a gang must be a group. Some agencies even assign a specific number (Curry et al., 2014). Second, gangs are often associated with the use of symbols such as graffiti, hand signs, certain style of dress, and “colors”. Third, gangs are usually defined as a group that has achieved some level of permanence; in other words, the gang must have been in existence for some extended period of time. This helps differentiate between adolescent friendship groups that form and quickly split (Curry et al., 2014). Fourth, gangs are usually understood as embodying the “street orientation” (Anderson, 1999; Curry et al., 2014). This usually takes the form of gang-identified territory/turf. However, it has been noted that there is some controversy about this element because some gangs, particularly Asian gangs, often do not claim territory. The last element of gang is involvement in criminal activities. This last element make gangs unique because it is possible to conceive of groups that meet all the previous elements (Curry et al., 2014).

Although Curry and colleagues (2014) describe several components that constitute a gang, Klein’s (1995) discussion on tipping points serves as the best definition of a street gang. He stated that a gang can be defined based on three characteristics. First, gangs have a commitment to a criminal orientation. Second, the gang has self-recognition, that is, the gang sees itself as a collective unit that is distinct from other groups. This can be expressed through gang jargon, clothing, signs, and display of colors. Finally, the gang receives negative responses from segments of the community, such as school teachers, law enforcement, and parents. Furthermore, this last component is not as concerned with the label, but rather “the group’s acquiescence to it, acceptance of it, and eventually its stated pride in it. The community serves as a looking glass: Members look into it and see their gang character” (Klein, 1995, p. 30). In summary, although Curry and his colleagues (2014) provided a useful definition for gangs, Klein’s (1995) discussion is more appropriate due to the notion of self-recognition. This is important because within gang research, self-nomination is the most robust measure of gang membership (Curry et al., 2014; Howell, 2012).

Regardless of the definitional ambiguity, the notion of gangs have been a part of American history for a long time, with the earliest recorded gangs tracing back to the end of the American Revolution in the late 1780s (Adamson, 2000; Sante, 1991). However, it was not until the early immigration waves from Western Europe that gangs became extensively studied. Notably, the Northeastern United States was the first region to experience noticeable gang activity (Howell, 2012). Specifically, in the 1820s, gangs of white youth were documented in “New York’s Bowery and Five Point districts, Boston’s North End and Fort Hill, and the outlying Southwark and Moyamensing sections of Philadelphia” (Adamson, 2000, p. 274). Furthermore, New York City found itself dealing with a considerable level of gang activity in the late 1890s, comprised primarily of Irish immigrants (Decker & Van Winkle, 1996). These early immigrants found it difficult to adjust to the economic pulls of American society and lacked prosocial activities to occupy their time. As a result, they formed gangs as a source for fulfilling social and material needs. The genesis of these early gangs were attributed to poor social conditions, including poverty, inadequate education, and housing, where the “sunlight was not among them” and only “darkness and discouragement” existed (Riis, 1902, p. 4). Similarly, Ashbury's (1927) examination of New York City's Five Point area found that gangs were still largely represented by recent Irish, Italian, and German immigrants, who were bounded by ethnic ties and exclusiveness. It is apparent that the early gangs of New York were organized around immigration and ethnicity, and were highly reflective of the social conditions at that time.

In tracking the history of gang research in America, it is generally understood that Thrasher's (1927) classic field study of 1,313 gangs in Chicago is the first academic examination of gangs (Decker & Van Winkle, 1996; Joe-Laidler & Hunt, 2012). Thrasher's pioneering work positioned gang development under the lens of social disorganization—noting that Chicago gangs resided in "deteriorating neighborhoods and shifting populations" (1927, p. 3). He ultimately concluded that that gangs arise in conflict and are symptomatic of community disorganization. His pioneering work is important because his assertions about the role of structural variables and group processes remain valuable in understanding modern gangs (Decker & Van Winkle, 1996). Additionally, he acknowledged the existence of Chinese criminal groups. Specifically, Thrasher (1927) noted the existence of Chinese tongs, which developed out of community disorganization (much like the other black and white gangs he examined). These tongs were protective societies that engaged in illegal activities such as drug trade and human trafficking. Interestingly, although Thrasher (1927) differentiated between gangs and tongs—which he states as "merely blackmailing organizations" (p. 145)—he acknowledged that some tongs develop out of the conflict tradition of most gangs. In summary, even though Thrasher's (1927) conceptualization of the "Chinese gang" is better understood as an organized criminal group, his discussion of Chinese tongs stressed the existence of such groups even in early academic inquiry.

Even though Thrasher (1927) noted the existence of “Chinese gangs”, most studies have continued to focus on black and Hispanic gangs, including several exemplary books: Keiser (1969), Moore (1978, 1988), Horowitz (1983), Campbell (1984), Vigil (1988), Jankowski (1991), Decker & Van Winkle (1996), Hagedorn (1998), and Miller (2001). In contrast, there has not been nearly as much research conducted on Asian gangs. Thus, the advancement of knowledge on Asian gangs is imperative. To gain a better understanding of Asian gangs, it is important to review the Asian American experience, including the model minority stereotype, immigration, and general delinquency.

Model Minority Stereotype

The limited focus on Asian Americans within criminal justice and criminology literature may be a result of the model minority label (Bohsiu, 2008; Museus, 2013; Le & Stockdale, 2005; Xiong & Huang, 2011). Furthermore, the model minority stereotype has resulted in the neglect of Asian communities in regards to governmental and social service agencies (Cowart & Cowart, 1993). Thus, this erroneous stereotype has resulted in academic and practical repercussions.

The stereotype can be traced back to the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s as a way to discredit the argument about racial inequality and discrimination towards minorities. Asian Americans, the model minority, symbolized the idea that the American dream could be achieved through hard work and perseverance (Museus, 2013). Furthermore, this stereotype was formed from the perceptions of Asian immigrants during the 1960s and 1970s, which comprised mainly Chinese, Japanese, and Filipinos—who were all highly educated immigrants (Kobayashi, 1999).

The model minority stereotype asserts four “truths” about Asian Americans: (1) they have lower incidents of criminal activity and almost no juvenile delinquency, (2) they are physically and mentally healthier, (3) they earn higher incomes, and (4) Asian American students are higher academic achievers (Kobayashi, 1999). Most relevant for discussion is the first component. Although Asian Americans have historically been underrepresented in official statistics, there is evidence that Asian Americans are becoming more involved in the formal criminal justice system. Additionally, official statistics can be misleading because numerous Asian ethnicities are grouped with Pacific Islanders. Thus, the "Asian" category comprises a variety of different people and is not disaggregated by ethnicity (Le, 2002). This is especially important because certain ethnic groups are disproportionately represented in arrests (Le, Arifuku, Louie, & Krisberg, 2001a; Le, Arifuku, Louie, Krisberg, & Tang, 2001b). In sum, the Asian model minority stereotype is based on broad generalizations that are inaccurate for many ethnic groups and has discouraged much research on Asian American crime and delinquency, especially in regards to Asian gangs (Tsunokai, 2005).

Asian Immigration

The immigration and refugee experience of Asian Americans is salient to understanding the emergence and contextual factors behind the development of Asian gangs. It is important to understand that the history of immigration varies based on the ethnic group. In other words, the Chinese experience was vastly different from the experiences of Southeast Asians. Thus, the history of Chinese immigration will first be examined, followed by the immigration experienced by Southeast Asians. The immigration of these two groups is particularly important for discussion because even within the limited research on Asian gangs, Chinese and Vietnamese gangs have received the most attention from scholars (see Chin, 1990, 1996a; Hunt et al., 1997; Joe, 1994a; Lam, 2012; Long, 1997; Robinson & Joe, 1981; Sheu, 1986; Sung, 1977; Toy, 1992a, Toy, 1992b; Vigil & Yun, 1990).

Chinese Americans are the oldest and largest Asian ethnic group in the United States (Zhou, 2003). Their history of immigration and settlement dates as far back as the late 1840s. In the mid-19th century, most Chinese immigrants came to the United States as contract labor, working in the plantations in Hawaii as well as the mining industry on the west coast. Later on, the Chinese began to work on the transcontinental railroad, west of the Rocky Mountains (Zhou, 2003). In essence, the Chinese came to the United States in pursuit of economic growth and stability, similar to immigration of western Europeans and the migration of southern blacks at the conclusion of World War II. However, very few actually achieved what they sought out to do and many became targets of discrimination. Specifically, in the 1870s, white workers who were frustrated with the economy and employment instability channeled their attention towards the Chinese, blaming them for the unavailability of jobs (Zhou, 2003). This mindset led to the formation of racist attitudes and phrases such as the “yellow peril”, “Chinese menace”, and “indispensable enemy” (Zhou, 2003, p. 38). Ultimately, this sentiment echoed across the nation and climaxed in 1882, when the United States Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act—which halted Chinese immigration. This act was then subsequently renewed in 1892 and later extended to exclude *all* Asian immigrants. It was finally repealed in 1943 near the conclusion of World War II (Zhou, 2003). In addition, subsequent legislation primarily concerned with the Chinese (due to their history of opium usage) were also passed, notably the Smoking Opium Exclusion Act of 1909 and the Harrison Narcotic Drug Act of 1914 (Mieczkowski, 2009). Thus, “the first crest of prohibition” was largely a product of anti-Chinese sentiment. In summary, the Chinese entered the United States in the pursuit for economic prosperity, where they became targets of racism and legal exclusion.

In stark contrast to the Chinese experience, Southeast Asians came to the United States to seek refuge after the fall of the governments allied to the United States in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia in 1975 (Bankston, 1998; Museus, 2013). These waves of immigration were a product of the United States' involvement in the Vietnam War. Specifically, many Southeast Asians—such as the Hmong—were recruited by the United States Central Intelligence Agency to fight against the Communist North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao (Tsai, 2001; Yang, 2003). They were assured that even if their efforts failed, they would receive compensation for their military service (Tsai, 2001). Since then, over 1 million Southeast Asians have immigrated to United States (Cowart & Cowart, 1993; Hong, 2010). Although it has been stated that Southeast Asians "immigrated" to the United States, it is important to note that they are refugees, not immigrants. Therefore, it is essential that a clear distinction be made between these two terms. Immigrants are people who come to the United States by choice (e.g. Chinese immigrants). On the other hand, refugees are displaced people who have been uprooted by war and violence and have been forced to flee from their homeland. They are unable to return to their country of origin due to the persecution they face (Cowart & Cowart, 1993). This is particularly the case for the Hmong. Specifically, there have been Hmong resistance groups (led by former Hmong officers of the Royal Lao Army) since the end of the Vietnam War in 1975 due to persecution, retaliation, oppression, and forcible "re-education" by the Lao government. This still remains an issue in Laos (Yang, 2003). This is the biggest difference between the history of Chinese and Southeast Asian immigration in the United States.

In April of 1975, the city of Saigon fell to communist forces (e.g. Vietcong and North Vietnamese Army). Additionally, the Royal Lao government was taken over by the Pathet Lao. This collapse forced many allies of the United States (e.g. the Hmong) to flee to avoid retaliation

(Bertrand & Simons, 1994). Since then, the United States has received three major waves of Southeast Asian refugees (Cowart & Cowart, 1993). The first wave of refugees arrived immediately after the collapse of the Vietnamese government, between the years of 1975 – 1977 (Hong, 2010). This first wave comprised highly educated, professional Vietnamese elites who were middle and upper class individuals. Many of these refugees were prepared to handle the changes of American life due to their skills and knowledge of the English language[1] (Hong, 2010).

The second wave of refugees were considered “boat people” and arrived in the United States between the years of 1977 – 1985 (Hong, 2010). These refugees comprised a combination of Chinese-Vietnamese, Cambodians, Hmong, and Laotians (Vigil & Yun, 1990). These refugees fled Vietnam on fishing boats, where they endured brutal conditions, such as murders, rapes, and kidnappings from Thai pirates as well as shipwreck (Cowart & Cowart, 1993; Hong, 2010). This group suffered terribly, with up to half of their people dying in the attempt to escape (Ima, 1992). Specifically, the Cambodians fled from persecution under the Pol Pot regime, where over one million Khmer died. Additionally, many other racial and ethnic groups were targeted. Specifically, the Vietnamese minority was completely eliminated, roughly 200,000 Chinese were killed, and a third of the Muslims Chams were murdered (Kiernan, 1990, 1988, 1986). People of Chinese-Vietnamese descent were persecuted by the Vietnamese after the border war between China and Vietnam. Similarly, the Hmong and Laotian fled from Laos when it was taken over by the Pathet Lao (Ima, 1992; Jang, 2002; Museus, 2013; Yin & Han, 2008). The boat people were relocated into refugee camps in Thailand, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Indonesia, and Malaysia, where they often experienced trauma—including disease, starvation, and inhumane living conditions (Hong, 2010; Museus, 2013). In contrast to the first wave, these refugees were less educated, primarily rural farmers and fishermen, and less likely to understand the English language (Ima, 1992; Lam, 2012).

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[1] It is during this wave—and in addition to the existing Chinese community—that the model minority myth was bolstered.

The third wave began between 1982 and 1985 and continues today, with over half a million refugees coming from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam between 1985 and 2010 (Southeast Asia Resource Action Center, 2011). This wave of immigration was facilitated by an agreement between Vietnam and the United States. The refugees in this wave are even more poor, less educated, and unskilled than the previous two waves. Additionally, there are still boat people arriving from various countries during this wave (Cowart & Cowart, 1993; Ima, 1992; Southeast Asia Resource Action Center, 2011).

The examination of Asian immigration is important because it provides the context for Asian gangs and the unique circumstances that may contribute to the formation, persistence, and identity. For instance, Lam (2012) found that the emergence of Vietnamese youth gangs coincided with the second wave of immigration. These refugees were ill-equipped to prepare to their new lives. Also, within this wave were many Vietnamese children and teenagers who came on their own due to separation and abandonment from their parents (Garbarino, 2008). Thus, the role of immigration is salient in understanding the formation of Asian gangs.

Delinquency

Asian Americans are the least studied racial group for criminal justice research due to their low rates of criminal activity. However, official statistics can be misleading because they do not fully depict the extent that different Asian ethnic groups involve themselves with the legal system (Le, 2002). Although limited research has been conducted in comparison to other racial groups, research has shown that Asian American youth are becoming an increasing presence in the criminal justice system (Le, 2002).

Jang (2002) found that although Asian American youths generally report less deviance than other racial groups, this was only primarily for school deviance. They are just as likely as other racial youths to engage in running away from home. Furthermore, a recent analysis has shown that even though Asian youth generally have lower levels of violent and drug offenses, there are very few differences in property offenses among Asian and non-Asian youth (Feldmeyer & Cui, 2015). The official statistics show that juvenile arrest rates have decreased most significantly for Asian juveniles between 1980 and 2012 (i.e. 59% decrease compared to 44% for whites and 21% for blacks) (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2014); however, this is misleading. By examining rates of delinquency based on ethnic groups within the broad Asian category, it becomes apparent that not all Asian ethnicities are low rate offenders. In fact, some are disproportionately represented. Le, Monfared, and Stockdale (2005) found that Chinese youth reported the lowest levels of delinquency, followed by Vietnamese youth, Laotian, and Cambodians, respectively in their study of California youth. In other words, Southeast Asian youth reported more delinquent activities. Furthermore, some Southeast Asians have even had higher criminal involvement than blacks, whites, and Hispanics. For example, in Alameda County, California, the arrest rate for Samoan and Vietnamese youth were far greater than the arrest rates for whites, Hispanics, and all other Asian ethnic groups (Le et al., 2001b). Additionally, Le and colleagues (2001b) discovered that Samoans had even higher arrest rates than Blacks, followed by Vietnamese in San Francisco County, California. In sum, the illusion of the less criminal Asian is perpetuated by the aggregation of different Asian ethnic groups in official data. When disaggregated, different rates emerge for the different ethnic groups; and even in certain areas (e.g. San Francisco and Alameda Counties) some Asian youth are more disproportionately represented than their black and Hispanic counterparts.

Asian Gangs

The combination of the model minority stereotype, immigration, and general delinquency provides the context for understanding Asian gangs. Even though it has been recognized that race and ethnicity plays an important role in understanding gangs (Jankowski, 1991; Joe, 1993; Klein, 1995; Miller, 2001; Perkins, 1987), very little research has actually been conducted on Asian gangs (Davidson, 1996; Jang, 2002; Joe, 1994a; Joe, 1993; Shelden et al., 2013) in comparison to black and Hispanic gangs (Toy, 1992b). Additionally, although Asian gangs—particularly Chinese gangs—have been around for several decades, most of our knowledge comes from law enforcement and journalistic accounts (Chin, 1990). This has allowed for inaccurate perceptions of Asian gangs and their connection to organized crime (e.g. Triads and Yakuza), which has contributed to the misperception that Asian gangs are extremely violent and urgently problematic (Joe, 1994b).

The perceptions of Asian gangs are further exacerbated with the inaccurate depiction of Asians as a homogenous group. Each ethnic group has their own history, religion, language, and culture, which contributes to the diversity in Asian gangs. Depending on the ethnic group, the gang may differ in group cohesion, languages, culture, and socioeconomic status (Cowart & Cowart, 1996). In the United States, there are several varieties of Asian gangs, such as Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Mien, Hmong, Filipino, Samoan, Tongan, and Hawaiian gangs (Shelden et al., 2013). Therefore, contrary to popular belief that all Asian gangs are Chinese, they have expanded to include other ethnic groups (Klein, 1995).

Early empirical literature

The earliest explorations of Asian gangs in the United States have been conducted primarily in California (Joe, 1994a; Hunt, Joe, & Waldorf, 1997; Takagi & Platt, 1978; Toy, 1992a; Toy, 1992b) and New York (Chin, 1990; Sung, 1977). This is due to the fact that most Asian populations have settled in these states (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Additionally, Asian gangs have also been examined in Vancouver, Canada (Robinson & Joe, 1981).

Toy (1992a) documented the development of Asian gangs in San Francisco, California. He conducted 73 face-to-face interviews with current and former Asian gang members from various gangs: the Wah Ching, Suey Sing, Hop Sing, Asian Invasion, Eddy Boys, Chinese Playground Boys, and the Ping Boys. He found that Asian gangs formed during the 1960s when there was a large influx of Chinese immigration. These immigrants were forced to resolve issues by themselves due to the absence of social services, lack of legitimate opportunities, and hostility from other ethnic groups.

Additionally, Asian gangs often served as surrogate families and a space for youth to relieve their stress from culture conflicts. Culture conflicts stemmed from the experiences of marginalization from both their Asian and American backgrounds. In other words, they were neither accepted as truly Americans nor were they accepted as wholly Asian. Thus, Asian gangs provided a compromise for this double marginalization by establishing a sense of identity and bonding (Long, 1997; Toy, 1992b). More recently, however, Tsunokai (2005) found that very few Asian gang members in Southern California expressed cultural concerns as a reason for joining a gang. Therefore, it may be possible that due to acculturation and assimilation, cultural conflicts have become less salient in explaining Asian gang membership.

As mentioned earlier, Asian gangs in San Francisco formed due to victimization experiences from other ethnic groups. Many youth considered gang membership as a form of protection and security. They perceived gang membership as the most effective method for revenge and protection from further victimization (Toy, 1992b). However, not all gang members joined for the same reason. Younger gang members emphasized protection from victimization as the most important reason for joining; whereas, older members remained in gangs to maintain a source of income through illegal avenues (Toy, 1992b). Similarly, Tsunokai (2005) found that Asian gang members in Southern California expressed a variety of reasons for joining a gang. The most common reasons were that they already had friends in gangs, fun and excitement, and for protection and support. Thus, even with the passage of a decade, both Tsunokai (2005) and Toy (1992b) found similar reasons for gang membership. Notably, black, white, and Hispanic gang members also express these reasons for joining gangs.

Even with their emergence in California, Asian gangs were not considered problematic and did not receive much public attention until 1972, when the Attorney General of California held a meeting to address Asian gangs and organized crime in San Francisco (Toy, 1992b). During this time, San Francisco's Chinatown was experiencing large waves of violent activities, which culminated in 1977 with the infamous "Golden Dragon Massacre"— a shooting spree that killed five and injured 11, all of which were innocent bystanders. Immediately after this incident, the San Francisco's Gang Task Force was formed (Joe, 1994a).

Asian gangs in New York City's Chinatown also emerged after the major influx of the Chinese population due to the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 (Chin, 1990; Robinson & Joe, 1980). Under this legislation, China became a "preferred" nation for immigration. However, many unforeseen consequences gave rise to gangs. Similar to San

Francisco, the unpreparedness of existing Chinese communities and social services left many Chinese immigrants with little to no assistance. Thus, many new immigrants were left to resolve housing, employment, and educational concerns by themselves (Chin, 1990). Consequently, many Chinese immigrants had difficulty with adjusting to their new life and experienced cultural conflicts (Sung, 1987). Interestingly, before the mid-1970s, many youth joined gangs voluntarily and shared a sense of camaraderie. However, this changed in the mid-1970s and early 1980s. Many youth were now joining gangs out of fear, in part because established gangs would employ coercive recruitment techniques (Chin, 1990). Gangs continued to grow and become more involved in these Chinese communities due to the underground gambling industry, which provided ample criminal opportunities for gangs. For example, Chin (1990) found that many gambling dens hired gangs as a form of protection from law enforcement, outside intruders, and from the gang themselves. Likewise, Sung (1987) found that tongs seized the moment to advance their own goals by utilizing gang members who were “hot-headed and willing to take chances” (p. 138). Additionally, with the growing economy and expanding business in these Chinese communities, gangs became largely involved in extorting businesses for “protection” money.

In summary, early literature revealed that Asian gangs in the United States first emerged during the great influx of Chinese immigrants after the passage of the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1975. Consequently, many immigrant Chinese families were unassisted and neglected from social services and their communities. These factors, along with others, gave rise to the emergence of Asian gangs. However, there are a couple of caveats within the extant literature. First, these studies were limited to only a few geographic regions, namely San Francisco and New York City. Second, most of these early studies focused exclusively on

Chinese gangs, with very few exceptions (e.g. Hunt et al., 1997; Joe, 1994a; Wang, 2002b; Vigil & Yun, 1990).

Gang Structure and Characteristics

Within the Asian gang literature, there has been some exploration into the structure, hierarchy, and membership characteristics of these gangs. These characteristics are similar to other racial gangs, with the notable exception of territory or turf, although there is not consensus among scholars on this.

In terms of gang structure, Asian gangs have been characterized as near groups (Robinson & Joe, 1980; Sheu, 1986; Yablonsky, 1958), although the structure, duration, and organization of the Asian gang varies from gang to gang (Chin, 1990; Joe, 1994a). For instance, the Ghost Shadows in Chin's (1990) study of Chinese gangs had four or five leaders at the top, similar to Jankowski's (1991) conception of the horizontal/commission type gang (based on white, black, and Hispanic gangs). In contrast, other gangs had only one or two leaders, similar to Jankowski's (1991) conception of the influential type gang. Additionally, Asian gangs consisted primarily of males like other ethnic gangs, and tend not to recruit non-Asian gang members (Chin, 1990), although there has been evidence of Asian gangs becoming more ethnically mixed (Davidson, 1996).

Hunt and colleagues (1997) found that Southeast Asian gangs in San Francisco had little hierarchal division based on the age of the gang members. This was also the case for Chinese, Vietnamese, and Cambodian gangs, where most gangs indicated an "equalness" among all gang members (Joe, 1994a). In contrast, the Bahla Na-Barkada, a Filipino gang, has indicated hierarchal division based on age, including OG's older heads, juniors, and new kids (Sanders, 1994). In summary, the structure and hierarchy within Asian gangs is similar to black and Hispanic gangs (Chin, 1990) with some degree of structural variation from gang to gang.

As previously discussed, Asian gangs have been understood as near groups. Characteristic of near groups is the fluidity of membership. Davidson (1996) found that Asian gangs in Chicago had fluid membership, with individual gang members “floating easily from one gang to another” (p. 299). Similarly, Vigil and Yun (1990) came to the same conclusion about Vietnamese gangs in Southern California in that members were free to move in and out of the gang, and even into other gangs. Likewise, Sung (1987) found that membership for Chinese gangs in New York’s Chinatown “fluctuates drastically” (p. 143). Related to gang membership is the recruitment tactic employed by gangs, and even this varies. For instance, Chin (1990) found that Chinese gangs were active in coercive recruitment of young members, while in contrast, Vigil and Yun (1990) found that gang membership was established through previous relationships. In review, the fluidity of membership is a unique characteristic of Asian gangs. Additionally, research has highlighted the varying recruitment and induction techniques utilized by Asian gangs.

Because of fluid membership, coupled with intra-gang conflicts, the group cohesion of Asian gangs is rather weak (Chin, 1990). In particular, similar to Keiser’s (1969) observation of Vice Lord cliques, Chinese gangs also developed cliques, which often dislike one another (Chin, 1990), resulting in an unstable foundation of membership (i.e. there is not a concrete count of membership). Consequently, some researchers have found that Asian gangs lack well-articulated goals, norms, and beliefs (Robinson & Joe, 1980).

The most notable distinction about Asian gangs is there lack of territory or turf (Curry et al., 2014). Most research has highlighted the relative unimportance of turf for Asian gangs (e.g.

Cowart & Cowart, 1993; Hunt et al., 1997; Joe, 1994a; Klein, 1995; Vigil & Yun, 1990). This may result from the gang's desire to blend into the community and exist undetected from formal authorities. Although Asian gangs typically do not claim territory, they do have areas they frequently congregate, in which other gangs avoid (Robinson & Joe, 1980), such as parking spaces, pool halls, and convenience stores (Hunt et al., 1997). On the other hand, scholars have also noted that some Asian gangs do claim territory. Chin (1990) stated that the second most cited reason for inter-gang conflict and violence was due to territorial disputes. Their territory included commercial areas surrounding the nearby tongs in which the gang was affiliated with. It was through extortion of businesses that Chinese gangs were able to assert their control over certain territories (Chin, 1990). Furthermore, although Joe (1994a) found that territory was largely absent in her study, some of the older Chinese gang members indicated that gang violence in San Francisco during the 1960s and 1970s developed out of territorial disputes. In review, most research has found that territory is not a major component and concern for Asian gangs—with the exception of Chinese gangs. However, it has been asserted that Asian gangs' notion of territory is not residence-based; rather it is prey-based. In other words, the gang usually claims territory over commercial areas in which they can continue extortion and victimization (Klein, 1995).

Asian Gang Myths, Misconceptions, and Organized Crime

Most early literature on Asian gangs were not scholarly inquiries. This was the case for several reasons: (1) their prevalence is far less than other non-Asian gangs, (2) they have emerged in nontraditional gang cities, and (3) they are extremely hard to penetrate (Klein, 1995). Instead, early literature on Asian gangs were based on media and journalistic accounts. Thus, the initial understanding of Asian gangs were often sensationalized and simply inaccurate (Chin, 1990; Joe, 1994b; Mark, 1997; Tsunokai & Kposowa, 2002). The lack of scholarly attention allowed law enforcement, politicians, and the media to develop their own explanations for the emergence and characteristics of Asian gangs, based on anecdotal and limited evidence. These explanations often portrayed Asian gang members as being extremely violent and involved with organized criminal groups (Tsunokai & Kposawa, 2002) such as the Chinese Triads (also referred to as Chinese Mafia)(Toy, 1992a) and Japanese Yakuza (Vigil & Yun, 1990). To better understand these conclusions, it is important to briefly explore the history of the Chinese Triads and Japanese Yakuza.

The Chinese Triad societies—based in Hong Kong—are alleged to be the largest and most dangerous organized crime groups in the world (Booth, 1990). The Triad's name represent the unity of three elements: heaven, earth, and humanity. These societies originally formed three hundred years ago to fight the corrupt and oppressive Qing dynasty. When the Republic of China was established in 1911, these societies did not disband, rather, they began to be involved with criminal activities (Bolz, 1995). Today, the Triad societies have been involved in both illegitimate and legitimate businesses and government associations (Bolz, 1995). Some Triad societies are believed to be very well organized, contain highly disciplined members in their ranks, and consist of influential leaders and figures in Hong Kong (Booth, 1990). Furthermore, Triad societies engaged in local criminal activities (e.g. extortion) as well as transnational criminal activities, such as illegal alien trafficking (Bolz, 1995).

The Japanese Yakuza are some of the most affluent and organized crime groups in the world due to their involvement in numerous criminal activities, including dealings in "narcotics, weapons, counterfeiting, and the smuggling of women for the sex slave trade" (Gragert, 1997, p. 148). The majority of the Yakuza crime groups operate in Japan; however, some of these groups are expanding their operations across the world. Unlike most other organized crime groups, to a certain extent, the Yakuza organization is readily accepted in Japan and is heavily connected with the Japanese government. This public opinion and sentiment can be traced back to the historical roots of the Yakuza, whom were believed to be the spiritual descendants of the "ronin" (masterless samurai) in the 17th century and allied with simple townspeople against assaults from outlaw gangs (Gragert, 1997). Early on, the Yakuza developed political connections as a shield against official detection. However, as time progressed, the Yakuza and government became so closely associated that many members were elected into national office. In summary, the Yakuza are an entrenched part of Japanese society and have expanded their empire through both legal and illegal businesses across the world in places such as Southeast Asia, Europe, and North and South America (Gragert, 1997).

Even with this understanding, Tsunokai and Kposowa (2002) found that in their respective books, Posner (1988) and Bresler (1981) asserted that Asian gangs are an extension of the Triads and tongs, are highly organized, well integrated, and highly cohesive. However, as discussed earlier, empirical research has not found support for these claims. Additionally, they based most of their conclusions from official accounts, which are sources that have an interest in exaggerating the prevalence of drugs and gangs (Tsunokai & Kposowa, 2002). Moreover, many journalistic accounts developed conclusions that were not predicated on theoretical frameworks and scholarly sources, nor were they empirically tested (Tsunokai & Kposowa, 2002). In some cases, these misinformed accounts have even led to official action. As mentioned earlier, in 1986, Attorney General John Van de Kamp conducted a hearing to the California legislature on organized crime, where he cited an increase in organized crime in connection with Asian street gangs (Toy, 1992a; Vigil & Yun, 1990). As a result, the term Asian gang became synonymous for both highly organized criminal groups and loosely structured street gangs (Vigil & Yun, 1990).

To address these misconceptions, Joe (1994b) sought to examine the veracity of two myths about Asian gangs on California's west coast: (1) Their group connection to organized crime and (2) their role in heroine sales related to the organized crime. The first myth concerns the sensationalized connection between tongs, Triads, and gangs. Joe (1994b) found that the majority of gang members in San Francisco knew little or nothing about the tongs and Triads. Furthermore, the association between the three institutions were connected through individuals, rather than organizations. In other words, it is not the gang that was connected to the Triads or tongs; rather, it was certain individuals within the gang that was associated with the tongs and Triads. Likewise, Toy (1992a) found that there was little evidence to indicate an elaborate connection between the Triads and gangs in San Francisco, and concluded that these reports may have been exaggerated.

The second myth concerns law enforcement's perception of Asian gangs and heroin trafficking. This misperception can be attributed to two reasons: the "Golden Triangle" and the history of Chinese heroin trafficking. First, the Golden Triangle refers to the cultivation of opium and refinement of heroin in Southeast Asia, specifically in Northern Thailand, Burmese highlands, Western Laos, and a small segment of China's Yunan province (Neilson, 2000). Interestingly, during the Vietnam War, the CIA transported opium for the Hmong and Laotian tribes in exchange for their resistance against the North Vietnamese. Consequently, "addiction spread among the US forces in South Vietnam and through them to the metropolitan centers of the Western world" (Neilson, 2000, p. 163). Ultimately, with "a growing addict population in China and East Asia, the preeminence of the Golden Triangle as a major opium producing area remains undisputed" and it "stands as a cartographic register of hidden conflicts within the US administration that fueled the growth of the heroin industry in the early 1970s" (Neilson, 2000, p. 164). Based on this, it is not surprising that law enforcement perceived a connection between Asian gangs and heroin (a chemical derivative of opium) trafficking. Second, Chinese immigrants have had a history with heroin trafficking (Chin, 1996b). Chin's (1996b) review of the Chinese and heroin provided great insight into this history. For instance, in 1986, the frequency of heroin cases involving Chinese offenders increased dramatically. Consequently, drug enforcement and customs officers paid particular attention to Chinese couriers arriving from Hong Kong and Bangkok. They found that each courier concealed ten to fifteen pounds of high quality heroin in their luggage, which led to multiple arrests at several airports located in New York City, Los Angeles, and San Francisco (Chin, 1996b). As a result, the Chinese then changed importation methods, where they imported over 50 pounds of heroin in the seaports of Newark and Elizabeth, New Jersey, and in Chicago, concealed inside furniture, frozen seafood, and nylon bags (Chin, 1996b). These two instances illustrate the history between heroin and the Chinese. Thus, it is not difficult to understand why law enforcement related Asian gangs to heroin trafficking. However, even with the historical evidence, Joe (1994b) found that only one of the 73 gang members in her study sold heroine. Furthermore, Joe (1994b) found that the primary drugs sold by Asian gang members were powdered cocaine, Quaaludes, and marijuana. In addition, several gang leaders reported no involvement with heroine sales and indicated that neither the gangs nor tongs were involved in drug trafficking. This was also the case for gangs in New York, where Chin (1990) did not find that drug use and drug dealing were as rampant among Chinese gangs as has been portrayed. In summary, the perception of the gang as entrenched in organized crime is simply not supported. Rather, the gang may provide the context for establishing individual connections for these types of criminal activities (Joe, 1994b; Joe-Laidler & Hunt, 2012).

In addition to journalistic accounts, these myths can be attributed to the media's depiction of Asian gangs. To understand what themes and messages the media associated with Asian gangs, Tsunokai (2003) conducted a content analysis of 147 newspaper articles in a major metropolitan newspaper over a 27 year period (1974-2001). He found six themes emerged (from most prevalent to least prevalent): (1) gang crime, (2) gang busting, (3) organized crime, (4) gang research, (5) gang resistance, and (6) gang reference.

Of particular importance are the themes of gang crime, gang busting, and organized crime. Gang crime was the most prevalent theme (29.2% of all coverage). These stories focused on the different types of crime committed by Asian gangs, from shootings to extortion. Notably, home-invasion robberies were one of the most popular crimes written about. These stories also pointed out that many new immigrants from Southeast Asia were attractive victims due to their beliefs and action (e.g. keeping large amount of cash in the house). Subsequent articles emphasized the point that many of these crimes were becoming less race specific and that the pool of potential victims has expanded beyond just Southeast Asians (Tsunokai, 2003), creating an image of the indiscriminate Asian gangster.

Second, gang busting (28.5% of coverage) focused on the official response to Asian gangs, which attributed successful gang sweeps to the actions of specialized Asian gang units. These stories often implied that a small army of law enforcement is almost necessary to address and take on Asian gangs (Tsunokai, 2003). This further reinforced the idea of the violent Asian gangster and urgent need for law enforcement intervention.

Third, Asian gangs were consistently linked to organized crime (24% of coverage). Specifically, Asian gangs were part of the larger organized crime families that controlled money-laundering operations, narcotics, and computer piracy. Similarly, these stories often indicated that law enforcement were ill-equipped to handle Asian gangs. These stories and statements implied that Asian youth gang members were able to carry out sophisticated crimes associated with organized criminal groups (Tsunokai, 2003).

In summary, media depiction of Asian gangs were largely exaggerated and inaccurate. Early coverage portrayed gang members as vicious criminals who only victimized their own community. However, subsequent coverage reported the increasing scope of criminal victimization and that all members of the public are potential victims. Additionally, the media portrayed Asian gang members as sophisticated criminals and especially difficult to take on, often requiring a small army for successful encounters (Tsunokai, 2003).

Theories of Gang Formation for Asian Gangs

Currently, there is no leading theory that “best explains the emergence, presence, and nature of Asian gangs” (Tsunokai & Kposowa, 2002, p. 42). There are two major reasons for this: (1) lack of research literature, and (2) the different Asian ethnic groups and their experiences. However, early work on Asian gangs had attempted to determine if regular criminological theories were capable of explaining the formation of Asian gangs. The results were often mixed, thus, focus was shifted towards integration of Asian American’s distinctive ethnic identity and experiences (Tsunokai & Kposowa, 2002). For instance, some research has highlighted the breakdown of the family, immigration, adaptation to a new country, and acculturation as factors contributing to the formation of Asian gangs (Bankston, 1998; Chin, 1990; Sanders, 1994; Vigil & Yun, 1990).

Researchers have focused their attention primarily on Chinatown gangs (Chin, 1990; Chin, 1996a) or Southeast Asian gangs—primarily Vietnamese gangs (Hunt et al., 1997; Joe, 1994a; Toy, 1992a; Toy, 1992b; Vigil & Yun, 1990). Due to their unique experiences and ethnic identity, studies have frequently applied different theoretical models; yet no research has actually attempted to examine whether or not both of these ethnic groups could be understood within the same theoretical framework (Tsunokai & Kposowa, 2002). For instance, Chin (1990; 1996a) focused extensively on Chinatown gangs and emphasized the social process and differential opportunity theories to explain gang involvement among Chinese youth (Tsunokai & Kposowa, 2002). Specifically, the presence of competing groups, organizations, and subcultures increase social conflict, which in turn weakens the community's ability to address problems and establish formal and informal control (Tsunokai & Kposowa, 2002). Additionally, tongs contribute to the development of Asian gangs by providing many opportunities to engage in criminal activities and gain exposure to criminal adults (Chin, 1990; Mark, 1997; Tsunokai & Kposowa, 2002). Thus, Chin (1990; 1996a) integrated theoretical aspects of social disorganization, social learning, Cloward and Ohlin's (1960) concept of criminal gangs, and unique ethnic characteristics.

On the other hand, Hunt and colleagues (1997) focused primarily on Southeast Asian gangs. They utilized cultural disorganization and subcultural theories to explain gang formation. They asserted that recent immigrants often experience culture and identity conflicts. Specifically, these youth are "too Americanized for their parents, liking [*sic*], yet considered to be too foreign by their mainstream peers" (Tsunokai & Kposowa, 2002, p. 43). Thus, this double marginalization can develop more stress in addition to stress already experienced from structural factors (e.g. education failures/neglect, community alienation). These stressful events can lead to the youth's membership into a developed subculture for alleviation (Tsunokai & Kposowa, 2002). For example, Hunt and colleagues (1997) noted that the development of the gang was often seen as a protective mechanism to deal with hostile situations. Thus, Hunt and colleagues (1997) integrated components of social disorganization and strain theories within the cultural experience to explain the emergence of Southeast Asian gangs.

Vigil's (2003) multiple marginality approach is another theory that seeks to explain gang formation among ethnic minorities. Although originally developed to explain gang involvement among Hispanic youths in the barrios of Los Angeles (Freng & Esbensen, 2007), it has been extended to other ethnic gangs as well. Notably, this theory introduced the role of race and ethnicity in gang formation, which has been lacking in previous literature (Freng & Esbensen, 2007). Multiple marginality is a conceptual framework that accounts for the reciprocal actions and reactions among a variety of ecological, socioeconomic, sociocultural, and socio-psychological factors (Vigil, 2003). Additionally, it "is more than a laundry list of factors but a model showing sequential, cumulative linkages among factors" (Vigil, 2003, p. 232), accounting for urbanization, cultural conflicts, and change. The various macro forces lead to an array of conditions, including economic insecurity, lack of opportunity, disrupted institutions of social control, poverty, and emotional barriers (Vigil, 2002). These various factors interact to produce a cumulative marginalization, which results in gang membership (Freng & Esbensen, 2007; Vigil, 2003). For instance, many newly settled immigrants are often separated from mainstream people and institutions due to residency, which limits their access and identification to the dominant culture. This hampers integration, which engenders frustration and anger (Vigil, 2003). The family can also become stressed under marginal situations, such as poor housing conditions (e.g. crowded and dilapidated building). Furthermore, urbanization and cultural strains on roles and expectations between first generations (parents) and second generations (children) can attenuate social control and add more stress (Vigil, 2003). In review, the cumulative effects of marginalization within the family, school, neighborhood, and host of other factors can result in the emergence and formation of gangs (Vigil, 2003).

The literature has demonstrated that Asian gangs are unique in their history, ethnic identification, and experiences. However, Asian gangs are also very similar to their non-Asian counterparts. Thus, it is beneficial to examine the similarities and differences to gain a more holistic understanding of gangs.

Similarities between Asian Gangs and Other Racial Gangs

There are several similarities between Asian and other racial gangs, including racism, territory/turf, adoption of gang characteristics, daily routines, violence, motivation for membership, subcultural values, and organization.

First, Asian gang members are also subjected to discriminatory actions, racism, and negative stereotypes, much like their Hispanic and black counterparts (Sanders, 1994). Thus, institutional racism and the marginalized and alienated status of Asians is similar to those of black gang members (Tsunokai & Kposowa, 2002).

Second, some Asian gangs do claim turf, although there has been some contention about this. For example, several researchers have noted the absence of turf or territory among Asian gangs (Hunt et al., 1997; Joe, 1994a; Shelden et al., 2013; Vigil & Yun, 1990), while Chin (1990) found that New York Chinese gangs claimed turf and often had disputes and violent incidents over it, especially on the borders of gang territory. Additionally, some older Chinese gang member in Joe’s (1994a) study in San Francisco did indicated that violence stemmed from territory disputes. Based on these accounts, it seems as though territory is primarily unique to Chinese gangs. However, Wang (2002b) discovered that some established Laotian and Hmong gangs have also claimed gang territory. Thus, although territoriality is documented among Chinese gangs, more and more Asian gangs are adopting this practice.

Third, some Asian gangs have identified with and emulated the characteristics of the more traditional and established black and Hispanic gangs. For instance, some Asian gangs have copied the style of dress, attitude, symbols, graffiti (Davidson, 1996; Klein, 1995), claim small territory (Klein, 1995), and even distinguish themselves via gang insignias (Wang, 2002b) such as cigarette burns, tattoos (notably of dragons and tigers), and colors (e.g. green). A few Asian gangs have even formalized initiation practices, such as jumping someone in and proving oneself by committing a crime (Hunt et al., 1997). Interestingly, Laotian and Hmong gangs have adopted mainstream gang names to claim a tougher reputation to intimidate rival gangs, such as the Laos Crips, Asian Crips, and Blood Nation, even when there is not a true alliance (Wang, 2002b).

Fourth, Asian gangs are perceived as a well-integrated unit (Chin, 1990) associated with organized crime, with the purpose of carrying out criminal activities such as extortion on a routine basis. The reality is that the Asian gang’s everyday functions are similar to other racial gangs. For instance, Hunt and colleagues (1997) found that Asian gang life is very mundane, with many members just drinking and kicking back doing nothing, similar to the gangs observed by Klein (1995).

Fifth, Asian gangs display violence that often characterizes established gangs (Sanders, 1994). They engage in drive-by shootings and other violent assaults. Sanders (1994) has noted that even the pattern of the drive-by was similar: The gang typically used a pistol, shot at rival gang members, announced their gang affiliation, and then drove away. Moreover, Asian gangs are similar to black gangs in terms of carrying out inter-gang and intra-gang simple assaults, and robbery (Tsunokai & Kposowa, 2002).

Sixth, Asian gangs members often joined for protection and to counter police harassment on the streets. Additionally, most scholars found that gang affiliation is similar to those of other racial gangs. Specifically, the social structural and sociocultural factors for gang affiliation are similar. For example, many Asian gang members also experience issues with school, difficulties with their parents, a perceived lack of opportunities for employment, and weak social bonding (Tsunokai & Kposowa, 2002; Wang, 1996).

Seventh, Asian gangs also subscribe to similar subcultural values. For instance, Chin (1996a) found that Chinese gang members greatly valued machismo, honor, and respect. These values are highly regarded and expressed in many Hispanic gangs—particularly honor (Horowitz, 1983). Likewise, older Chinese gang members in Joe's (1994a) study indicated that violence often stemmed from respect and honor.

Lastly, the organizational structure of Asian gangs is similar to other gangs. Contrary to the sensationalized portrayal of Asian gangs as extremely violent and forming a new gang structure, Asian gangs are typically loosely connected (Hunt et al., 1997). Asian gangs are no more cohesive and integrated than black and Hispanic gangs. As Chin (1996b) succinctly stated,

> The very notion of a street gang among the Chinese appears similar to other ethnic gangs. Although Chinese gangs appear to be relatively well integrated units, with clear lines of power and authority, they may be more accurately described as loose confederations of smaller cliques precariously held together by a shared interest. (p. 174)

In summary, Asian gangs share several similarities with other racial gangs. Some scholars have even argued that they are no different from black and Hispanic gangs aside from their "superfluous components" such as language, customary practices, country of origin, and beliefs (Knox & McCurrie, 1997).

Differences between Asian Gangs and Other Racial Gangs

Although there are several similarities between Asian gangs and non-Asian gangs, extant literature shows that they also exhibit unique characteristics and differences. These include theories of gang formation, conflict, territoriality, focal concern, fluidity, and criminal activities.

First, some research has asserted that Asian characteristics are major factors that facilitate gang formation and involvement. Specifically, Chin (1990) argued that affiliation and internalization of Triad norms and beliefs are critical intervening factors for Chinese gang development. In other words, "becoming a gang member invariably involves learning and internalizing Triad norms and values, transmitted by tongs" (Chin, 1990, p. 101). For instance, under the guidance of adult criminal role models, who are affiliated with tongs, youth are instilled with Triad values through initiation ceremonies that emphasize Triad beliefs, such as loyalty, secrecy, brotherhood, and righteousness. Similarly, identity and cultural conflict can also lead to gang involvement. The acculturative process that many recent Asian immigrants face can lead to adoption of a gang culture to alleviate strains and frustrations of the cultural tug-of-war (Tsunokai, 2005; Tsunokai & Kposowa, 2002; Vigil & Yun, 1990).

Second, Sanders (1994) found in his San Diego based study that Asian gangs (specifically Southeast Asian) were unique in that they had interethnic and interracial conflicts with other gangs. This is unique considering that the majority of gang conflicts were intraracial and intraethnic.

Third, some Asian gangs have been noted to be so completely different from the traditional understanding of a street gang that some researchers have suggested they are not gangs at all (Davidson, 1996). Vietnamese gangs often do not fit the traditional patterns of black and Hispanic street gangs. For the most part, they do not claim territory, adopt a particular style of dress, and sometimes, do not even have a gang name (Cowart & Cowart, 1996; Shelden et al., 2013; Vigil & Yun, 1990). Additionally, Hunt and colleagues (1997) noted the lack of demarcated territory among Southeast Asian gangs, although they did have areas and locations that were frequently visited. However, even in the areas where gangs frequent, many gang members stated that they would not start anything unless provoked, which contrasts the understanding of claiming and protecting your “hood” or “barrio”. In addition, Asian gangs are not spatially bounded like many black and Hispanic gangs. In other words, they have very different residential settlement patterns, which makes Asian gangs not bounded by the street subculture (Hunt et al., 1997).

Fourth, the focal concern of Asian gangs has been primarily to generate and control money (Chin, 1990; Sung, 1977). They are entrepreneurial and very pragmatic in that they victimize their own ethnic community because of its lack of understanding and utilization of the criminal justice system (Shelden et al. 2013). Additionally, unlike their black and Hispanic counterparts, they are often secretive and loyal to inhibit law enforcement intrusion. They infrequently engage in fighting, drug dealing, and using hand signs to avoid drawing attention to their illegal activities (Shelden et al., 2013; Vigil & Yun, 1990). Furthermore, Asian gang members (at least in Chicago) often do not admit to gang membership, often change their personal names and the name of the gang to avoid detection from law enforcement (Davidson, 1996). Due to this concern for generating income, Asian gangs have developed a system of practices to reduce official detection.

Fifth, Asian gangs have very fluid membership with members constantly shifting (Shelden et al., 2013; Vigil & Yun, 1990), making it more difficult to penetrate the gang. The members often do not face backlash from the gang for wanting to become less involved, inactive, or switching into another gang (Davidson, 1996).

Lastly, the sources of intergang conflicts and violence are different. Although drug sales are one of the biggest reason for gang conflict among black and Hispanic gangs (Sanders, 1994), this is not the case for Asian gangs. In particular, none of the respondents in Chin’s (1996a) study mentioned drugs as a source of conflict among rival gangs. Interestingly, research has even demonstrated that weapon choice are different for Asian gangs. Within the context of gang homicides, Lopez (2006) found that Asian gangs preferred to use blunt objects while white and black gangs favored knives as their primary weapon of choice.

Although there are notable differences that make Asian gangs unique, some scholars remain skeptical. As discussed earlier, Knox and McCurrie (1997) argued that there is nothing unique about Asian gangs beyond the superficial differences such as language. However, this assertion neglects literature that has highlighted the importance of cultural influences and identity/culture conflicts (Hunt et al., 1997; Long, 1997; Toy, 1992b; Wang, 2002a).

The literature on Asian gangs has provided a great deal of insight into the lives and experiences of Asian gang members (particularly in San Francisco and New York City). Moreover, research has debunked myths about the sophisticated Asian gangster and their connection to organized crime. The extant literature has highlighted the pernicious effects of immigration and cultural conflicts in the formation of Asian gangs. However, much more research is needed to fully understand these phenomena and tease out points of contention. For example, some scholars note an absence in gang territory (Davidson, 1996; Hunt et al., 1997; Vigil & Yun, 1990), while others observed territorial practices (Chin, 1990; Wang, 2002b). A key difference may lie in the fact that Chin’s (1990) observation of territory among Chinese gangs in Chinatown were business and commercial areas, not the typical residential hoods or barrios claimed by black and Hispanic gangs. Additionally, Wang's (2002b) preliminary examination of Hmong and Laotian gangs suggested that these gangs are engaging in territorial disputes. This may result from acculturation, given their relatively recent arrival. However, this is only a tentative suggestion and would require further research.

In conclusion, the unique distinctions and similar overlaps of Asian gangs as well as the lack of consensus in research warrants additional scholarship. As research progresses on Asian gangs, so do the many questions that are left unanswered or not fully discussed. For instance, what about Asian gangs in other states and regions? What about Hmong and other ethnic gangs that have been neglected in research? What role does the community play in the development of Asian gangs? To what degree does acculturation affect gang formation and identity? How do Asian core values (e.g. filial piety, saving face, family honor) affect the gang's focal concerns and activities? What about female Asian gang members? Does desistance differ for Asian gang members due to the fluidity of membership? If serious academic research was conducted to answer these questions, we would gain invaluable insight and knowledge on the Asian gang experience in the United States. This would not only help close the empirical gap that currently exists on Asian gangs, but also contribute to our understanding of the gang phenomenon in general.

Even though we have learned a great deal about Asian gangs based on extant literature, there is still a dearth of literature and many unanswered questions. Thus, this study will help fill this gap by examining Asian gangs in the form of a meta-synthesis. This is particularly important because, as Tsunokai & Kposowa (2002) pointed out, there have not been studies to examine whether or not Chinese and Vietnamese gangs operate similarly considering their ethnic context.

This study will address this issue by examining Asian gangs of several ethnicities to tease out critical themes that emerge in the literature.

A meta-synthesis is the equivalent of a meta-analysis in that it seeks to identify, compare, reduce, interpret, and synthesize a large body of qualitative studies (Wholl, Palacios, Cochran, Sellers, 2013; Noblitz & Hare, 1988). Specifically, a meta-synthesis can provide a greater understanding of a phenomenon through identification, comparison, and integration of salient themes that emerge during qualitative analysis (Doyle, 2003; Noblitz & Hare, 1988; Wholl et al., 2013). Unlike a literature review that summates findings in a linear fashion, a meta-synthesis provides a more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon through linking critical themes that emerge in the context (Campbell, Pound, Pope, Britten, Pill, Morgan, & Donovan, 2003; Doyle, 2003). Thus, it requires an inductive level of analysis in which themes are "translated" into one another to develop a better conceptual understanding of the studied phenomenon, which ultimately extends to theoretical formulation and elaboration.

This study is particular important for two reasons: (1) The lack of Asian gang literature and (2) the underutilization of meta-syntheses in criminal justice and criminology literature. It cannot be stated enough that there is an absence of Asian gang literature. Furthermore, there has not been much contemporary literature on Asian gangs. Secondly, an extensive search for meta-syntheses revealed only two criminal justice and criminology meta-syntheses (Martinez & Abrams, 2013; Wholl et al., 2013). Thus, this study will not only advance our understanding of Asian gangs, but it will also utilize a research method that has rarely been used by criminologists. In summary, it is the combination of a new approach to examining a neglected population that makes this study worthwhile and interesting.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

It is important to note from the outset that the terms “meta-synthesis” and “meta-ethnography” are used interchangeable. As pointed out from scholars who have published and researched on this type of qualitative method, a meta-ethnography is one of several methods for synthesizing qualitative research (Atkins, Lewin, Smith, Engel, Fretheim, & Volmink, 2008). Additionally, even though the term “meta-ethnography” implies that it is used to synthesize only ethnographies, it is applicable to all types of qualitative studies (Britten, Campbell, Pope, Donovan, Morgan, & Pill, 2002). Furthermore, most studies that labeled themselves as meta-syntheses actually used Noblit and Hare’s (1988) seven step guideline—which was originally written to provide steps for conducting a meta-ethnography. The only notable differences between explicit meta-ethnographies and meta-syntheses, is that the former adheres more closely to Noblit and Hare’s (1988) guidelines, achieves a higher degree of conceptual development, and includes a smaller number of studies (Campbell, Pound, Morgan, Daker-White, Britten, Pill, Yardley, Pope, & Donovan, 2011). However, regardless of the method, all qualitative syntheses seek to identify, compare, reduce, interpret, and synthesize a body of qualitative studies (Wholl et al., 2013) to develop third-ordered constructs. To clarify, according to Schutz (1973), all knowledge, both scientific and common sense, are interpreted facts. However, “this does not mean that, in daily life or in science, we are unable to grasp the reality of the world. It just means that we grasp merely certain aspects of it” (Schutz, 1973, p. 5). Therefore, social scientists develop second-ordered constructs by interpreting participants’ interpretation of the world. Following this logic, some scholars have suggested that meta-syntheses develop third-ordered constructs, in which we (the synthesizers) are interpreting the social scientists’ interpretations of the original participants' interpretation (Campbell et al., 2011). Considering this information, the current study's research design is acknowledged as a meta-synthesis, subsuming the characteristics of a meta-ethnography. Therefore it is not surprising that the term "meta-synthesis" has evolved from its original understanding as a distinct method of qualitative comparison to becoming the most comprehensive and generic term for a variety of synthesis approaches (Thorne, Jensen, Kearney, Noblit, & Sandelowski, 2004).

Meta-synthesis

Qualitative syntheses has become more common in recent years (Atkins et al., 2008). Particularly, it has proliferated in health and nursing literature (Aguirre & Bolton, 2013; Atkins et al., 2008; Bondas & Hall, 2007; Britten et al., 2002; Campbell et al., 2011; Thorne et al., 2004; Toye, Seers, Allcock, Briggs, Carr, & Barker, 2014). Within the large body of meta-syntheses in nursing, the most common methodology is a meta-ethnography in which researchers utilized Noblit and Hare's (1988) guideline (Campbell et al., 2011). A meta-synthesis is defined as "the theories, grand narratives, generalizations, or interpretive translations produced from the integration or comparison of findings from qualitative studies" (Sandelowski, Docherty, & Emden, 1997, p. 366). The goals of qualitative meta-syntheses are theory construction, conceptual development, and generalizability in order to make findings readily accessible for practice—this is particularly the case for nursing and education (Jensen & Allen, 1996; Sandelowski et al., 1997; Zimmer, 2006). Additionally, meta-syntheses seek to examine and interpret a number of studies to produce new and integrative interpretations that are more substantial than the interpretations from single studies alone, allowing for conceptual clarification (Finfgeld, 2003). Thus, a meta-synthesis will provide a deeper understanding of theory and the phenomenon being studied, “presenting individual findings in a new interpretive and holistic context” (Wholl, Palacios, Cochran, & Sellers, 2013, p. 81).

A meta-synthesis treats findings from scholarly research as the “raw data” for analysis. However, it is more than a summation of research findings because it involves new analysis for conceptual clarification and theory development (Bondas & Hall, 2007). Additionally, it is an interpretive synthesis of several variations of qualitative data, including phenomenologies, grounded theories, ethnographies, and other explanations of phenomena (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2003). As a result, in the process of synthesizing research, third-ordered constructs are developed to gain a deeper understanding and interpretation of the findings (Campbell, Pound, Pope, Britten, Pill, Morgan, & Donovan, 2003). In summary, the analysis and inductive nature of a meta-synthesis provides another reading and reflection of the data in a new, innovative way in which no two researchers will produce the same results (Jensen & Allen, 1996). It does not provide a greater or more accurate “truth” in virtue of having more available data collected from multiple researchers in a variety of context (McCormick, Rodney, & Varcoe, 2003). However, it does provide answers to new questions by using broader and richer data, which cannot be realized in single studies (McCormick et al., 2003).

Although qualitative meta-synthesis and quantitative meta-analysis do use findings from multiple sources in extant literature, this is the extent of their similarities (Campbell et al., 2003; Doyle, 2003). Meta-analysis is a form of aggregated synthesis for the purpose of predicting outcomes in similar conditions and extending generalizability of past research. It seeks to reduce data findings to a common unit for analysis (Doyle, 2003). Additionally, a meta-analysis requires an exhaustive sampling process, in which the omission of a key paper can have a significant effect on the paper’s ability to draw conclusions (Toye et al., 2014). In contrast, a meta-synthesis aims to enhance theory through an interpretive synthesis of data by reconceptualizing theoretical constructs (Campbell et al., 2003; Noblit & Hare, 1988; Sandelowski et al., 1997; Wholl et al., 2013). Thus, the goal is to compare findings and construct larger narratives of the phenomenon (Sandelowski et al., 1997). As stated earlier, a meta-analysis aims to include as many relevant articles as possible. This is not the case for meta-synthesis because it does not aim to include an entire body of literature; rather it is focused on conceptual analysis. Furthermore, having too many studies can make this process difficult, and even detrimental, for developing third -ordered constructs. In review, although both these forms of synthesis involve analysis of extant literature, they are very different. As Britten and colleagues (2002) stated succinctly, "qualitative research is not about fitting the round peg of qualitative research into the square hole of quantitative methods but about developing separate methodologies" (p. 209).

Although meta-syntheses have flourished in nursing, education, and even social work disciplines (e.g. Aguierre & Bolton, 2013; Campbell at el., 2003), it has received virtually no attention in the field of criminology and criminal justice research (Wholl et al., 2013). A thorough search for meta-syntheses within criminology and criminal justice resulted in only two published articles (see Wholl et al., 2013; Martinez & Abrams, 2013). Notably, both these studies were relatively recent, which indicated the non-existence of prior meta-syntheses in our field. Additionally, further review into these articles' reference list did not produce any other criminology and criminal justice meta-synthesis. Within Wholl and colleagues' (2013) study, they developed third-ordered constructs regarding rational choice theory and further developed the theory by synthesizing six ethnographies. Martinez and Abrams (2013) examined the role of informal support networks in the reentry experiences of young offenders by synthesizing 13 articles. Although both these studies utilized Noblit and Hare's (1988) seven step guideline, there was variation in how they approached each step. Notably, even the sample size and type of qualitative studies included differed, reflecting the “loose” design of meta-syntheses. Overall, Wholl and colleagues (2013) recommended continued use of meta-synthesis in the field of criminology and criminal justice to provide new and innovative interpretations of related phenomena. Taking their advice, this study explored and interpreted the Asian gang experience with the application of a meta-synthesis.

Noblit and Hare’s (1988) Seven Step Guide

Most meta-syntheses rely on Noblit and Hare’s (1988) seven step guide because it is a classic method, has implications for additional research, and is the most cited method for meta-synthesis publications (Bondas & Hall, 2007; Finfgeld, 2003). Before elaboration on these seven steps, it is important to understand that synthesis in not a concrete, linear process. Rather, there are multiple iterations, steps frequently revisited, and most importantly, multiple ways to “complete” the steps (i.e. there is no one correct way to accomplish each step)(see Lee, Hart, Watson, & Rapley, 2015). As a result, no two identical meta-synthesis are produced even if given the same research material (Jensen & Allen, 1996). These seven steps are: (1) getting started, (2) deciding what is relevant to the initial interest, (3) reading the studies, (4) determining how the studies are related, (5) translating the studies into one another, (6) synthesizing the translations, and (7) expressing the synthesis (Noblit & Hare, 1988).

The first step—getting started—refers to identifying an initial interest that may be further developed and informed through a qualitative synthesis. Also, the initial interest should consider the intended audience (Wholl et al., 2013; Noblit & Hare, 1988). Additionally, the research interest can be broad (e.g. Wholl et al., 2013) or narrow (e.g. Martinez & Abrams, 2013). However, the focus of the synthesis can change as the inductive process continues. Thus, there is no consensus about the proper scope of a meta-synthesis, although the project should be large enough to include studies that refute the main body of work (Walsh & Downe, 2005).

The second step—deciding relevant literature—consists of purposive sampling for studies that meet the researcher's "inclusion" criteria. Thus, the sample for a meta-synthesis will depend on the scope of the paper. For instance, Toye and colleagues (2014) suggested that if very little has been published on the topic, it may be necessary to have a larger research scope. Conversely, if there has been a lot published, it may be necessary to narrow the scope and exclude studies that do not fit the research interest. Additionally, there is no consensus on which sources are best. For example, some researchers suggested only peer-reviewed journal articles, while others suggested only unpublished reports (to avoid publication bias) (Bondas & Hall, 2007; Finfgeld, 2003). Furthermore, Doyle (2003) suggested that any study could be used so long as it provides the richest source of data synthesis. Another area of contention is whether or not studies of differing qualitative perspectives can be synthesized. In other words, can studies utilizing phenomenology be synthesized with ethnographies? Jensen and Allen (1996) argued that they could not, while other researchers have argued that the synthesis of multiple perspectives can counterbalance the limitations inherent in one type of method (Knafl & Breitmayer, 1991). Lastly, the sample size for meta-syntheses is also not concrete. The sample size is dependent on the scope of the topic, research questions, and objectives (Wholl et al., 2013). Noblit and Hare (1988) suggested that between two to six studies is sufficient, while others have recommended 10 to 12 (Bondas & Hall, 2007). Some researchers have even synthesized as many as 77 studies (Toye at al., 2014). Because of the lack of consensus, there is no "magical number", thus the number of studies included is up to the researcher and interests of the intended audience.

The third step—reading the studies—is the repeated process of carefully examining the text throughout the entire synthesis process (Noblit & Hare, 1988). Within this phase, researchers not only carefully read the studies, but they also begin creating and coding for metaphors—the "themes, perspectives, organizers, and/or concepts revealed by qualitative studies" (Noblit & Hare, 1988, p. 14) (Atkins et al., 2008). In short, this phase is revisited multiple times to compare, identify, extract, organize, relate, and verify findings and metaphors (Lee et al., 2015).

The fourth step—determining the relationship between studies—is the phase in which key concepts are coded, and similarities, differences, and patterns are recognized. Specifically, a table of relevant concepts is created and facilitate careful evaluation of the number of important concepts that exists across studies. Subsequently, a frequency count can be completed to examine the prevalence of key themes within each study. Furthermore, the most prevalent themes among the sample will provide the opportunity to recognize commonalities, differences, and patterns among the sample (Wholl et al., 2013).

The fifth step—translating studies—concerns the creation of common metaphors (i.e. holistic interpretations of key concepts) that can then be used to represent the prevalent concepts that run across all studies (Wholl et al., 2013). This phase encompasses the creation of metaphors that capture the meanings of the text in each study. Metaphors are considered adequate when they meet five requirements: (1) economy (i.e. parsimony), (2) cogency (non-ambiguous, non-contradictory, and non-redundant), (3) range—"ability to integrate a wide range of data relative to a similar phenomenon" (Wholl et al., 2013, p. 100), (4) apparency (ability of metaphor to show experience, rather than refer to it), and (5) credibility (understood by the intended audience) (Noblit & Hare, 1988). Thus, in this phase, the researcher reduce the major prevalent themes into an even smaller set of metaphors. These metaphors "serve as holistic representations of the most common and salient concepts/themes found in the data that also maintained the original language" of the studies (Wholl et al., 2013, p. 101)

The sixth step—synthesizing translations—refers to the process of putting metaphors in a new interpretive order to explain the interaction and connections between phenomena in different situations in a way that can be understood by the intended audience (Noblit & Hare, 1988; Wholl et al., 2013). Thus, the synthesizer interprets the relationships between all the studies. Noblit and Hare (1988) asserted that there are three types of relationships: (1) reciprocal, (2) refutational, and (3) line of argument. A reciprocal relationship exists when the studies are about similar issues and metaphors could account for one study as it does for another (Thorne et al., 2004). A refutational relationship exists when the studies refute each other. Lastly, a line of argument relationship can be established when the studies suggest an argument or inference about a larger issue. Essentially, it is recognizing that people often study different aspects of the same phenomenon and that it is possible to link these different perspectives to gain a fuller account of the phenomenon by arranging the metaphors in an order that constructs an argument (Thorne et al., 2004).

The seventh step—expressing the synthesis—refers to effectively communicating the synthesis to the intended audience (Noblit & Hare, 1988). This is accomplished when the synthesis is presented in the audience's particular language and they can view the phenomenon in a new perspective. Furthermore, it must be presented in an appropriate form (Noblit & Hare, 1988; Wholl et al., 2013). For example, Wholl and colleagues (2013) graphically displayed their synthesis as a cycle (see Figure 1 in Wholl et al., 2013) and illustrated the interactions and fluidity of the constructed metaphors.

In review, these seven steps are followed to complete a meta-synthesis. As demonstrated by various authors, there is no standard method for conducting a meta-synthesis (Britten et al., 2002; Finfgeld, 2003). Additionally, although Noblit and Hare’s (1988) guide has been highly utilized, it does not offer a robust guide or provide concrete details for each step. Furthermore, although these steps are listed in sequential order, they often overlap and parallel, thus engaging the researcher in a highly inductive and interpretive cycle (Lee et al., 2015; McCormick et al., 2003).

Data collection and Analysis

Inherent in this methodology, there is no need to collect “raw data” (i.e. interviews); rather, the data will already be publicly available in the form of books, published articles, and dissertations. Thus, there will not be any concerns with traditional ethical issues raised in qualitative research, such a participant access, respects for person, and mitigation of harm.

Steps 1-2

Of primary importance is the sample of articles that was included in the analysis. The lack of empirical literature on Asian gangs informed the decision for an appropriate sample size. As discussed earlier, there is contention about the appropriate number of studies to include for a meta-synthesis, ranging from two to 77 (e.g. Campbell et al., 2003; Noblit & Hare, 1988; Toy et al., 2014). Additionally, Toye and colleagues (2014) suggested that if very little has been published about your topic, it may be necessary to have a larger research scope. Thus, considering that there has been very little published on Asian gangs, this synthesis included as many studies as possible. However, to avoid including irrelevant or inappropriate studies, an inclusion and exclusion criteria were developed.

The inclusion criteria contained five requirements. First, the study or a component (e.g. a chapter of a book) of the study had to focus on Asian gangs (or "crime/street groups" that were obviously in reference to street gangs) in the United States. Additionally, this study defined "Asian" as people whose origins were of east (e.g. China, Japan, Korea) and/or southeast regions (e.g. Vietnam, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia) of Asia. In other words, South Asian countries were not included (e.g. India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka). This was based on the historical context of immigration, war, and sentiment of the "yellow peril". Second, the study had to include a discussion on the Asian gang experience. This meant that the study was not simply a descriptive account of Asian gangs (e.g. age, prevalence of gang, number of Asian gang members). Third, the methodology of the studies had to be grounded in qualitative principles. Although two studies that utilized mixed methods were included, only data that drawn from the qualitative components were coded for analysis. Furthermore, their methods had to be made explicit. Fourth, the study had to be authored by a researcher (i.e. published by university/academic press, funded, peer-reviewed, dissertation, or acknowledged as an academic). In other words, the study could not be media or journalistic accounts of Asian gangs (e.g. newspaper, internet article, or radio transcription). Fifth, the study had to be written in English. In addition to the inclusion requirements, there was one point of exclusion: the article could not focus on transnational organized criminal groups (e.g. Chinese Triads and Japanese Yakuza). Similar to gangs, there is a lack of agreement on defining organized crime (Paoli, 2002). Some definitions are extremely vague and do not distinguish between different criminal groups. For example, the Federal Bureau of Investigation defines organized crime as:

> Any group having some manner of a formalized structure and whose primary objective is to obtain money through illegal activities. Such groups maintain their position through

> the use of actual or threatened violence, corrupt public officials, graft, or extortion, and generally have a significant impact on the people in their locales, region, or the country as a whole. (“Organized Crime”, n.d., para. 1)

This definition does not provide sufficient detail to distinguish between street gangs and more well-known organized criminal groups. However, Curry and colleagues (2014) have pointed out that there are four key points that distinguish gangs from other criminal groups: The goals of gangs are more symbolic, they have a less-defined organizational structure, “exhibit fluid levels of cooperation, commitment, and leadership and engage in sporadic profit-making activities” (p. 56), and are more concerned with territory. Based on this knowledge, any study that listed itself as a study of organized crime and/or focused exclusively on the Triads or Yakuza was excluded. It is imperative to make this distinction between organized criminal groups and street gangs because of the distinguishing factors mentioned earlier. This is particularly the case for excluding studies on organized criminal groups like the Triads. Specifically, although Chinese gangs have been observed to adopt Triad attitudes (Chin, 1990), this is an adoption of attitudes and not the scope of criminal activities. As noted earlier, the Triads engage in variety of criminal activities across the world with many networks. Typical street gangs tend to be more localized, less organized, and more sporadic in criminal activities.

There is no standard method for creating an inclusion or exclusion criteria. It is solely based on the researcher and the intended audience. Following these requirements, 15 studies were selected for synthesis (see Appendix A for list and Table 1 for sample characteristics). Although past meta-synthesis have utilized a quality appraisal process to determine whether the quality of the study was sufficient for inclusion, this study does not based on two reasons. First, there is very limited research on Asian gangs; therefore, it was appropriate to include as many

Table 1. Characteristic of the sample

Author	Study Location	Sample	Methods	Ethnicity
Chin (1996)*	New York City, NY	62 former and current male gang members	Interviews	Chinese
Choo (2007)	New York City, NY	12 male gang members	Interviews and participant observation	Korean
Cowart and Cowart (1996)	Dallas, TX	1 male gang member	Interviews	Laotian
Hunt, Joe, and Waldorf (1997)	San Jose, CA	91 male gang members	Interviews	Vietnamese, Chinese/Vietnamese
Kendis and Kendis (1976)	Boston, MA	30 - 40 "street boys"	Interviews and participant observation	Chinese
Ko (2015)*	San Pablo and Richmond, CA	8 former and current male gang members	Interviews	Laotian, Vietnamese, Laotian/Burmese, Mien
Lam (2009)	San Gabriel Valley and Orange County, CA	2 males and 1 female current or former gang members	Interviews	Vietnamese
Long and Ricard (1996)	Santa Clara County, CA	------------------------------	Drawn from experience as a youth counselor, including informal interviews and participant observations	Indochinese, Vietnamese
Mark (1997)	Oakland, CA	8 former male gang members	Interviews and participant observations	Chinese
Pih and Mao (2005)	Roland Heights, Hacienda Heights, and Walnut, CA	21 males and 1 female former and current gang members	Interviews	Taiwanese
Sung (1977)	New York City, NY	8 interviews with a social worker, a wannabe, a former member, 2 current members, a Chinatown civic leader, and 2 police officers	Interviews	Chinese
Toy (1992a)	San Francisco, CA	73 former and current gang members	Interviews and participant observations	Chinese, Chinese/Vietnamese
Toy (1992b)	San Francisco, CA	73 former and current gang members	Interviews and participant observations	Chinese, Chinese/Vietnamese
Vigil (2002)	Whittier and Los Angeles, CA	------------------------------	Interviews and participant observations	Vietnamese
Vigil and Yun (1990)	Deidentified as regional CYA (California Youth Authority) center	Interviews with police, social workers, CYA administrative personnel, and 17 gang members	Interviews	Vietnamese

* Only qualitative component was examined and included for synthesis.

studies as possible that met the inclusion criteria. This was justified because although there are frameworks that suggest quality appraisal, there is no consensus on what makes a study “good” (Toye et al., 2014). Second, studies were assumed to be of acceptable quality due to publication in a peer-reviewed journal or by a university press. This is justified considering that some researchers have also made the same assumption and still published highly cited work (Britten et al., 2002).

Steps 3-4

For analysis, open coding on second-order constructs (Schutz, 1973) was utilized. These codes were generated from a variety of narratives, which included direct quotes from participants in the original studies, observations and life narratives discussed by the authors, and even interview transcriptions. Both a priori codes as well as invivo codes (Marshall & Rossman, 2016) were utilized during the coding process. A priori codes included masculinity, racism/discrimination, protection, community disorganization, family disruption, and cultural identity conflict. Masculinity referred to the idea of displaying or acquiring toughness, respect, and “being a man”. Racism/discrimination related to experiences with racism and discrimination that may have been the impetus for gang formation and persistence. Similarly, protection referred to gang formation because of actual or perceived victimization. Community disorganization referred to the disorganization experienced by Asian youth within their community. Family disruption captured the tension that immigrant families endure due to changing lifestyle (e.g. overworked parents, lack of emotional support). Lastly, cultural/identity conflict referred to issues that youth experience due to acculturation and assimilation. In other words, the cultural tug of war they experience. Through the process of reading the studies, invivo themes were also coded. After open coding, the average frequency of each code was examined to see which concepts were most prevalent across all studies. This is important because meta-syntheses are not only concerned with the integration of findings, but also with comparing different findings among studies (Sandelowski et al., 1997). Thus, a frequency count determined major themes as well as provided a preliminary examination of similarities and differences that existed between studies.

Steps 5-6

After discovery of the main themes, appropriate metaphors or third-ordered constructs (Britten et al., 2002) based on Noblit and Hare's (1988) criteria (i.e. economy, cogency, range, apparency, and credibility) were developed. These metaphors were informed by the main themes, which resulted in insightful third-ordered constructs that retained the nuances that existed between the studies. After the development and interpretative ordering of the metaphors, a line of argument relationship emerged which allowed for the incorporation of similarities and differences. Importantly, the findings were reached through two existing lenses—the interpretation of the publishing authors as well as my own interpretation of the data (i.e. findings from studies).

Step 7

Once the metaphors were developed, the synthesis was presented with intelligible concepts appropriate for the intended audience. Furthermore, the findings were presented in a manner consistent with academic expectations.

In summary, these were the seven steps outlined by Noblit and Hare (1988) for conducting a meta-synthesis. Again, there is no standard for conducting a meta-synthesis (Britten et al., 2002; Finfgeld, 2003), thus, this methodology was guided by Noblit and Hare (1988), and past research as well as more recent contributions (e.g. Martinez & Abrams, 2013; Wholl et al., 2013).

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The major themes for this study resulted from the comparison of the average frequency count of each theme to the grand average for all themes. The grand average was calculated to form a baseline or cutoff for determining significance, which was about three coded data passages per case. In other words, if a theme appeared on average about three times per case, then it was considered significant. After an initial frequency count, certain themes were consolidated due to their similar and overlapping meanings, reducing the number of coded themes from 37 down to 28. For example, “ties that bind” was consolidated with the theme “desistance” because the data suggested that although gang members desisted from active gang membership, they retained social ties with certain members of the gang.

After consolidation, frequency counts were reexamined and compared to the new grand average (i.e. 2.9) to finalize the list of major themes (see Figure 1). Wholl and colleagues (2013) noted that counts do “not provide insight into the substantive meaning of the concepts” (p. 87) but rather facilitate the analytic process of identifying patterns across the studies. Thus, it would be inappropriate to make direct inferences about the studied phenomenon based on these counts alone. Furthermore, not all major themes were coded for in all the studies (see Table 2). This is largely a result of the broad research question and inclusion criteria. For example, the topics of these studies ranged from reasons for joining to the creation of identity within the gang. After consolidation and prevalence counts, 11 major themes emerged from the data: (1) masculinity, (2) racism and discrimination, (3) protection, (4) family disruption, (5) cultural/identity conflicts, (6) gang conflicts, (7) second family/brotherhood, (8) gang structural characteristics, (9) gang desistance, (10) money, and (11) gang activities and victims.

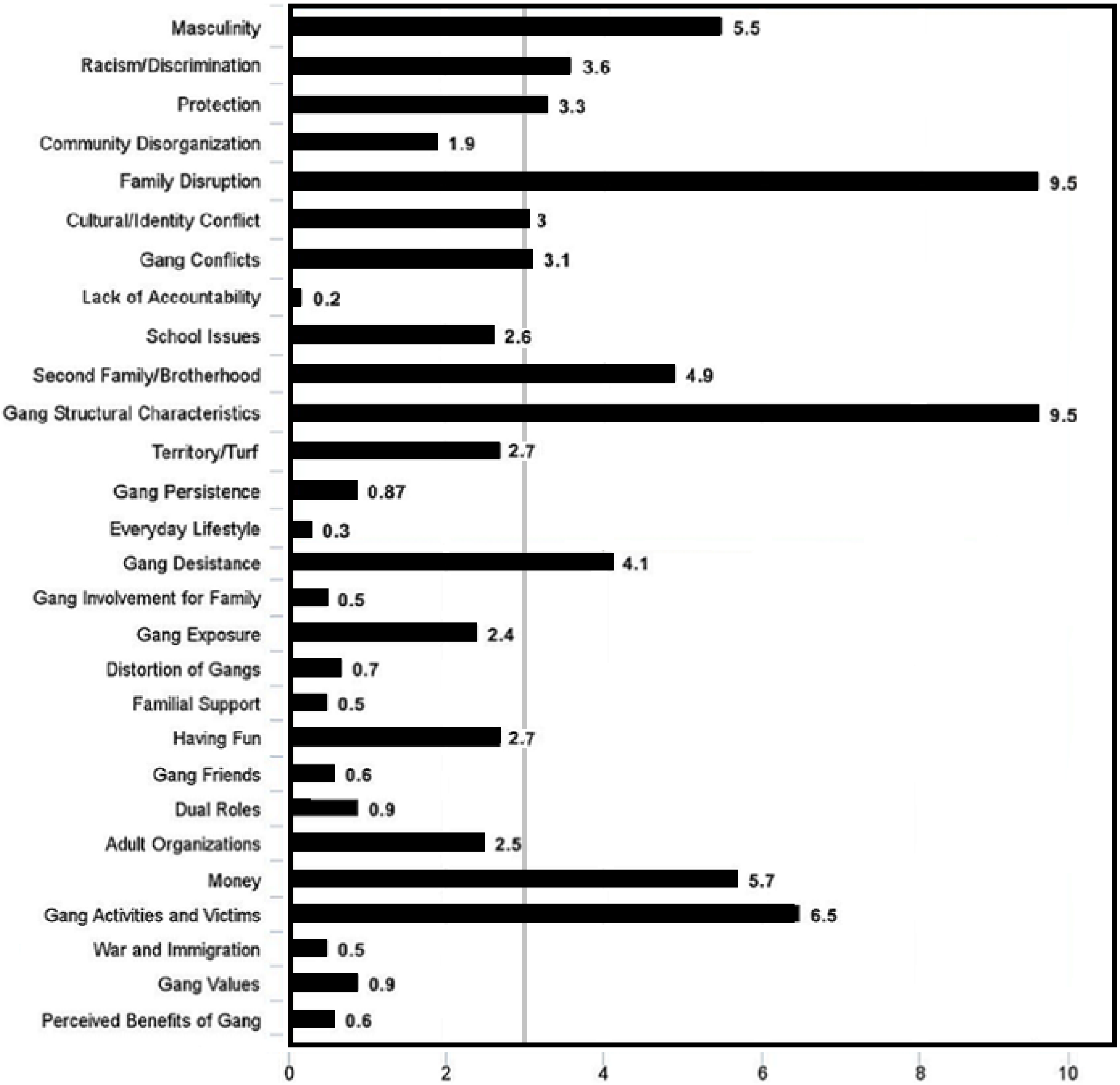

Figure 1. The average frequency counts for all coded themes.
Note: The line represents the grand average (2.9).

Table 2. Frequency counts of major themes

	Mascunlity	Racism/ Discrimination	Protection	Family Disruption	Cultural/ Identity	Gang Conflicts	Second Family/ Brotherhood	Gang Structural Characteristics	Gang Desistance	Money	Gang Activities
Chin (1996)*	4	0	2	2	0	16	2	24	7	5	24
Choo (2007)	10	1	3	2	4	4	7	25	6	7	18
Cowart and Cowart (1996)	5	3	0	6	1	1	1	1	0	0	1
Hunt, Joe, and Waldorf (1997)	0	9	5	9	4	1	6	20	0	0	0
Kendis and Kendis (1976)	3	3	0	5	13	0	3	0	0	1	1
Ko (2015)*	8	5	1	35	2	2	14	3	15	0	0
Lam (2009)	5	12	9	9	3	9	5	17	12	5	0
Long and Ricard (1996)	12	5	3	34	2	0	16	11	1	21	6
Mark (1997)	0	3	3	0	4	3	0	4	2	1	3
Pih and Mao (2005)	7	0	1	1	0	0	3	2	7	3	0
Sung (1977)	16	2	7	11	1	5	1	19	6	20	24
Toy (1992a)	1	1	2	0	0	4	2	2	2	3	7
Toy (1992b)	3	1	12	6	5	0	8	6	4	6	1
Vigil (2002)	7	7	1	16	5	2	3	5	0	9	9
Vigil and Yun (1990)	2	2	1	6	1	0	2	4	0	5	3
Average	5.5	3.6	3.3	9.5	3.0	3.1	4.9	9.5	4.1	5.7	6.5

Major Themes

Masculinity

Masculinity was the display of toughness, gaining or earning respect, and simply “being a man”. Furthermore, masculinity was often attained through gang membership in which reputation and status are easily accessible due to the prestige of a gang. This is because certain gangs are well known and have often acquired a reputation for being tough. Thus, the gang provided members with an aura of masculinity by simply being a committed member. For example, a former gang member in Ko’s (2015) study stated that one benefit of gang membership was that

> it also lead to a certain type of respect. People would recognize me for hanging up [*sic*] with this certain group of folks, they would think twice before they would disrespect me….they would rob me….they would make fun of me in school and outside of school….in the neighborhood of the school that is. (p. 41)

Furthermore, masculinity was often measured by the attention and status they were afforded from other youths, especially girls. Pih and Mao (2005) found “that several respondents joined gangs because they wanted to gain attention from females. ‘Chicks dig it’, said ‘Francis’. They believed females were attracted to the power, coolness and the masculine facade of being a gang member” (p. 67). Ultimately, masculinity played a major role in a gang because it provided a sense of empowerment. This is especially salient during times of conflict. As Sung (1977) found,

> the macho image has a lot to do with it. The martial arts and the street image are very important to their face. When they war, if you really look at it objectively, most of the youth in the gangs have identical backgrounds but they see each other as competitors. (p. 6)

In summary, masculinity was a central concern with acquiring a degree of prestige, status, and self-empowerment.

Racism and Discrimination

This theme referred to gang members' experiences with racism and discrimination. These experiences often are the impetus for joining and staying committed to the gang. Additionally, members were often targets of discrimination from a variety of sources, including law enforcement. For instance, a gang member in Cowart and Cowart's (1996) study stated that law enforcement "think that all Asian kids are gangsters anyway. All they do is stop kids, tell us that we're gooks, and write our names down. They wouldn't do that to Hispanics" (p. 313). Furthermore, gang members were often subjected to discrimination from people of their own race and ethnicity. Mark (1996) found that all the Chinese gang members in his study

> indicated that after their arrival in the United States, they were verbally harassed and physically abused by many different groups at school and in their neighborhoods. The gang members stated that the people that harassed them the most were the American-born Chinese (ABCs). (p. 45)

Ultimately, racism and discrimination became inevitable to many young gang members. Hunt and colleagues (1997) found that

> as our respondents moved into their teen years, race and ethnicity increasingly became important in their interactions with others. As one respondent reflected, "when I was little, I just played with anybody. But now, I don't know, you have to be with your own kind." It is at this point that they often faced physical and verbal abuse from their contemporaries in school who taunted them with racial stereotypes. (p. 14)

In summary, racism and discrimination was a pervasive force in many young gang members lives because the effect it had on their daily experiences in their neighborhoods and schools.

Protection

Gang members often stated that protection was a source of security from perceived, anticipated, and/or actual victimization. Toy (1992a) found that victimization and "the fear of repeated incidences of victimization are, therefore, the main catalysts leading to gang membership and continued gang participation. According to interview data, gang membership is perceived as the most effective methods of revenge and protection" (p. 21). Furthermore, the protection afforded by the gang also ensured that retaliatory actions could be taken against individuals (gang or non-gang) who had initially victimized the gang member. For example, Chin (1996b) found that many "subjects joined gangs because they were frequently attacked by schoolmates, who may or may not have been gang members" (p. 109). In addition, many gang members felt that gang membership "was the most effective way to deter such attacks" (Chin, 1996b, p. 106) and that by "joining a gang, youth from other gangs would not dare to touch you" (Pih & Mao, 2005). In summary, protection was an important factor for why youth joined gangs because it ensured security against victimization as well as a means to exact revenge.

Family Disruption

This theme referred to the tension and strains within the family unit. These "disruptions" negatively affected the family, especially more so for the children. For instance, one of the most common familial strains experienced by the gang members was the absence of their parents. One gang member reflected on his childhood and stated that

> my dad was into that 'being the good' provider shit. That's what being a good father was all about to him, nothing more. He always had to work, work, work. That's all he thought

> about, making a living and getting ahead in life. No amount of money was enough for him. He measured his success as a father by how much money he brought home. My mother worked long hours in a sweat shop and so we never saw her either. And it was like there was no time for us. So we more or less ran loose. (Toy, 1992b, p. 17)

In addition, family issues were exacerbated from the “role reversal” or reliance of parents on their children, resulting in “forced adulthood” or the acquisition of greater responsibilities. One gang member stated that

> the only thing I’m good for is to translate for my parents…My mother is sick all the time so I am the one who is pulled out of school to translate for them at the hospital. I do all the record-keeping too. I write all the checks, and I always have to worry about the bills. I never have time to be a kid. I’ve always had to be the adult. (Cowart & Cowart, 1996, p. 312)

Furthermore, parents held their children to high academic expectations. However, most parents were unable to provide the support and assistance necessary to help their children excel. This is in part because of their unfamiliarity with the English language. A former gang member stated that

> she’s [his mother] been supportive most of my life but the challenge was that she didn’t have the social capital to help me. Meaning, she always wanted me to do well in school, she wanted me to go to college, she wanted me to be a doctor but she couldn’t help me with my homework. (Ko, 2015, p.36)

In summary, issues at home with the family had negative consequences that often propelled youths towards gangs.

Cultural and Identity Conflicts

Cultural and identity conflicts referred to the issues that gang members experienced due to acculturation and assimilation. They saw themselves in a marginalized position, where they were neither fully American nor fully ethnically Asian (e.g. Chinese, Vietnamese) because they were "raised in what is in effect two worlds, but they receive only partial socialization into either" (Kendis & Kendis, 1976, p. 2). Consequently, these youth become frustrated, resentful, and confused, pushing them towards gangs as a means of finding a meaningful identity. For example, Vigil (2002) found that

> children, less bound to the cultural ethics of their homeland than their parents, find themselves pulled both ways in a cultural tug-of-war between their parents and the outside society. This cultural tug-of-war also plays into the internal formation of the youth's identity. Culturally the gang youth may be more U.S. than Vietnamese-oriented, but racially the youth will never be able to escape her or his ethnic background. (p. 104)

Furthermore, if the gang did not provide resolution or a meaningful identity to the member, he/she was able to seek gang membership elsewhere. For example, a gang member in Choo's (2005) study that shifted from a Korean to Chinese gang stated that "When I hang out with KP (Korean Power gang), I was younger member there. I wasn't familiar with showing respect to Korean elders. I didn't like that. I was brought up American, you know" (p. 65). In summary, the gang provided an identity refuge for youth experiencing cultural and identity conflicts and "can be viewed as a new strategy providing an acceptable self-image for the boys, as members of a group, on their own terms" (Kendis & Kendis, 1976, p. 2).

Gang Conflicts

This theme captured the conflicts that occurred between other gangs and within the gang organization itself. Furthermore, these conflicts occurred due to exclusive gang membership and were often perpetuated by racist encounters and the implicit expectations of gang loyalty, notably the need for retaliatory action. For instance, the case of former gang member “Melo” in Lam’s (2009) study illustrated how gangs were readily available to avenge one of their own.

> Melo was "pretty pissed" when he heard one of his homeboys was fatally shot by a WC rival while in prison. After this incident, different Asian Boyz cliques came together as an umbrella group, as they sought retaliation on Wah Ching (WC) gang members. Melo states, "...all the homeboys from Long Beach, Van Nuys, Chinatown, out here [W. San Gabriel Valley]...every night, they went looking for them (WC), you know." (p. 145)

Furthermore, some families were torn by gang conflict due to gang rivalries among brothers and cousins.

> At times, the loyalty to the gangs was so deep that it would been brother to brother or cousin to cousin. Phil states that they would often be “fighting other Asian folks... sometimes it ended up being some of our own family”. (Ko, 2015, p. 63)

Not all conflicts were met with violence or retaliation and some were deferred with a truce. These truces stemmed from the need to collectively defend against racial conflicts. For instance,

> Melo’s gang did not get along with other Asian gangs at Keppel, as well, "we used to hate them (other Asian rival gangs)." Since the Asians and Mexicans got at it... we call peace at that time. We got along. The Hispanics, you know, tried to get at all of us. So we just teamed up... If it meant us, like, getting along with our enemies which was our own race, too...we had to do it, cause' they made it a racial thing." (Lam, 2009, p 106).

In addition to intergang rivalry, many gangs often experienced internal conflicts. For instance, Chin (1996b) found that the “Pell and Grand factions (Manhattan) of the Flying Dragons are often in conflict with each other” and that “there is little cooperation among the various factions of a Chinese gang and that these factions or subgroups can be considered gangs in and of themselves” (p. 115). In summary, gang conflicts, both internal and external, were common experiences held by all gang members.

Second Family and Brotherhood

The gang often became a second family in which members were instilled with a strong sense of solidarity and brotherhood. The gang satisfied the emotional and material void that stemmed from home. Thus, the gang became a surrogate family in which members actively sought emotional support. For example, a gang member in Toy’s (1992a) study stated that

> almost all of us came from broken homes. Everybody had their own problems, and that’s why we needed each other. We were young we didn’t know what life was all about. The gang gave us brothers, little brothers, and big brothers that led us and taught us. It all made a lot of sense back then. It doesn’t make much sense to me now, but back then it was your family, your *Hing Dais* (brothers). (Emphasis in original, p. 25)

Similarly, a gang member in Long’s (1996) reported that,

> when I [am] with my friends they seem to respect me more and care more for me by the attention they give me. They give me respect for the wrongs that I do, but it is better having the wrong kind of respect than having no respect which I’ve never experienced from…my family. (p. 91)

Consequently, strong social bonds were formed and gang members became willing to do anything for their brothers and gang family. Two gang members in Vigil and Yun's (1990) study described the love that gang members felt towards their gang.

> One 20-year-old informant said, "We have a lot of respect and love for each other. We really with together [sic]. We live with each other. We're real close to each other." Another informant emphatically declared, "They were family to me…I love 'em. Something come down, I'll be there for them…I'd die for my homeboys." Affection is declared by calling their homeboys *ahn* (the Vietnamese word for brother) or by using personal nicknames (e.g. one informant was referred to as "*Co*," which means flamingo). (Emphasis in original, Vigil & Yun, 1990, p. 157).

In summary, the gang often replaced the family and became the sole source of emotional and monetary support, so much so that often times a gang member's immediate family was unaware of his or her wellbeing. For instance, Kendis and Kendis (1976) recalled an instance where "one boy was arrested for trafficking in drugs his friends raised bail money and hired a lawyer for him, and even after he stood trial his parents were not aware of his experience" (p. 5).

Gang Structural Characteristics

This theme described the basic structural characteristics of Asian gangs. Overall, unlike the sensationalized media reports, Asian gangs were typically loosely structured. Hunt and colleagues (1997) found that

> in terms of general gang organization, our data suggests that most of the Southeast Asian gangs in this study exhibited little hierarchical divisions….When asked the question: "Is your gang divided into older and younger members?", the majority of our Southeast

> Asian respondents said that there was no hierarchical differences within the gang based on age. (p. 17)

Thus, Hunt and colleagues (1997) concluded that the "absence of internal hierarchy, and a clearly defined leadership seems to suggest that Southeast Asian gangs fit the typology of horizontally organized gangs" (p. 17). Although some gangs did not have a complex level of internal hierarchy, others did have some distinction based on leadership. Furthermore, the level of structural complexity seemed related to the ethnicity of the Asian gang. For instance, Pih and Mao (2005) found that in their examination of Taiwanese gang members (who associated with Chinese gangs), there was some degree of internal hierarchy and structure. Specifically,

> at least one respondent is a gang elder (Dai Dai Lo), and another two were captains (Dai lo) of local sides. These Dai Dai Lo and Dai Lo provided extensive knowledge on the structure operations, personnel, and other highly sensitive information with regard to their respective organizations. (p. 65)

In addition, in Choo's (2005) study of Korean gang members (who also associated with Chinese gangs) found that there were four generations of members, in which "big brothers" constituted the first two generations and each "generation has its own leaders while older generation leaders often extend their leadership over the younger generation members" (p. 122). Furthermore, leadership was based on the level of gang involvement and activity. One member of the third generation of the Mo Ming Pai gang in Choo's (2005) study stated that "If you're not active, you're not recognized as a leader of the generation" (p. 122). In addition to active involvement, Sung (1977) also found that some members eventually took on leadership roles through a natural process of prolonged membership. In particular, the "ones that do stay 'hard-core' find themselves the leaders because the others have left and they are the leaders over the upcoming generation" (p. 11).

Even though these hierarchal divisions were utilized primarily by Chinese gangs, not all Asian gangs subscribed to this structure, as initially noted by Hunt and colleagues (1997). Specifically, some Asian gangs expressly rejected any attempts to become more structurally organized. One Vietnamese gang member from Lam's (2009) study emphatically stated that

> we still got the triple OGs, the forefathers or whatever you want to call it, you know. The people we talk to, man...people for wisdom. It's not like the other (Asian) gangs out there, we got no "dai lo" (big brother) or whatever you want to call it...leader. We got no leaders, no nothing like that...no "shot-callers"...none of that shit. We don't listen to one person, we're a unit. It's teamwork. (p. 97)

In addition to loose structural organization, Asian gangs often borrowed or imitated gang practices (e.g. dress) from traditional black and Hispanic gangs. Lam (2009) noted that

> as P-Dog, Melo, and their homeboys started high school in the early 1990s, they distinguished themselves from other Asian gangs in the area with their dress, style, and speech. They were perhaps the first Vietnamese-Chinese gang in the San Gabriel Valley to dress like the "eses" (Chicano gang members) and talk "black." More specifically, their mode of speech is associated with urban black vernacular. Undoubtedly, they were influenced by the rise of hip hop music and West Coast "gangsta rap" that was going through the Southern California airwaves. They were rocking the Dickies, Nike Cortez and shaving off their heads [*sic*], much like their Chicano counterparts. (pp. 134-135)

Most notable about Asian gangs was their lack of residential territory or turf. This practice was often seen as pointless as illustrated by a gang member from Vigil and Yun's (1990) study:

"Black and Ese [jail slang for Chicano] gang they…fight for neighborhood. They shoot each other for nothing" (p. 159). However, commercial areas were typically claimed as territory due to the lucrative opportunities to generate money. Thus, unlike black and Hispanic gangs that had violent disputes over residential territory, Asian gangs often come in conflict over commercial territory. Choo (2007) stated that "Inter-gang violence used to be inevitable when businesss-extortion areas overlapped with the Korean Fuk Ching gang" (p. 77). In summary, the Asian gang typically exhibited loose organization; therefore there often exist no definitive modes of gang practice. Furthermore, Asian gangs have adopted several modes of practice from black and Hispanic gangs.

Gang Desistance

Not all gang members had a lifelong commitment to the gang. On the contrary, the majority of gang members desisted for a variety of reasons, including familial concerns. For instance, Pih and Mao (2005) found that

> for the former gang members, they admitted their parents were a crucial reason for leaving the gang lifestyle. They expressed dire concerns for bringing shame and disgrace to their parents and families, and they did not want to continue to disappoint their parents. (p. 66)

Most respondents in Pih and Mao's (2005) study left the gang after graduating high school and heading into college. Thus, these feelings of familial concern may be a function of maturation. Additionally, gang members also became disillusioned with the lifestyle. One gang member in Chin's (1996b) study stated that

> I felt like I had the potential to do something else. I felt that the life of a gangster was not glorious anymore. It is a way of life that is filthy and corrupt. Also, there were so many

> intergang fights. The gang only know how to victimize their own people. It is really disgusting. (p. 111)

Furthermore, when members did leave the gang and became inactive, they were not always required to go through some sort of ritual process. A former gang member in Ko's (2015) study stated that he "just kinda stopped hanging out with them" and reported that he was "not being fearful of any retaliation because he believes that 'they were all grown up and everyone [the gang members] understands." (p. 35) However, this was not always the case. Toy (1992a) found that

> generally, gang members are sympathetic to those who wish to leave the gang to pursue a conventional career. However, heavy sanctions are imposed on those who wish to leave the gang for no apparent reason. Therefore, some gang members remain in the gang to avoid negative responses. (p. 26)

Therefore, desistance is often accepted by the gang if there is good reason to do so.

Even after desistance, many former members still retained strong social ties with the gangs, or at least certain members. Even though former gang members became inactive, they still felt a strong sense of identity and brotherhood with the gang. For instance, Ko (2015) reported that

> when asked if there are any differences in his feelings about his current or past gang relationships and non membership status, John reports that he does not see any differences related to when he was in a gang or now that he is out; "It's a brotherhood and still a brotherhood. The love for me is still the same as it was when I was in one!" (p. 32)

In addition, Lam (2009) found that "Melo", a former gang member in his study

> still hangs out with the older Asian Boyz members, but is not "actively involved": "pretty much, I did my time. I earned my stripes already. That's how it works. I can still come around. I still get that respect. No one's gong [*sic*] to talk shit to me, you know." As a seasoned gang member, he feels like he does not have anything to prove because "they know what I'm about already." (p. 108)

Furthermore, another former gang member in Lam’s (2009) study stated that even after leaving the gang, it is impossible to never be involved with the gang.

> When asked if PD is still involved, he replied by saying, "you can never *not* be involved...we kicked it with the same people because that's all we know, you know. We got no friends outside the circle, man." (Emphasis in original, p. 101)

In summary, although many gang members desisted by either completely severing ties with the gang or by becoming inactive in its activities; former members retained strong social ties to certain individual members and/or the gang itself.

Money

Gang members were often enticed by the promise of material possession and the opportunities to make money. Thus, the prospect of lucrative opportunities became a large part for gang membership. P-Dog, from Lam’s (2009) study, illustrated the need for money.

> Not all of us are rich, you know: The government's still helping us after all these years, man. You know, it's not that we're lazy....times are tough out here. We weren't born with a silver spoon. You can only do so much....especially a single lady raising fucking all of us, you know. (p. 102)

Furthermore, gang members in Vigil and Yun’s (1990) study stated that “money was the primary focal point within their gangs” and that “Virtually all criminal activities are oriented towards this end. Stealing cars, for example, is not committed for the sake of joyriding, but for money" (p. 156). Money was a source of financial independence and provided gang members with the ability to live the fast life and achieve a sense of masculinity as discussed previously. For instance, Vigil and Yun (1990) found that due to the poor family background of gang members, "they are hostile to the idea of accepting money from their parents" (p. 155). In addition, a gang member in Vigil and Yun's (1990) study stated that

> That's why I think my family poor. They don't take care of me enough. I just want to go my own. They take care whatever I need, but I don't want that money from them. I just want my own money. I want to make my own money. (p. 155)

Furthermore, money was especially salient since gang members often experienced an absence in opportunities to pursue a conventional lifestyle or when a conventional lifestyle was not sufficient to support their needs. A gang member in Sung's (1977) illustrated the insufficiency of conventional work.

> I worked once, washing dishes for $100 a week. I worked one week. No more washing dishes for me! Do you know that I can now make $100 in one minute?...How do I get $100 so easily? I'll tell you. I take a gun, go into a restaurant, point it at the owner, and I come out with the money. (p. 56)

In summary, money was of vital importance to the function of the gang particularly because of its pervasive influence on gang members.

Gang Activities and Victims

Asian gangs engaged in a variety of criminal activities, some for making money while others were simply violent aggression during conflicts. Choo (2007) noted that

> although younger generation members deal with a small amount of drugs, they view their drug selling activity as a viable means of making money, like the older generation members. This interpretation is supported by a statement made by another member, Willie who engaged in drug selling to have money for gang recreational activities. He explains, “You got to have money for going out and kicking and whatever. And you’re not gonna ask money from your parents every single day so you end up either mugging or selling drugs.” (p. 138).

Not all gang members started out committing all types of crime. Instead, an implicit system allowed gang members to climb the criminal ladder.

> According to our informants, there is an implicit understanding that one progresses from grand theft auto to armed robbery and finally extortion. Extortion is considered to be the riskiest, yet the most efficient means of procuring money because it requires a great deal of stability and “reputation”. (Vigil & Yun, 1990, p. 157)

Asian gangs primarily victimized their own ethnic people. This is in part due to the traditional practices within the Asian community. For instance, Vigil and Yun (1990) found that the victims of gang activities “are without exception other Vietnamese, and the crime usually occurs within the victim’s home” because “many Vietnamese-Americans tend to keep large amounts of cash and gold within their homes” (p. 157). In addition to this knowledge, Asian victims were also seen as easy targets because of their unfamiliarity with the legal system and were unwilling to involve official authorities. One gang member stated that: “We scared of Whites, [of] any other race, ’cause they know a lot of law and they don’t keep cash [within their homes]” (Vigil & Yun, 1990, p. 158). In summary, gang activities and their victim choice were based on avoiding apprehension and the quickest means to obtaining money.

Metaphors

After the major themes were coded and identified, common metaphors were created. These metaphors provided a holistic representation of the data, encompassing the similarities and differences between the studies, and allowed for a new interpretive understanding of the phenomenon. The iterative and inductive process during analysis resulted in the creation of five metaphors that reflected a line of argument synthesis and relationship between the studies. These metaphors were: (1) sense of belonging, (2) power, (3) pragmatism, (4) loose organization, and (5) desistance and ties that bind.

Sense of Belonging

Sense of belonging referred to the notion that gangs were a second family and provided a sense of belonging through brotherhood and camaraderie. The gang provided members with a set of brothers “who would supply friendship, support and attention” (Hunt et al., 1997, p. 15). Several gang members emphasized how important this sense of belonging was to them while involved in the gang.

> I think the reason why I chose to do it [join up] because…I felt comfortable with this crowd of people. I felt so comfortable that they were my family. And I mean, my parents, I wasn't close talking to them. [With my parents] it's get your schoolwork done and that's it. You don't understand anything else...I'm right, you're wrong. There's was a lot of fear with me and my parents, so I was not close to them. There's no talking to them. But with my friends, I felt invincible. (Lam, 2009, p. 114)
>
> John reports being introduced into the gang life at the age of 13 by another family member and that the gang became a very important part of his extended family. John states that this sense of family was the good thing about being in a gang and that being in

> a gang "molded me into the person that I am today and that's priceless". He also felt that he received more love and acceptance from his gang than his family of origin or extended family and that "it [the gang] becomes a brotherhood and um... everyone has respect for each other and everyone doesn't….no one crosses each other. (Ko, 2015, p. 31)

Feelings of belonging were especially important because many gang members came from families that could not provide emotional and financial support due to the absence of their parents (working long hours). One gang member stated:

> And it was like there was no time for us. So we more or less ran loose. As well, the attention that we didn't get from them, the brothers, as we called each other, we were getting from them. That is where it was at. (Case #367) (Toy B, p. 17)

Furthermore, many conflicts within the family (e.g. language barriers, acculturation, and violence) made it difficult for the youth to communicate with their family and strengthen familial ties, especially with their parents.

> "My parents have never understood the problems I had in school," he said. "They don't speak English, so how was I to get any help with homework? Whether I did well, or failed, they didn't know. All they do is sit around with their friends talking about how they were someday going to go back to their country. (Cowart & Cowart, 1996, p. 312)
>
> Phil further states that when there were conflicts and disagreements in the home, they were often handled through violence and that there was "a lot of yelling, a lot of hitting, a lot of there was….there was never any debate." According to Phil, his father was "very strict….strict….and extra violent in disciplining me from that age [12] on up. So me and him didn't get along for a very long time." Additionally, he shared that "you couldn't reason with your folks. You couldn't have even tried that but what started

> happening was me and my brothers, as we started getting older, we just stopped caring, we just started doing what we wanted to do!" He reports knowing that when they did get in trouble, "that we'd get yelled at, that we'd get hit but then I think after a certain while my parents started to realize that the scare tactics and the violence didn't work on us anymore, so they kind of….yeah….they kind of resigned to the fact that we….we were just….that they couldn't tell us anymore." (Ko, 2015, p. 37)

In summary, the gang provided these troubled youths with the sense of family and belonging that was often not available to them at home. Thus, the tumultuous home environment pushed many youth into gangs as a means of a seeking acceptance and belonging.

Power

The gang provided members with a sense of power, status, and means to success. Power meant the ability to achieve masculinity, respect, and assurance that no one would mess with him, or that he would have "back-up". Gangs allowed similarly situated youths to collectively organize and establish their own focal concerns (Miller, 1958), which revolved around the notion of power. For instance, Kendis and Kendis (1966) stated that

> the Chinese-American boy seeks and finds the solution to his social needs with those who have the same problems as he does…By setting new standards for status and success with fellow sufferers, the Chinese-American is able to achieve what he feels is a measure of success and status, on his own terms within his own peer group. (p. 14)

Similarly, in examining reasons for joining gangs, Pih and Mao (2005) found that gang members

> believed the power, respect, and pride in being a gang member was the primary motive. Several other respondents also believed they were being loyal to their brothers in joining the gangs. The members of the same gang often defended one another in violent

> situations. One respondent, “Lawrence”, said “You have to be ‘down with your homies.’” In maintaining brotherhood and loyalty, members believed they achieved righteousness, which was an extremely important character and a sign of masculinity in traditional Chinese culture. (Pih, p. 67)

One gang member explicitly stated that power was the most important aspect of gang membership.

> Power is so no one bothers you…The more power you got, the more respect you get. They are not going to touch you, they won’t even come near you if you have a lot of power. With the gang to back you up, you can say things and it’ll happen. If you don’t have the gang, that power is gone. Take away the gang and you just a ordinary person, vulnerable. (Case #352) (Toy, 1992a, p. 24)

Similarly, another gang member reflected on how the gang provided him with power.

> How do people join gangs? Well, you get jumped by one gang and you join another group to get them back…When the Joes knew I was protected, they didn’t fuck with me again. (Case #75) (Toy, 1992a, p. 20)

Contributing to the need for power is the fact that many gang members were subjected to racial discrimination. These experiences often led to a sense of powerlessness because they were unable to protect themselves from verbal and physical assaults. One gang member stated that “Black people, they look at us as immigrants and they keep telling us to go back to our country and we shouldn’t belong here…they always start things with us” (Hunt et al., 1997, p. 14). Another gang member echoed a similar concern: “I joined for protection. That was the first thing we did because racism was getting out of hand. If one of us was walking at night and a black guy seen you, he would have jumped you right away” (Hunt et al., 1997, p. 14). Additionally, a gang member stated that the “Mexican gang over there [in my school] pretty big…A lot of Vietnamese there got pushed around and I can’t understand it. I like to stand up for what we are. Feel like I’m big, too” (Vigil & Yun, 1990, p. 152). As a result, youth turned to gangs to achieve a sense of power by ensuring adequate protection, means for retaliation, and ability to earn status through masculine practices. Furthermore, power remained a source of conflict among gangs and cliques so much so that any gesture to threaten that power often resulted in violent confrontations. Chin (1996b) found that

> A person who stares at another is considered arrogant and aggressive. Asking a gang member the identity of his leader is also construed as a serious challenge; it conveys an intention to belittle or degrade the reputation or power of a gang. (p. 130)

In summary, power was a source of masculine currency that was highly coveted, protected by gang members, and most easily obtained through gang membership.

Pragmatism

Asian gangs functioned pragmatically in terms of their criminal activities, victim choice, and how they sustained their gang lifestyle. Many youths “join gangs because gang life holds out the promise of material benefits” (Long, 1996, p. 99). Thus, fast and easy money was appealing to gang members because it allowed them to continue their lifestyle without the hindrance of working a regular job. The statements made by two gang members captured this process:

> Before the gang I worked washing dishes in a coffeehouse. No way was I going back to that when I could make thousands by running do [drugs] on the street. (Long, 1996, p. 106)
>
> I didn’t want my parents’ money…I feel like maybe they need the money. I always tried to get my own money…I got a job [as a hotel bellboy] to save money. But

> the money was too slow. I didn't have enough money…so I quit…With my homeboys I could make $10,000 in a day. (Vigil, 2002, p. 110)

Thus, in order to sustain the gang lifestyle, members often engaged in criminal activities that were financially rewarding (e.g. extortion, armed robbery, and burglary). However, in order to continue these criminal ventures successfully, gang members chose their victims pragmatically. For instance, when explaining which stores are extorted by the gang, a member stated that "We target only Chinese take-out restaurants within our area because thy [sic] won't give us hassle" (Chin, 1996b, p. 71). Similarly, "Many gang members said that their favorite targets are businesses with high cash flow, such as restaurants and retail stores" (Chin, 1996b, p. 71). Furthermore, Asian gangs victimized their own people because they knew that the victims were less likely to solicit official investigation. For instance, Long (1996) recalled an incident where a gang member victimized his own adopted mother because he knew she was vulnerable:

> His homeboys had run out of money. Tre Den led them to his "mother's" house…Tre Den stood outside in the street to avoid being seen by her and to act as a lookout. Four homeboys stormed into the dwelling and forced her at gunpoint to surrender all her cash and valuables, even the jewelery she wore on her wrists and fingers. Then they took turns raping her. Tre Den's "mother" did not report the incident to the police, although her rapists were familiar to her. (p. 203)

In addition, victims were often chosen due to their own criminal activities, such as welfare fraud. For instance, a gang member stated that they victimize their own people because

> It's easier. Most of the Oriental, they don't go to the police unless they rich and stuff. Most of them [the victims] are on welfare and they make money on the side. (Vigil, 2002, p. 111)

In summary, gang members' pragmatism allowed them to continue criminal activity, avoid apprehension from official authorities, and continue living the gang lifestyle.

Loose Organization

This metaphor referred to the overall loose organization of Asian gangs. Particularly in that the gangs themselves did not have a set of concrete rules or guidelines. For instance, a gang member noted that although his gang was going to "jump in" new recruits, they decided otherwise.

> They were trying to jump people in but then we didn't think that was right so we just let them kick back with us for awhile and see if they are down or not. Like take them to do a drive by or maybe like tell them to beat some guy up or something. See if they are down. (Hunt et al., 1997, p. 17)

Additionally, gang initiation methods are not always utilized for prospective members. For instance, one gang member noted that he just became a part of the gang without any form of initiation:

> He made the claim that he was never recruited or jumped into a gang because; "I've known them since elementary school and just through school and playing sports together." That's how he reports getting into a gang. (Ko, 2015 p. 52)

Furthermore, the looseness of the gang also manifested in its fluidity in terms of gang insignias and gang name. For example, a gang member from Choo's (2005) study stated how gang identification was changed after pressures from the police.

> The identity of the gang actually has been changed. A couple of years ago, a lot of group names were recognized, but also there were a lot of federal crackdowns and raids. Green Dragons was raided and high-up members were arrested. Same thing happened with

> Flying Dragons, Ghost Shadows, and Korean Power. A lot of gang members were prosecuted by federal and state authorities. They used to identify themselves by clothing and tattoos. It was recognizable what gang and what group you belonged to. But because a lot of arrests have been made, they were wise enough to know that it’s not quite smart if they have a group name. (Choo, p. 80)

Similarly, Asian gangs also depended on its loose structure to ensure the survival of its members. For example, instead of retaining long term rivalries, the looseness of the gang allowed it to compromise in times of emergency.

> County Jail's totally different, man. Even if you're from WC (rival Asian gang), you still have to get along. Because there're so many Southsiders, which are Hispanics. The Surenos don't like us. The blacks... we're cool with, but still...you know...it's always like that. It started, I think, from TRG (Tiny Rascal Gang). In Long Beach, TRG and Eastside Longos.... they're enemies. Eastside Longos are Hispanics...they're Surenos. We don't get along with any of those two [gangs]. But in jail, we get along with TRG because they're Asian...the Surenos gave "green light" on all the Asians in County. (Lam, 2009, p. 107)

In summary, the loose structure of the gang facilitated adaptation to the current situation, whether it was initiation practices or ensuring its survival. By maintaining a loose approach to its operations, the gang could “bend” and “twist” to meet its needs and objectives. It is important to note that although Asian gangs were generally loosely organized, its structure varied depending on the ethnicity of the gang. For instance, Chinese gangs seemed be more structured in terms of internal hierarchy (i.e. they have “dai los” or big brothers who hold a higher chain of command). In contrast, this hierarchy was largely absent in Vietnamese gangs. Regardless of this discrepancy, Asian gangs shared a common feature in that they were loosely organized in their practices (e.g. exiting methods and modes of initiation).

Desistance and Ties that Bind

Not all gang members remained active and the majority actually desisted at one point or another. Thus, similar to black and Hispanic gangs, Asian gangs served as a temporary unit of solidarity for most gang members. Furthermore, they all seem to desist through distance; whether it be physical or social distance. For example, one gang member desisted as he matured into an adult and socially distanced himself from the gang.

> As he got older, Phil reported that in being an adult and realizing in potential repercussions of his actions, he started to distance himself from gang life and he "started working legit jobs so I started being exposed to people that were more square and that kinda had things….a better head on their shoulders. (Ko, 2015, pp. 43-44)

Additionally, gang members often tried to physically distance themselves from the gang in hopes to escape the gang life.

> To get away from gang life in Southern California, P-Dog moved to Seattle to live with an uncle in 1993 when he was 16. (Lam, 2009, p. 100)
>
> After getting out of Camp Affierbaugh in 1994, Melo moved to Arizona to live with relatives his junior and senior year of high school to get from gang life in Southern California. (Lam, 2009, p. 107)

Although gang members desisted and became inactive, some former members still had "ties that bind" (Pyrooz, Decker, & Webb, 2010); that is, they retained close social ties with the gang. Choo (2007) found that these social ties often remained intact because of personal affinity for one another.

> Nonetheless, members experience, in reality, difficulty in breaking the bond with the gang completely because of the maintenance of personal contact with current gang members. As Willie illustrates, “I don’t wanna do things I used to do anymore. Sometimes, I hang out with them but I am not active with them. I just keep in touch with a couple of people I personally like…I don’t regret what I did because that’s who I am and where I am now.” (Choo, p. 135)

Social ties with the gang are also kept because of the support and respect that the gang has provided.

> Although he is not "active," he is nevertheless involved because of the respect that he gets from his younger homeboys. His younger homeboys understand what Melo is trying to do, as he is trying to change his life. Because of that, he still has a strong affinity for the gang because it has been his support group all these years. (Lam, 2009, p. 109)

In summary, despite the fact that most gang members desisted from the gang life by becoming inactive, they retained strong social ties to the gang due to a variety of reasons. It is important to note that desistance did not mean that former gang members eliminated all and any gang ties or affiliations. Rather, most gang members who desisted simply became inactive in the gang’s activities. This may be a function the former gang member’s role residual in which they maintained certain aspects of their former role (i.e. active gang member) through symbols such as gang demeanor and worldview (Bubolz, 2014).

Adequacy of the Metaphors

The metaphors were created based on the five requirements established by Noblit and Hare (1988). In order for the metaphors to be adequate representations of the data, they needed to meet the following criteria: (1) economy (i.e. parsimony), (2) cogency (non-ambiguous, non-contradictory, and non-redundant), (3) range—“ability to integrate a wide range of data relative to a similar phenomenon” (Wholl et al., 2013, p. 100), (4) apparency (ability of metaphor to show experience, rather than refer to it), and (5) credibility (understood by the intended audience) (Noblit & Hare, 1988). The metaphors were carefully considered within this framework and were adequate given that they successfully formed a line of argument synthesis.

Line of Argument Synthesis

The metaphors were ordered interpretively to holistically represent and understand the Asian gang experience. The synthesis of these metaphors developed a line of argument relationship in which the career of the Asian gang members could be understood, specifically why members joined, remained committed, and eventually desisted from the gang. It is important to note that the relationship between the metaphors is not one that is linear; rather, it is fluid and there were many interactions that take place. Thus, these metaphors were highly dependent on one another and co-exist in time and space.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Interpretative ordering of the metaphors resulted in a line of argument synthesis in which each individual study provided a glimpse into the Asian gang experience and allowed us to more fully understand the phenomenon. Noblit and Hare (1988) asserted that a line of argument is adequate when the synthesis of all the studies are complete and when an inference could be made about the whole phenomenon. Accordingly, this synthesis reveals the cycle of Asian gang members and the experiences associated with them. In addition, three inferences can be made. First, the Asian gang experience is similar for all gang members, regardless of ethnicity. Second, Vigil's (1988) multiple marginality theory is the best theoretical framework for explaining the onset and persistence of gang membership regardless of ethnicity. Lastly, the Asian gang experience is comparable to those of black and Hispanic gangs, particularly the subcultural values and beliefs.

The Asian Gang Cycle

There has been a lack of agreement regarding the structure and behavior of Asian gangs because most studies have focused exclusively on one ethnic group in one particular region. Furthermore, "studies that attempt to examine similarities and differences between Chinese and Southeast Asian gang activities across different cities are nonexistent…until this occurs, our understanding regarding the etiology of Asian gangs will at best, remain fragmented" (Tsunokai & Kposowa, 2002, pp. 39-40). This synthesis provides insight and understanding into this inquiry. The line of argument relationship reveals several important factors that concern the lives and careers of Asian gang members across all ethnicities based on the interpretation of the resultant metaphors (see Figure 2).

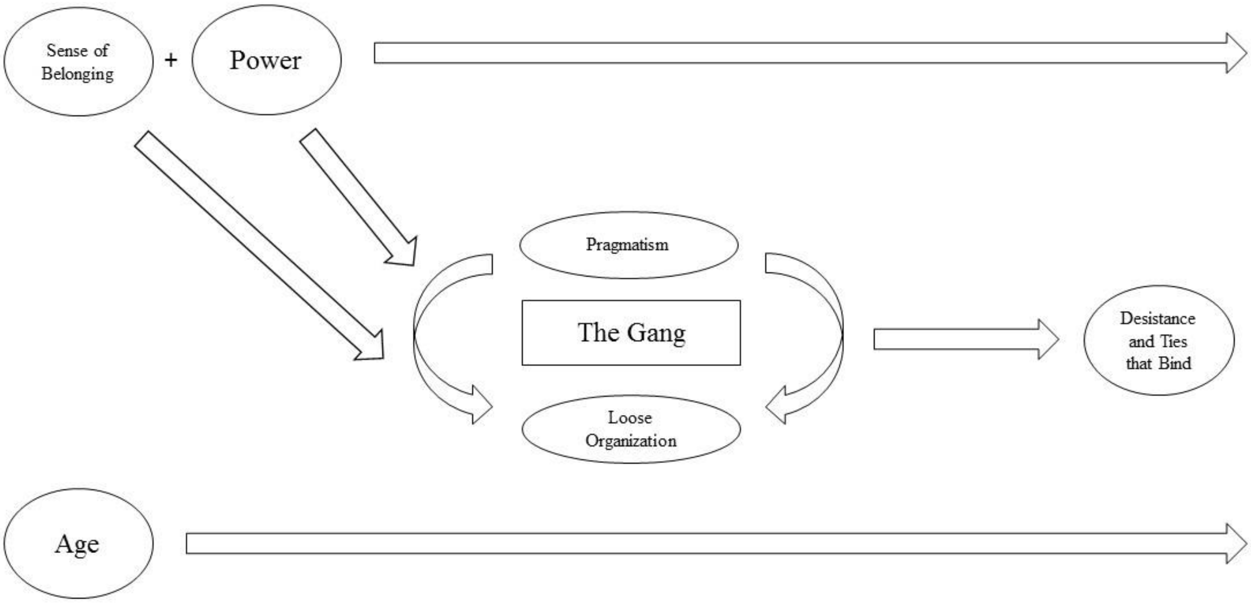

Figure 2. The Asian gang cycle

Asian youths pursue gang membership due to several factors that place them in a vulnerable position where they are pushed and pulled towards the gang. They often experience a sense of powerlessness and lack of emotional commitments at home due to a variety of factors, notably familial disruptions (e.g. parental absence, generational discrepancies) and experiences with racism and discrimination. Consequently, these youths are enticed by the opportunities that gangs offer to obtain "power" and find a "sense of belonging". This is not surprising considering that gangs "provide the sense of belonging for those who do not get it at home…and status for those who cannot earn it in the classroom or by other conventional means" (Curry et al., 2014, p. 149). Additionally, Klein (1995) stated that the most consistent characteristic of gang members is their need for social status in which gang affiliation can provide them with "claims to reputation" and collective identity (p. 200). Asian youth covet power because it provides them with an aura of respect and masculinity. Furthermore, these youth are often subjected to verbal and physical assaults that are deeply rooted in discrimination and prejudice. Thus, similar to Hagedorn's (1988) examination of Milwaukee gang members, these vulnerable youth find that gangs provide power in the form of protection, revenge, and deference in interpersonal contact. Ultimately, they feel that gang membership will shield them from perceived and actual victimization while allowing them to earn some degree of respect and masculinity. The latter is especially important because they are unable to obtain social capital at school and at home. This understanding pulls youth towards the gang because it is perceived as the most efficient way to deal with their problems.

In addition to this pull factor, youth are also pushed into gangs due to their dysfunctional familial relationships. They are often emotionally neglected by their parents due to working long hours and feel that they are not important or loved by their parents. Vigil (1988) found that Chicano gang members had similar experiences and that "child neglect and petty crime stemmed from shaky economic conditions" (p. 29). Thrasher (1927) also found that parental neglect propelled youth towards gangs as a means to satisfy their emotional needs. Consequently, the bond between parent and child is attenuated. Furthermore, generational discrepancies often exacerbate the situation. For instance, these youths are held to a high academic standard, yet their parents are unable or unwilling to understand and resolve the struggles they experience in school. Similarly, Long (1997) found that Vietnamese gang members often experienced parental criticism (which he notes often times leads to truancy and therefore, gang membership) which stemmed from the cultural belief that "a child's academic success reflects on the family, and family pride is sacred" (p. 335). Additionally, their parents view monetary support as a reflection of their love, while they yearn for emotional and social support. As a result of this misunderstanding, they seek out a sense of belonging where their emotional and material needs can be met. Thus, this desire for brotherhood and camaraderie act “as a kind of bonding agent” (Jankowski, 1991, p. 87). In summary, the convergence of these two social dynamics push and pull Asian youth towards the gang. The metaphors “power” and “sense of belonging” are most salient in understanding why Asian youth join gangs.

While a sense of belonging and power do remain important factors for retaining gang membership, they soon find that these feelings and comfort give way to monetary concerns. The acquisition of money becomes important because members discover that their lifestyle can be quite costly. Thus, the need to sustain the lifestyle they have grown accustomed to—partying, buying clothes/flashy things, and kicking back with the gang—becomes crucial. However, this desire to accumulate money is not unique to Asian gangs. For instance, 82% of gang members in Decker and Van Winkle’s (1996) study indicated that making money was a reason for joining a gang. Thus, in order to maintain their way of living, members must behave and function “pragmatically” and contribute to back to the collective group (or at least certain cliques within the gang) through money. Vigil (2002) found that Vietnamese gang members would carry out armed robberies when they needed money to party and purchase drugs and alcohol. It is precisely this monetary need that encourages gang members to behave pragmatically in criminal offending. This aligns with Jankowski’s (1991) finding that “The ambition to accumulate capital and material possessions is related…to the desire to improve the comfort of everyday living and quality of leisure time” (p. 103). A reflection of this is the victimization of their own ethnic group. They understand that these families are often unwilling to contact law enforcement, thus, their risk of apprehension is minimized. Furthermore, these families, due to cultural practice, tend to keep large sums of money and valuables at home, which the gang is more than willing to take. Davidson (1996) found that Asian gangs in Chicago predicated their criminal activities on these understandings as well. Thus, pragmatism and the acquisition of money becomes one of the central components for maintaining gang membership.

In addition to the pragmatic function of Asian gangs, the overall “loose organization” allows members to operate independently and freely in addition to their expected gang behaviors and contribution. In other words, gang members are not compelled to act only on behalf of the gang; rather, they are given the freedom to pursue their own personal objectives. Similarly, in their review of extant literature, Curry and colleagues (2014) concluded that most gangs are informally-diffused, in which they are “diffused and poorly regulated groups of individuals who pursue group interests but remain committed to individual self-interest” (p. 47). This flexibility becomes an attractive feature of the gang and reinforces their “sense of belonging” because members feel free to do what they want. The loose organization is also salient to the maintaining gang membership because many members value flexibility and freedom. Miller (1958) found that “autonomy” was also a focal concern of gang members in his study. As discussed earlier, many members experience family disruptions that push them towards the gang. One of these disruptions is the rigid home environment and high academic expectations. The gang remains an attractive group because it does not place unbearable and unachievable expectations on its members. Thus, the loose organization of the gang allows members to achieve a sense of independence and freedom, which they have not experienced at home. In summary, gang membership is retained because it allows members to function pragmatically to earn money and provides a space for freedom and independence due to its loose organization.

Although the gang is initially an attractive option for finding a sense of belonging and achieving a sense of power, most members ultimately desist by becoming inactive in its functions and criminal activities. Similar to why youth join in the first place, there are both push and pull factors that help explain why members choose to leave the gang life behind. Thus, “desistance” becomes a natural outcome for most membership (Pyrooz et al., 2010). However, desistance in the form of inactivity does not necessitate the complete severance of gang association; rather, former members often retain close social ties with the gang and its members. Thus, “ties that bind” is part of the reality of desistance (Pyrooz et al., 2010). Furthermore, social ties are especially salient to former gang members because unlike criminal desistance, gang members undergo a process of embeddedness into their gang affiliation (Bubolz, 2014; Pyrooz, Sweeten, & Piquero, 2013). In other words, aside from criminal activity, the gang identity becomes an important component for members and makes it difficult to completely cut ties with the gang.

The majority of members leave the gang by becoming inactive in its operations or by completely severing ties. This synthesis suggests that both push and pull factors are responsible for this course of action, including disillusionment, maturation, and familial concerns. Additionally, desistance occurs because the importance of “power”, “sense of belonging”, “pragmatism”, and the “loose organization” found within the gang becomes attenuated or redirected elsewhere in gang members’ lives. In other words, although the gang is initially perceived as the greatest source for experiencing all these things, over time it no longer is. Many members, through the course of aging, find better alternatives for meeting these needs, such as marriage and a renewed understanding of family. This is not surprising given that “most gang members continue to be more committed to their natal families than their gang” (Curry et al., 2014, p. 146). Thus, although the gang may have taken precedence over their biological family during their adolescence, the commitment to their family may be realized with age. Therefore, the phenomenon of “aging out” is also applicable to gang membership. Furthermore, disillusionment also affects members' perception of the gang's utility. As a result, members begin a series of steps to both physically and socially distance themselves from the gang by gradually desisting or abruptly leaving by knifing off their association (Decker & Lauritsen, 2002). Interestingly, just as the looseness of the gang permitted members to behave freely and independently, it also allows most members to desist from the gang rather easily and without retaliation. For instance, even Chinese gangs (the most structurally formalized gang in this synthesis) exhibited loose practices regarding member desistance. Specifically, Chin (1996b) found that leaving the gang was relatively easy, with most members simply not showing up to gang activities and ignoring their calls. Furthermore, the majority of former gang members indicated that they were not met with retaliation. Ultimately, even for the most structurally complex Asian gangs, the pervasiveness of the loose organization is a mechanism that facilitates gang desistance.

The gang desistance literature found that former members tend to retain social ties to the gang and certain members (Bubolz, 2014; Decker & Lauritsen, 1996; Pyrooz & Decker, 2011; Pyrooz et al., 2010). This study extends this consensus for Asian gang members as well. Within the Asian gang experience, these "ties that bind" transcend gang membership because they are based on feelings of brotherhood and camaraderie (i.e. sense of belonging) and not simply gang identification. In other words, real personal relationships are formed through gang affiliation. On the other hand, some former members retain social ties to the actual gang itself. This study finds that the combination of both "sense of belonging" and "power" explains this association. Former members still attach themselves to the gang entity because it still symbolizes power. Essentially, the occasional identification with the gang supplies former gang members with a convenient source of "power" in situations where they feel it is most needed, such as confrontation by rival gang members. This phenomenon has also emerged in the broader literature as well. For instance, Pyrooz and colleagues (2010) found that former members expressed a willingness to retaliate against another gang if their old gang was disrespected or attacked. In summary, most gang members desist due to both push and pull factors. However, social ties are often kept due to residual feelings of power and sense of belonging. It should also be noted that desistance does not represent complete severance of gang ties and that desistance is better understood as inactivity from the gang and/or efforts made to seek alternate groups as a source of belonging and power.

In summary, the interpretation of the metaphors provide a holistic understanding of the Asian gang experience. Notable about the Asian gang cycle is the interplay and fluidity of the metaphors. In other words, these metaphors represent the whole gang experience, not just certain aspects of it. For instance, although “sense of belonging” and “power” are primary factors in explaining why youth join gangs initially, they also inform us why gang membership is retained, and the process of desistance. Furthermore, these metaphors are constant themes throughout the gang cycle; however, their importance and impact wavers throughout the course of the gang career.

The synthesis—through examination of the Asian gang cycle—provides an answer and conclusion regarding Tsunokai and Kposowa’s (2002) inquiry about the general understanding of the structure, functions, and behavior of Asian gangs. Based on these findings, it is understood that regardless of geographic location and ethnic makeup of the gang, the overall structure and functions of Asian gangs are very similar. In other words, although there may be slight differences between Chinese and Southeast Asian gangs, their experiences are similar. For instance, Chinese gangs exhibit territoriality while most Southeast Asian gangs do not. However, a deeper analysis into this finds that Chinese gangs utilize territory as a pragmatic means to acquire money—which is salient to both Chinese and Southeast Asian gangs. This becomes abundantly clear considering that Chinese gangs claim commercial and business areas. Thus, Chinese territoriality is simply a function of "pragmatism". Furthermore, territory is claimed in Chinatown, where their own people reside and work. Just as Vietnamese gangs victimize their own people, Chinese gangs do so as well because they are well aware that these victims will not enlist the aid of law enforcement. In summary, this synthesis extends an answer to Tsunokai and Kposowa's (2002) question in that regardless of the ethnic makeup of the gang and different practices, Asian gangs all function within the context of the metaphors.

Multiple Marginality

Tsunokai and Kposowa (2002) not only posed the question of whether or not the Asian gang experience differs based on ethnicity, but also which theory has the most explanatory power to explain the collective Asian gang experience. As expressed in the literature review, extant literature has utilized different theories for explaining Asian gang involvement (see Chin 1990, 1996 and Hunt et al., 1997). Missing from the literature has been an attempt to understand different Asian ethnic gangs under the same theoretical foundation. Based on this synthesis—considering that the Asian gang experience is similar across all ethnic groups—it is concluded that the dominant theory for understanding the Asian gang experience is Vigil's (1988, 2002, 2003) theory of multiple marginality.

Multiple marginality is a conceptual framework that accounts for the interaction among a variety of ecological, socioeconomic, sociocultural, and socio-psychological factors (Vigil, 2003; see literature review section). Furthermore, examining these "various circumstances and forces in a combinative way increases our understanding of the similarities and variations found within and across groups" (Vigil, 1988, p. 9). Additionally, it "is more than a laundry list of factors but a model showing sequential, cumulative linkages among factors" (Vigil, 2003, p. 232), accounting for the interaction between macro (i.e. group history), meso (i.e. family history), and micro (i.e. personal life history) factors (Vigil, 1988). In summary, Vigil (2002) states that,

> the street gang is an outcome of marginalization, that is, the relegation of certain persons or groups to the fringes of society, where social and economic conditions result in powerlessness. This process occurs on multiple levels as a product of pressures and forces in play over a long period of time. The phrase "multiple marginality" reflects the complexities and persistence of these forces. (p. 7)

The Asian gang experience is best understood within this theoretical framework because Asian gang members experience marginalization from several sources, including racism, economic marginalization, family, school, and internal conflicts.

Asian gang members are affected by macrosocial and macrostructural forces that permeate into their daily lives, particularly racism and economic living conditions. For instance, many Asian gang members experience racism from the public (e.g. law enforcement) and their peers—both Asian and non-Asian. Additionally, due to macrostructural forces, many Asian parents are forced to work jobs that require long hours just to make ends meet. The combination of these two macro forces ultimately permeate into Asian gang members' family experience. As a direct result of overworking parents (macrostructural force), these youth rarely see their parents and are often emotionally neglected. Therefore, they turn to gangs to fulfill these needs. Thus, "sense of belonging" can be partly attributed to this interaction. Furthermore, racism is evident across the meso level factors, such as schools. Asian youth are often discriminated against by other students due to stereotypes of Asian immigrants. As a result, they feel powerless and therefore actively seek a source of “power” to equalize the situation. In addition, meso level factors also interact with micro factors as well. Generational discrepancies and culture conflict within the family affects the identity struggle of many Asian youth. Asian parents express their love through financial support; whereas their children expect emotional and social support. This disjuncture ultimately affects their self-identity, placing them in a marginal position between two cultures (their parents and their own). Furthermore, racist taunts from their peers also relegate them as not fully American. Consequently, some youth internalize this marginal identity, which can result in uncooperative and often negative interactions with their family and their peers in schools. For instance, some gang members internalize these racist beliefs (Ko, 2015) and actually taunt their own ethnic people for being too “fobby” or not American enough (Choo, 2007; Mark, 1997). Similarly, Vigil (1988) found that many Chicano gang members would “avoid affiliation with a Mexican heritage and, in fact, hold somewhat disparaging attitudes towards ‘chúntaros’ and ‘wetbacks’, as they call Mexican nationals or immigrants” (p. 42). As a result of internalized racism, some Asian gang members would berate their parents because of their cultural beliefs and inability to speak English (Long, 1997).

In summary, the cumulative effects of marginalization within the family, school, and a host of other factors can result in the emergence and formation of Asian gangs (Vigil, 2003). It is especially relevant to Asian gangs because there are multiple factors and interactions in place that lead to the marginality of gang members, particularly meso level factors, such as the family and school. This study concludes that although different theories have been utilized to explain the gang phenomenon for Chinese and Southeast Asian gangs, Vigil’s (1988, 2002, 2003) theory of multiple marginality supplants earlier theories due to its scope to explain the collective experience and the interaction of multi-level factors.

Subcultural Values

This study provides a more holistic understanding of the Asian gang experience, particularly in relations to the different ethnic gangs that make up this phenomenon. In the process of better understanding Asian gangs, a platform was created to adequately compare Asian gangs to black and Hispanic gangs. Overall, Asian gangs are very similar to more established gangs in that they share similar values. Even though gangs can vary from one gang to another (Thrasher, 1927), it is apparent that there are common themes across all gangs: sense of belonging and power.

This synthesis finds that the metaphors “sense of belonging” and “power” operated throughout the whole Asian gang cycle. As discussed previously, “sense of belonging” referred to the notion that the gang provides its members with feelings of brotherhood and family through support, affection, and attention. Additionally, “power” referred to the notion of achieving masculinity, respect, protection, and deference in interpersonal situations. Similarly, these two concepts (power more so than sense of belonging) have been documented within black and Hispanic gangs as well. For instance, Keiser’s (1969) found in his examination of Chicago’s Vice Lords (primarily black) that the ideology of “heart” was a part of the Vice Lords’ reality. Heart referred to one’s ability and willingness to follow suggestion regardless of personal risk as well as displaying bravery and toughness. Similarly, gang members in Decker and Van Winkle’s (1996) St. Louis study (primarily black) expressed that they belonged to a gang primarily for protection, which is another aspect of power. Additionally, Miller’s (1958) early examination of gangs focused on the focal concerns of lower class culture, particularly those held by gangs. He stated that gangs were additionally concerned with status, which could be achieved through elevated displays of toughness (e.g. masculinity, bravery, skill, etc.). Horowitz (1983) found that

Chicano gangs value honor and that their behavior was shaped around this understanding. Specifically, "Honor revolves around a person's ability to command deference in interpersonal relations…Honor demands that a man be able physically to back his claim to dominance and independence" (p. 81).

In addition to concerns about power, procuring a sense of belonging is also prevalent in other gangs. For instance, Keiser (1969) found that brotherhood was also salient in understanding the Vice Lord's experience. He stated that brotherhood was understood in terms of mutual help and that many gang members would express phrases like "Man, we're just like brothers" (p. 53). Similarly, Asian gang members also express similar sentiments and statements about their gangs. Lastly, Miller (1958) also mentioned that gangs have an additional focal concern of "belonging" in which members seek to belong to the group by meeting their expectations; thus, they also search for emotional attention and support. In summary, this synthesis suggests that Asian gang members also search for and value the same things that black and Hispanic gang members do. Thus, regardless of geographic location and racial differences, gangs subscribe to a subculture revolving around power and belonging.

The conclusions drawn from this meta-synthesis are extremely significant and greatly contribute to the existing body of gang literature. Based on the examination of the Asian gang cycle and its components, two key conclusions about the reality of Asian gangs are made. First, the various ethnic Asian gangs (e.g. Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, etc.) share a similar experience. That is, their existence and persistence stem from the same social forces regardless of geographic location and to an extent, cultural differences. Furthermore, regardless of ethnic differences, Asian gang members join, remain committed, and ultimately desist from the gang due to fluctuations and changes to their perception of power and sense of belonging. Thus, although past literature has examined these groups individually, this study finds that a holistic examination of Asian gangs is appropriate. The second major contribution of this study is that Asian and non-Asian gangs are more similar than they are different. In other words, the gang experience for all races and ethnicities revolve around similar themes, notably power and sense of belonging. Aside from some structural differences, which can vary from gang to gang (Thrasher, 1927), gangs as a whole are predicated on the notions of power and camaraderie. Therefore, Asian gangs are not much different from non-Asian gangs aside from their “superfluous components” such as language, customary practices, country of origin, and beliefs (Knox & McCurrie, 1997; McCurrie, 1999). In summary, “a strong homogenizing influence” exists that affects all gangs in the United States (McCurrie, 1999, p. 50).

Limitations

Inherent in research are the limitations that one encounters. Throughout the process of data collection and analysis, several limitations became apparent. In particular, during data analysis, there were three caveats. First, due to the broad research question, studies that were included had multiple focuses. Consequently, not all themes were coded for in each of the studies. In other words, some studies were absent of recognized themes. Similarly, no quality appraisal process was utilized for sampling. As a result, some studies were extensive and provided substantive knowledge about certain aspects of the gang experience while others were short and contributed less to the synthesis. Thus, it is possible that the synthesis is skewed towards larger body of works (e.g. dissertations and books). To extend this point, although only studies that were grounded in qualitative principles were selected for synthesis, two of the studies (see Chin, 1996 and Ko, 2015) utilized a mixed methods approach. However, only results derived from qualitative components (e.g. interviews and observations) were coded.

Secondly, the absence of collaborative effort affected the overall analysis process. A large majority of meta-syntheses involved the work of multiple researchers, which allowed for collaborative interpretation. Additionally, collaboration can enhance “the rigour [*sic*] of the process, the quality of the resulting synthesis, and –not inconsequentially—the meta-ethnographer’s experience” (Lee et al., 2015, p. 348). Contrary to this, this study was an independent endeavor without the assistance of additional coders. Furthermore, only two iterations of coding was completed. Thus, key concepts may have been missed or underrepresented.

Third, I assumed the role of an “insider” in which the interpretation of the data may have been altered due to biases and assumptions as an Asian American. For instance, it was possible that I may have notice themes that were not coded by the original authors due to my personal understanding of the Asian culture and people. Although, this posed an initial issue, I found that by remaining cognizant of this fact during data analysis, I was able to avoid and/or recognize and address any issues concerning my insider status.

Fourth, although the inferences drawn from this study are extended to understanding the whole Asian gang phenomenon, the data comprised primarily of Chinese and Southeast Asian gangs (largely Vietnamese). Therefore, the applicability of these conclusions may be more pertinent to understanding Chinese and Vietnamese gangs.

In addition to limitations concerning analysis of the actual data, contention regarding the utility of the meta-synthesis was also acknowledged. First, the concern over synthesizing studies of differing qualitative methods needs to be addressed. Some researchers (e.g. Jensen & Allen, 1996; Noblit & Hare, 1988) have argued that studies with different methods should not be combined. However, other scholars have argued that it is completely acceptable and actually beneficial due to the complementary nature of different methods (Knafl & Breitmayer, 1991). I chose to agree with the latter. This decision is largely attributed to the lack of empirical inquiries on Asian gangs. By excluding studies of differing methods, I would not have had a sufficient number of studies to gain a holistic and richer interpretation of the Asian gang phenomenon.

Second, there is a contention about the nature of the interpretivist paradigm. In other words, through the synthesis process, it was possible that the studies were losing the unique contextual factors associated with the phenomenon (Jensen & Allen, 1996; Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007; Sandelowski et al., 1997). Thus, turning idiographic knowledge into synthesized knowledge would lose the uniqueness of each study (Sandelowski et al., 1997) and go against the nature and purpose of qualitative research (Campbell et al., 2003). However, qualitative syntheses are necessary for the advancement of knowledge. First, the intent of a meta-synthesis is to neither predict nor control, it is to reinterpret the phenomenon and achieve a greater degree of conceptual and theoretical development (Campbell et al., 2003). Second, the full contribution of qualitative research will not be realized if individual studies merely accumulate without effort towards research synthesis. Thus, even though individual studies are informative, we still lack a full understanding of the phenomenon of interest (Jensen & Allen, 1996). Furthermore, the "generalizations" that develop out of synthesis are not meant to supplant findings from individual studies, but rather add to them (Britten et al., 2002). In summary, in order to avoid "one-shot research" (Estabrooks, Field, & Morse, 1994, p. 510), qualitative meta-syntheses are essential for the progression and future development of knowledge (Jensen & Allen, 1996; McCormick et al., 2003).

Conclusion

Asian gangs have received very little attention in criminology and criminal justice research (Davidson, 1996; Jang, 2002; Joe, 1994a; Joe, 1993; Shelden et al., 2013). As a result, the Asian gang experience has seldom been a topic of serious academic scholarship. Furthermore, Tsunokai and Kposowa (2002) posited that there has not been examination of the Asian gang experience collectively. In other words, past research has focused exclusively on and developed theories of gang formation specifically for certain ethnic groups. Through the utilization of a meta-synthesis, this study synthesized multiple qualitative studies to gain a holistic understanding of the overall Asian gang experience. In doing so, a line of argument synthesis was developed that allowed for the development of inferences. Thus, three conclusions were made.

First, regardless of ethnic differences and geographic location, the Asian gang experience is similar for all members. Second, Vigil's (1988, 2002, 2003) multiple marginality theory best explains the formation and persistence of all Asian gangs. This is especially salient considering past research has often compartmentalize the Asian gang experience. Lastly, Asian gangs are similar to black and Hispanic gangs in that the metaphors "power" and "sense of belonging" remain pervasive forces that dominant our understanding of gangs in America. In addition to the findings of this meta-synthesis, this study is valuable due to the utilization of an innovative methodology. As discussed previously, only two studies within the criminal justice and criminology discipline have synthesized qualitative research.

This meta-synthesis not only provided a holistic examination of the Asian gang experience, but also opens up room for more discussion on the topic. As such, much future research is warranted. First, future scholarship should continue to add to our understanding of

Asian gangs considering this is still an understudied phenomenon. Second, the role of acculturation should be investigated. The Asian gang experience was largely shaped by desire to belong. This sense of belonging stemmed from various sources, including generational discrepancies and culture conflict between parents and children. This is especially salient considering the immigration history of many Southeast Asian Americans. Third, studies should tease out the potential effects of the "model minority" stereotype on gang formation. This is particularly important considering that some studies noted the negative reception of the model minority stereotype. Thus, it is entirely possible that some aspect of gang membership is related to the defiance of this characterization of Asian youth. Fourth, desistance within Asian gangs should be examined given that the literature on gang desistance has received very little attention (Bubolz, 2014). Fifth, future studies should continue to synthesize qualitative research. As demonstrated by this study, a richer and more holistic understanding of the phenomenon can be captured by examining the whole instead of its parts. Lastly, although the gang experience is similar across all races and ethnicities, future meta-syntheses should explicitly investigate the differences and similarities between black, Hispanic, and Asian gangs. Although "power" and "sense of belonging" are prevalent themes, the unique experiences associated with race and ethnicity are still salient to better understanding gangs.

In conclusion, this meta-synthesis provides a greater understanding of the Asian gang phenomenon and its relation to other gang experiences. Additionally, this synthesis has offered several suggestions for future research that would bolster our understanding of the gangs and the forces that act both on and within them. Ultimately, Asian gangs have been subjected to sensationalized media coverage and as a result, they have been misperceived and misunderstood. This study has demonstrated that Asian gangs, like all other gangs, are driven by the need for power and desire for a sense of belonging. Furthermore, contrary to views that Asian gangs are structurally complex, they typically are loosely organized. Lastly, like all other gangs, most members eventually desist from gangs to seek out a conventional lifestyle. In summary, contrary to the portrayals of Asian gangs as structurally complex and its members as extraordinarily vicious and sophisticated, the reality of the Asian gang experience mirrors those of black and Hispanic gangs.

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APPENDICES

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