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THE PERCEPTION OF ADOLESCENTS OF THE IMPERIAL COURTS HOUSING PROJECT
ABOUT GANG MEMBERSHIP, SCHOOL COMPLETION, AND CAREER OPPORTUNITES

By

Dion T. Gaston

A THESIS

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Under the Supervision of Professor Larry L. Dlugosh

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THE PERCEPTION OF ADOLESCENTS OF THE IMPERIAL COURTS HOUSING PROJECT ABOUT GANG MEMBERSHIP, SCHOOL COMPLETION, AND CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

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University of Nebraska, 2012

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The purpose of this study was to explore the perception of adolescents of the Imperial Courts Housing Projects about school completion, gang membership, and career opportunities from the perspective of current youth gang members who reside in the Imperial Courts. Nineteen youths participated in this study. The research population consisted of youths who identified themselves as member of the neighborhood gang. Each youth was interviewed individually by the researcher to gather information about school completion, educational and career resources, gang membership, and role models and mentors.

The researcher developed the survey used in this study specifically for use in this project. The twenty-three item survey contained questions that were intended to collect information about career exploration and selections, college awareness and selections, assistance with classroom and homework assignments, tutoring, college admission procedures, knowledge of the classes necessary for college entrance, knowledge of the college entrance exams, college visits and overnight academic summer camps. The researcher used qualitative coding techniques to analyze the participants' responses.

In general, all youths indicated that they belong to the neighborhood gang. All reported that they were born and raised in the community as part of their initiation into the gang. All the youths acknowledged their gang membership by the age of fifteen with one indicating his membership by the age of five. Eighteen of the nineteen youths indicated that they were not familiar with career exploration, and while they were in school, seventeen indicated that they were not provided with enough information to help them obtain a career. Eighteen of the nineteen youths indicated that while in school, their school did not provide them with the proper help with assignments like tutoring. Lastly, all the youths indicated that they did not know about college admissions and not familiar with the classes necessary to get into college. Only two of the youths knew about the college entrance exams and eighteen believe that college is non-affordable.

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Vignette

Growing up in an area where deaths, violence, police brutality, gangs, and teen pregnancies were the norm provided a firsthand understanding of the hardships and tribulations that an adolescent of the Imperial Courts faced on daily basis. I lived the life of a gang member. Experience, not conducting research on the topic or issue, provided me with real insight of such circumstances. By the time an adolescent of the Imperial Courts reached the age of eighteen, they became accustomed to funerals and prison life. Prison

life, either for themselves, for peers, or family members had a numbing effect on the future outlook of adolescents in the Imperial Courts Housing Projects.

Most of the funerals I attended were for youths between the ages of fourteen and nineteen. I know firsthand the barriers and hardships that these adolescents faced. By the time I was eighteen of age, I attended well over twenty funerals as a result of gang wars. Some of the dead were innocent bystanders; most were children, friends, youth gang members and family members.

I was born and raised in the Imperial Courts Housing projects where low educational and career aspirations were the norm. The lack of good role models and gang activity dominated the interests of the residents of the Imperial Courts. Adolescents were drawn to gang membership in their community because of a lack of educational and career exploration opportunities and other resources. Growing up as an adolescent in the Imperial Courts, there was a misconception among the citizens about making it out of the “ghetto.” The misconception was that a youth had to have a sport talent or have a talent in the entertainment area, i.e. rapper, singer or acting to move beyond Imperial Courts. The overwhelming majority of the adolescents who resided in the Imperial Courts did not have a sport talent nor have enough ability in the entertainment area to seek a decent lifestyle. And, just because a young person had a sport talent or talent in the entertainment area was not a

guarantee success. In fact, such talents were wasted because the individual did not know the proper steps needed to pursue such careers.

As a child, I aspired to become a professional football player. I wanted to attend the University of Southern California, get drafted by the National Football League and live a worthwhile life. What I did not realize about my future aspirations were the how to conduct proper steps needed to fulfill my dreams. Because I was a first generation student and due to my community's lack of educational opportunities, I was not considered a college bound student based on my academic curriculum and core courses in high school.

In the summer of 1976, my parents were forced to move from their trailer park in Compton, California to make way for the city's new shopping developments. As a result, all residents who resided in the trailer park were given an option to either move anywhere they could find housing or to move to the city's designated housing project. My parents elected to move to the designated housing project; the Imperial Courts. I was born December of 1976 in the Imperial Courts in Watts California. The family consisted of me, my older sister, my older brother and parents. My father passed away that following year. The Imperial Courts was where I resided until I went to college in 1995. In the fall of 2005, my mother moved out of the area.

The Imperial Courts are home to one of Los Angeles' largest street gangs; the P. J. (Projects) Watts Crips. The gang consists of four sides; Bull Side, Funny

Side, Island Side, and Pill Head. The Imperial Courts are controlled by the four sides. Depending where you lived in the Imperial Courts, the side of the gang determines your association. I lived on the Island Side.

The four sides of the gang acted as a “family”; a substitute for a family unity. Each of the four sides was separated into two cliques and by street location. These sides are separated into two cliques: Locsters and Dillions, and by street corner. The Imperial Courts are situated from 112th street to Imperial Highway and between Grape Street and Mona Boulevard. Again, depending on what street you lived, is the street that you are associated and the clique who controlled that area. I lived on 114th street and Croesus Avenue where the Island Side was located. Locsters were the members who viewed themselves as dangerous gang members usually ending their gang name with “Loc”, ex. Dee Loc. Dillions, on the other hand were those members who loved money and would do anything to get it. Dillions also viewed themselves as ladies men.

The gang was also made up by sub-cultures; crews. The criminal activities were committed by the crews. Crews were usually comprised of members with similar ambitions and interest. It is at crew level where a member makes their decision about how involved they wanted to be in gang activities. Once that decision was made, a person had to live with it. In traditional gangs, the initiation process required being “jump” in by other gang members. The gangs usually selected well establish gang members to do the initiation. In the Imperial

Courts, the initiation process differed from traditional gangs. The criteria for acceptance into the gang depended on how long a member lived in the community. My estimation was over 90% of the members were either born there or their parents moved there by the time the member was five or six years of age.

As stated above, a member was associated with the gang depended on what side of the street and side you lived. Since I lived on the Island Side, 114th street, I was, by default, expected to represent my side and street when necessary within the neighborhood. The four sides did not get together to do criminal activities but rather have sporting contest and events for bragging rights. The sporting contests can range from football, basketball, and softball games. This was a wonderful opportunity for the people of the community to engage in a friendly match that involves a whole day of fun activities leading up to the games. This is where I excelled.

Within the Imperial Courts, there was a community based recreational center where the community members engaged in a variety of sporting and cultural activities. The recreation center did a great job of hosting sporting leagues for all the different age brackets within the community. Depending on skill level, an individual had the opportunity to be selected to represent the Imperial Courts All-Star team. Being selected as an All-Star was a big accomplishment as there was competition and talented youths throughout the

Imperial Courts. I was blessed with a sport talent that allowed for me to be selected as an All-Star for three sports teams (Baseball, Basketball and Flag Football). Not only was I selected as an All-Star, I was always chosen as a captain. Our All-Star team competed against other neighboring All-Star teams.

In Watts, there were three major housing projects, the Imperial Courts, Nickerson Gardens and the Jordan Downs which are also major gang territories. There was an area of houses in Watts that surrounded a Park in which all three Projects and the Park community citizens (109th Street Park) all participated in the Watts Friendship Sports League. All four communities engaged in sporting tournaments and games that showcase the area top talents. As with the Imperial Courts leagues, there was an opportunity to be selected as a Watts Friendship Sports League All-Star. Such an opportunity provided the experience of leaving Watts as a whole to compete against the best players in the greater Los Angeles area.

By having the opportunity to engage in sports, I was given the exposure that is not typical for the adolescents in my community. I had the opportunity to travel and network. I was surrounded by positive individuals who took the time to mentor me because of my talent. They knew my background and the history of my community hardships and my ambitions to get away from the community. I took advantage of summer and sports camps especially the camps that allowed for participants to stay overnight.

What is unique about the gang members in the Imperial Courts was that they supported any decisions an adolescent made. As I stated above, if you decided that you wanted to engage in gang activity, you have to stick with that decision. Since I was more interested in sports, I was not expected to do criminal activities. Instead, whenever I, or any other youth who participated in sports at a high level would have games, the gang members and community would come out to be our biggest supporters.

Playing sports or being a resident of either housing project in Watts associated an adolescent with the gang who controlled that neighborhood. Because of the exposure playing sports or residing in the Imperial Courts, gang members from the other three gang territories in Watts associated all residents with the gang that controlled their neighborhood regardless of the crew level association. My crew consisted of all adolescents who were involved in sports and who shared the same ambitions and motivation to have a worthwhile life. This is where, by default, an adolescent from either area of Watts had to be prepared to defend themselves whenever they were out of their neighborhood. Schools, malls, parks, movie theatres, restaurants, skating rings, bowling allies and other public arenas are examples where Watts residents had to be prepared to defend themselves if approached by gang members from the other three gang territories. Back then, guns were not as popular among the youth gang members as documented today, but other weapons like brass knuckles, knives, baseball bats and any form of sticks were the popular weapons

of choice for youth gang members. Guns were more popular amongst the older gang members. Rarely had I been involved in incidents where those weapons were used instead, fights were the major action taken when confronted in a confrontation. I can estimate that I been in well over fifty fights as an adolescent due to the fact that I lived in the Imperial Courts. Luckily for me, only a few resulted in weapon used.

In Watts, there was one high school for the community to attend. The high school was located near the Jordan Downs housing projects. In fact, the high school was actually connected to the Jordan Downs. The Jordan Downs were home to the Grape Street Watts Crips (GSWC). The GSWC and the P.J. Watts Crips (PJWC) were rivals gangs who shared the same school grounds. Before the rivalry of the two gangs, which begun in the 1980s', the two neighborhood were allies as they joined together to fight the Bloods. The Nickerson Gardens, the third housing projects in Watts were home to the Bounty Hunters (BH) Blood gang. The Nickerson Gardens residents had to attend a separate high school in the city of Compton where other Blood gangs dominated the school because of the make-up of Jordan High school. Before the rivalry with the GSWC, the PJWC and other surrounded Crips gangs were allowed to attend Jordan High School without having to worry about fights and shootings on a daily basis. In the mid 1980s', the GSWC and the PJWC feud had begun. The rivalry between the PJWC and the GSWC lasted until 1992 when all gangs in Los Angeles came

together to cease violence due to the Rodney King verdicts. Currently, the rivalry between the two gangs has risen again.

During the war with the Jordan Downs, youths of the Imperial Courts were left without a school to attend. Parents of the Imperial Courts, with the assistance of local politicians, started an initiative project that allowed for the youths of the Imperial Courts to attend middle and high school in the San Fernando Valley due to the location of my home school, Jordan High. Growing up in Watts before the rivalry with the Jordan Downs, every kid in the Imperial Courts wanted the opportunity to become a "Jordan Bull Dog" because of the individuals who came before us. As a child, you heard stories from the elders about the success of the sport teams with all their league, conference and city titles over a course of two decades. I remembered as a kid going to the Los Angeles Sports Arena to watch Jordan High basketball team play in the city championship game. One year before the rivalry, my older brother was a starter on the freshmen basketball team that had a lot of success. I knew at that moment that I wanted to play sports for Jordan High to carry on the tradition and pride of the community. Unfortunately, due to the gang violence that caused for the youths of the Imperial Courts to now have to worried about their lives and not sports, my order brother's generation was stripped away from a typical childhood life of a Watts youth because they had to defend themselves from Jordan Downs residents. Not only had my brother and the youths of the Imperial Courts had to worry about their peers from the Jordan Downs, they had

to worried about the adults of the Jordan Downs who would engaged in over matched fights that would be out number for the Imperial Courts youths. For the next two or three years, the youths of my brother's generation were now going to juvenile halls and California Youth Authority Camps for violent crimes while trying to attend school. Some were dropping out of school at high rates because they were afraid to attend school. Back then, you had to attend your home school and you were not allowed to attend a school not in your district. So the youths of the Imperial Courts had no other choice but to engage in gang and criminal activities at high level.

As I mentioned, youths of the Imperial Courts had to attend school in the San Fernando Valley where the objectives were to allow for the youths the opportunity for a decent education. Since I was in middle school when this project started, I attended middle and high school in the San Fernando Valley and my older brother attended high school in the Valley. This was a different but wonderful opportunity for the community. Socially, it was a great opportunity to meet the different ethnic backgrounds, learning their values, ethics and belief system. Unfortunately, the majority of the youths did not take advantage of the opportunity. For me and my crew, this consisted of individuals who were not involved in gang activities, took advantage of the opportunity. In the summer before my freshman year of high school, I met with the football coaches to express my interests in trying out for the team. Since I never played tackle football (only flag) growing up, I did not have the necessary football resume

typically required for high school. Basketball and Baseball were the sports I excelled. Pop Warner football was not offered in my community because of budgetary and insurance reasons. As a child, I always wanted to play football with pads but my mother could never afford the fees. There was a local park near our community where youths who wanted to play Pop Warner football could but you had to pay. When the opportunity presented itself in high school to play tackle football, I took advantage of not having to pay fees.

Chapter 1-Introduction

Adolescents of the Imperial Courts Housing Projects are faced with many challenges and barriers that can lead to a life of self-destruction. It is well documented that these adolescents face many inequalities in the educational and jurisdictional systems. These adolescents are exposed to a life of violence, drugs, teen pregnancy, police brutality, and most importantly “the gang-life”. “Children who grow up in impoverished neighborhoods are at risk for dropping out of school, bearing children prematurely, and engaging in delinquent activities” (Jarrett, 1997).

Research indicates that early exposure to poverty, violence, drugs, sex, poor role-models; parent/guardian personal experiences with the public schools system, parent/guardian involvement and the lack of information about educational and career resources, play vital roles in an adolescent’s decision making for future opportunities. “Career decision-making difficulty is emerging as an important construct in framing and understanding factors contributing to the career development of adolescents and young adults” (Mau, 2004).

The Imperial Courts are housing projects, located in Watts California, an area located in South Los Angeles. The area is fighting to change the infamous reputation it has acquired for gang violence and riots. Beginning in the 1970s, the Bloods and Crips gangs’ rivalry dominated the community that had been established for the working class during WWII. Gang violence has since been

reported to be the cause of death for more than 20,000 people from 1985-2005" (laist.com, 2007). Many or majority of the deaths were youths between the ages of thirteen and twenty-five. "Many observers believe that the problems of crime, violence, and drug abuse reached "catastrophic" proportions in American inner cities in the late 1970s and have probably continued to worsen" (Wilson, 1987 in Case and Katz, 1991). "The proportion of black men 20 to 29 years old directly in trouble with the law (in jail or prison or on probation or parole) reached 23 percent in 1989" (Mauer, 1990 in Case and Katz, 1991). "African-Americans who are located at or near the bottom of America's economic strata, however, experience much more of the injustice that flourishes in our society" (Brown, 1998). The prison system population is made up of uneducated African American inmates. The reason why many African American men are in prison is because of their lack of education. The less education you have will increase your chance of going to prison.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the perception of adolescents of the Imperial Courts about gang membership, school completion and job opportunities. The research objectives of this study is to determine if federal funded educational access programs would increase the awareness of an adolescent of the Imperial Courts Housing Project educational, social and career aspirations.

The U.S. Public School system is a feeder for future jobs. The classes' students take must fit their future career aspirations to prepare them for U.S. and global employment. The U.S. job market varies regarding the level of education needed to obtain employment. To be employed in the U.S. job market, you must have employable skills. Through education, skills can be obtained in everyday classroom settings. The science, math, speech, English and all other courses are not only instrumental for college admissions; they are instrumental for future opportunities and well paying jobs.

The job market wants intelligent individuals. Education is the key out of poverty. Additional education beyond a high school diploma will expose students to travel, different cultures, leadership roles and advocates for their communities. There are careers that only require six-week on the job training, one-year programs and associate degrees. A four-year degree and advanced degrees are easily obtained, but not necessary needed to have a good paying job. Students' pathway to a career starts with strong support in the home, school and community.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. Why do adolescents in the Imperial Courts Housing Project join gangs?
2. Why do adolescents, who are gang members, from the Imperial Courts Housing Project not graduate from high school?

3. What are the needs of adolescents from the Imperial Courts Housing Project for access to educational and career resources?

Limitations

Information and knowledge of the youth descriptions describing their history and lifestyles were due to prior experience as a former resident. Information was shared to me typically not share to the average researcher due to the fact that I was born and raised in the Imperial Courts. There was a comfort zone that was established as a result of the research because of my relationship with their parents, family members and members of the community. The youths were surprised with all the information I knew about their family history and background. After I shared my knowledge, history and experiences of my upbringing as a youth in the Imperial Courts, the youths felt more comfortable with the interview as they shared information typically not shared to researchers in fear of law enforcement and not knowing anything about the researchers' upbringing. Typically in this situation, the researchers are not from a similar background and do not understand the issues and lifestyle that these youths encounter on a daily basis. Trust is a big factor when dealing with youth gang members and their community. In all, I knew all of the youth's parents either through being a part of the same crew as a youth or through sports as teammates or competition.

Chapter 2-Literature Review

Why Adolescents Join Gangs

"Many scholars agree that the family is probably the most critical factor related to crime and delinquency" (Brown, 1998). Case and Katz found that "family adult behaviors are strongly related to analogous youth behavior" (Case and Katz, 1991). "These factors (behaviors) include the affection of parents toward the child (the lower the level of affection, the higher the rate of delinquency), the kind of discipline the parents use (those parents who use consistently harsh and physical discipline will produce the most habitual and

violent delinquent), the prolonged absence of one or both parents (those from single-parent households are more likely to become delinquent), and the degree of supervision provided by the parent (the lesser amount of supervision, the higher rate of delinquency" (Brown, 1998).

"The links between behavior of older family members and youths are important for criminal activity, drug and alcohol use, childbearing out of wedlock, schooling, and church attendance" (Case and Katz 1991). Brown, in his study on 79 African America youngsters in Detroit states that just over half (53%) of his sample joined gangs through introductions by friends and peers, thirteen participants were introduced to gangs by siblings, eleven participants believed they "had" to join the gang for protection and respect, six joined because it "just happened", five joined because they had been envious of gang members, and that jealousy over gang members in school resulted in their joining gangs. For twenty-six, companionship was the most attractive characteristic about belonging to a gang (Brown, 1998). All 79 youths in Brown's study view their gang affiliation as a means for survival (Brown, 1998).

Huff study on Youth gangs and public policy in Cleveland and Columbus Ohio found that with little income to buy the flashy clothes and other consumer goods advertised throughout our society, a poor minority youth may find the "illegitimate opportunities" available through gangs, crime, and drug sales more compelling than the legitimate options available to him (Huff, 1989).

According to the William Gladden Foundation, 1992, four factors are primary in the formation of juvenile gangs. "First, youth experience a sense of alienation and powerlessness because of a lack of traditional support structures, such as family and school. This can lead to feelings of frustration and anger, and a desire to obtain support outside of traditional institutions. Second, gang membership gives youth a sense of belonging and becomes a major source of identity for its members. In turn, gang membership affords youth a sense of power and control, and gang activities become an outlet for their anger. Third, the control of turf is essential to the wellbeing of the gang, which often will use force to control both its territory and members. Finally, recruitment of new members and expansion of territory are essential if a gang is to remain strong and powerful, both willing and unwilling, members are drawn into gangs to feed the need for more resources and gang members" (William Gladden Foundation, 1992).

In the Imperial Courts Housing Projects (predominately African Americans), where gangs, violence, drugs, poor role models, teen pregnancies, childbearing out of wedlock, lack of career and educational aspirations and the lack of federal programs is the norm, framing and understanding factors that contributes to an adolescents or young adults career development can be link to the culture themes of the society. Creswell defines culture theme as, "a general position, declared or implied, that is openly approved or promoted in a society or (culture) group" (Creswell, 2007, 480). "Individuals sometimes mistake

cultural group with an ethnic group” (Creswell, 2007, 481). LeCompte & Schensul, states that “ethnic groups are self-identified individuals in a sociopolitical grouping that have a recognized public identity, such as Hispanics, Asian Pacific Islanders, and Arab Americans” (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). “Culture groups are individuals who share the same pattern as other in the group. This group can share any one or a combination of (a) behavior, which is an action taken by an individual in a cultural setting; (b) belief, is how an individual thinks about or perceives things in the cultural setting and; (c) language, which is how an individual talks to other in a cultural setting” (Creswell, 2007, 481).

Case and Katz found that “behaviors of neighborhood peers appear to substantially affect youth behaviors in a manner suggestive of contagion models of neighborhood effects” (Case and Katz, 1991). “Jarrett’s collective socialization theory maintains that inner-city neighborhoods lack middle-class residents who provide conventional role models and social control for poorer residents” (Jarrett, 1997). “Non-family adults who engage in ghetto-specific behaviors, such as crime, hustling, non-marital childbearing and dropping out of school are the most significant role models in children’s lives” (Jarrett, 1997). “Through frequent exposure to unconventional adults, children are encouraged to emulate alternative lifestyles as they mature” (Brooks Gunn et al. 1993; Jencks and Mayer 1989; Wilson 1987).

Lahey et al. 1999, in their study on "Boys who join Gangs" consisted of 347 boys; states that youths join gangs are based on two major competing models, Selection and Socialization theories. "Selection theories suggest that some youths join gangs because "birds of a feather flock together. Socialization theories suggest that youths who join gangs are socialized into antisocial behavior during or after gang entry. Lahey et al. 1999 continue to state that non-antisocial youths join gangs for reasons of self-esteem, power, and protection, but are encouraged to participate in antisocial behavior by the group after joining" (Lahey et al., 1999).

Gordon et al., 2004 study on Antisocial Behavior and Youth Gang Membership: Selection and Socialization goal was to "examine whether gang membership is associated with higher levels of delinquency because boys predisposed to delinquent activity are more likely than others to join. They found that boys who join gangs are more delinquent before entering the gang than those who do not join, and the delinquency of peers appears to be one mechanism of socialization" (Gordon et al., 2004).

According to Gatti et al. 2005 in their study on Youth gangs delinquency and drug use, a sample that included 756 boys first assessed when they attended kindergarten in disadvantaged areas of Montréal, using findings from Thornberry, Krohn, Lizotte, and Chard-Wierschem, states that gang membership can be linked to three models; selection, the facilitation and the enhancement

models (Gatti et al., 2005). According to the selection model, “the high level of delinquency among gang members does not depend on the influence of associating to a gang, but rather is due to the fact that gangs attract youths who are already committing crimes” (Gatti et al, 2005). The primary attraction of gangs is their ability to respond to student needs that are not otherwise being met; they often provide youth with a sense of family and acceptance otherwise lacking in their lives.

LACK OF RESOURCES

What would be very beneficial for the development of the youths in the Imperial Courts is exposure to a positive environment outside of their community and access to different outlets, career exploration and educational programs. “Early exposure to educational resources is an indicator that African American students will be successful in school and will be able to achieve their post-secondary goals” (Klern & Connell, 2004). “Consequently, poor children have little exposure to enriching educational, social, and cultural experiences that are characteristic of institutions and facilities in more affluent neighborhoods” (Jarrett, 1997). Jarrett’s Neighborhood resource theory argues that “impoverished African Americans neighborhoods have limited supply of good quality child-serving institutions and facilities” (Jarrett, 1997). “Poor children are more likely to live in unsafe neighborhoods, to go without recommended

vaccinations, to have difficulty in school and eventually drop out, and to become teen parents” (Seccombe, 2002).

Both educators and the general public have embraced the stereotype that African Americans are not interested in education. This theory is commonly practice in education and is regarded as common sense (Harris, 2006). Schools within schools (minority students are still denied access to resources that Caucasian students receive) “have limited African Americans students’ post secondary goals, which are arguably a continuation of historical discrepancies in equal educational opportunities that result in low expectations for future success and internalized self-perceptions that are reinforced by the educational system” (Bernak, Chi-Ying, & Siroskey-Sabdo, 2005).

African American students have dealt with inequalities in educational resources, leading many to feel helpless regarding their future goals. Many of these students turn to gangs, crimes, and drugs as a result of such inequalities as a “way out”. In his 1988 Field Notes, Huff states that, “we have to figure out a way to reach young kids before they get involved with these gangs” (Huff, 1989). Jarrett’s neighborhood effects theories argue that “inner-city areas lack social and economic resources that promote the social mobility prospects of African American children” (Jarrett, 1997). “Children who grow in impoverished neighborhoods are at risk for dropping out of school, bearing children prematurely, and engaging in delinquent activities” (Jarrett, 1997).

The 1960's civil rights movement was a major victory for all learners who were promised equal educational opportunities and access to resources regardless of their socioeconomic background or skin color. If the ruling that all students attending an U.S. public school system should have equal access to educational resources and allow for all learners' to excel academically, than there should be an equal distribution of high achievers from all ethnic backgrounds. "The dream of equal educational opportunities in the U.S. public school systems has turn into an exclusive infrastructure that has excluded them from resources; thereby contributing to their academic under achievement" (Honora, 2002).

Schools "master scripting" has generated a curriculum and classroom setting that is culturally insensitive; that rejects African American students' community values; and perpetuates negative feelings towards a public school system that has been built to facilitate failure academically. "Black children who prefer African American culture modes of achievement may find themselves at odds with the classroom demands geared toward learning in the mainstream cultural mode and thus may cause an increased risk of academic failure" (Sankofa, Hurley, Allen & Boykin, 2005). "In an inclusive public school system curriculum that is more sensitive to the students culture would create a Cultural Modeling academic environment" (Lee, 2006).

"If schools foster a curriculum that is rigorous and promotes higher expectations for African American students that are equal to those of Caucasian students' academic progress will soar. In addition, school environment that is warm and caring will produce African American scholars whose intelligence translates to high ACT/SAT scores, graduation from high school and college, and professional career positions just like their Caucasian peers" (Robinson-English, 2006). Griffin and Allen found that "African American students reach their occupational objective when they attend an inclusive school that grants them access to resources and set higher expectations for them" (Griffin & Allen, 2006).

Schools that are well resourced are usually attended by upper- and middle -class Caucasian pupils who grow up with advantages over African Americans. "If African American students, who attend under resourced districts and come from lower income families, were given the same academic luxuries as the above Caucasian students there could be a decrease in the achievement gap" (Glenn, 2006).

"When the communication between school and home is strong, families can provide the necessary support to help African American students to achieve academically and aid future career success in children" (Leckrone & Griffith, 2006). "Qualitative examples indicate that parental resource-seeking strategies and in-home learning strategies can expose children to good quality

resources and experiences, despite neighborhood limitations” (Jarrett, 1997). Schools must build an inclusive infrastructure for all parents especially for low-income families in order to ensure that all students have equal opportunities regardless of their familial background. “Proper access to these resources will encourage parental support, which will increase academic achievement and help African American students attain their future outlooks. These above changes in addition to a more equal distribution of resources, along with strong parental support, will give way to enhanced future outlook for African American students” (Roach, 2001).

Parental/Guardian Involvement and Awareness

“Traditionally, schools have operated under the assumption that African American parents are not interested in the educational growth of their children” (Fields-Smith, 2005). The perception that African Americans parents and guardians of adolescents of the Imperial Courts do not want to be involved in their children’s education is based on false assumptions. When education is important to poverty-stricken parents, their perception of education is positive and productive. Education, according to the parents in Brown’s study states, “is thought to be the key to escape from poverty, and ultimately, the road to success for their children” (Brown, 1998). In fact, African American students who attend an institution that discriminate on resources can achieve academically when there is strong parental support (Howard, 2003).

Contrasts to this belief, African American parents are less involved in their children's education due to their own negative educational experience in the U.S. public school system. "Because of their bad experiences in the U.S. public school system, the system have not prepared African American parents to become advocates for quality access to resources for their child" (Gosa & Alexander, 2007). Public schools must begin facilitating good communication between teachers, parents and community leaders, in addition to providing parents with resources to foster greater academic progress among students. "Students who have proper support in the home will excel academically and will have a strong connection to parents who are advocates for their children education objectives" (Moore, 2006). "Unfortunately, African American parents of lower economic status encounter barriers, such as a lack of communication with their child's educators" (Jackson et al., 2006).

In comparison to Caucasian parents, African American parents are less likely to instill self-determination skills, which are defined as, "personal control over environment, individuals, self-help, competition, future orientation and goal orientation" (Zhang, 2005). Caucasian parents are more likely to graduate from college, in contrast to African American parents who are likely to have only a high school diploma or GED. Therefore, Caucasian parents are more familiar with educational resources than are African American parents whose ignorance of academic support stems from their unfulfilling educational experience (Beaumont & Bell, 2006). "Caucasian families are provided with a dissemination of

information about educational resources that will assist their children's academic progress" (Bradley, Carla, Johnson, Phillip, Rawls & Glenda, 2005). The U.S. Public School Systems should promote and disseminate resources to all parents. These schools must begin facilitating good communication between teachers and parents, in addition to providing parents with resources to foster greater academic progress among students. "Schools and teacher preparation programs in our colleges and universities should move purposefully to develop teachers who are capable of teaching about and discussing situational ethics in general classrooms" (Huff, 1989). "Unfortunately, African American parents of lower economic status encounter barriers, such as a lack of communication with their child's educators. These communication barriers restrict access to the necessary knowledge needed to aid their child's aspirations for future success. African American parents with lower financial resources send their children to low functioning academic institutions that offer limited opportunities" (Jackson et al., 2006). These students are underachieving due to lack of academic support and not because of the myth that the African American community does not value education (Harris, 2006).

However, educational support in the home for most adolescents from Watts is limited to the abilities of those adults who care for them. Watts' parents whose standard of living is below the national average do not have the academic skills needed to be supportive. Actually, Watts has the lowest household income in all of Los Angeles County at \$17,987; 49.1% of individuals

were below poverty line (U.S. Census, 2008). The household income in the 1980 census for Watts was higher than it is today even with inflation (Wikimedia, Foundation, Inc., 2008).

Resiliency

Timmermans and Booker define resiliency as “(Those) who defy expectation by developing into well-adapted individuals in spite of serious stressors in their live” (Timmermans & Booker, 2006). Educational resilience is defined as “the heightened likelihood of success in school and other aspects of life, despite environmental adversities, brought about early traits, conditions, and experiences” (Griffin & Allen, 2006). Despite obstacles that obstruct career objectives, successful African American students show resiliency in their pursuit of potential career ambitions. “Resilient students’ have a tremendous self perception of their community’s hardships (low employment, peers having babies and high divorce rates) as incentives to do well in school” (Griffin & Allen, 2006). “Resilient students are motivated and exhibit commitment to education regardless of limited peer support and stereotyping from teachers who label them as not being intellectually capable enough to succeed in AP courses” (Howard, 2003).

“Many resilient African American students excel academically because of their belief in moving towards a brighter future and away from their impoverished neighborhood” (Gayles, 2005). These students understanding that

the U.S. public school system is socially unfair to them and that it treats them as second class citizens. "Resilient African American students' social awareness leads them to use this social upheaval as inspiration to succeed academically" (Gayles, 2005). "Lower socioeconomic status African American students who are enrolled in an underserved academic facility have academically excelled in education despite of many barriers. For these students the barriers in their communities constructed as a result of an unjust society - where victimization of uneducated adults motivate them to obtain post-secondary goals" (Griffin & Allen, 2006).

TRIO Outreach Programs

"The Federal TRIO Programs are federal outreach and student services programs designed to identify and provide services for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds" (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). "In August 1964, in the midst of his administration's "War on Poverty," President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Economic Opportunity Act. This legislation gave rise to the Office of Economic Opportunity and its Special Programs for Students from Disadvantaged Backgrounds or, as they have since become more commonly known, the nation's TRIO programs" (McElroy and Armesto, 1998). "TRIO includes eight programs targeted to serve and assist low-income individuals, first-generation college students, and individuals with disabilities to progress through

the academic pipeline from middle school to post baccalaureate programs” (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

“As part of this statute, the first TRIO initiative, Upward Bound, came into existence, followed soon thereafter by Talent Search, which was created by the Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1965. When the HEA was first reauthorized in 1968, it established TRIO's Student Support Services program and transferred all of TRIO from the Office of Economic Opportunity to the Office of Higher Education Programs” (McElroy and Armesto, 1998). When the HEA was reauthorized in 1972, the fourth TRIO program, Educational Opportunity Centers (EOC), was created. “The expansion of TRIO's reach and outreach continued in 1976 with the creation of the TRIO Staff and Leadership Training Authority (SLTA)” (McElroy and Armesto, 1998). “The fifth TRIO program, the Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program, was created in 1986” (McElroy and Armesto, 1998). Most recently, in 1990, the U.S. Department of Education created the Upward Bound Math/Science Program, which is administered under the same regulations as other Upward Bound programs.

Educational Talent Search (ETS) is a college access program that serves low-income youth in grades six through twelve. In addition to counseling, participants receive information about college admission requirements, scholarship, and various student financial aid programs. ETS also provides low-income students and their families with assistance in choosing a college,

applying for college, applying for scholarships, applying for financial aid, career awareness and six-week summer academic academy. "This early intervention program help young people better understand their educational and career opportunities and options" (The Pell Institute, 2009). "The program also serves high school dropouts by encouraging them to reenter the educational system, complete high school, and pursue postsecondary education" (McElroy and Armesto, 1998).

Upward Bound targets youth between 13 and 19 years old (grades nine through twelve) that have experienced low academic success. High school students from low-income families whose parents have not earned a bachelor's degree or military veterans with only a high school degree are eligible to participate. The program's goal is to increase the rates at which the targeted students enroll in and graduate from postsecondary institutions by providing fundamental support such as help with the college admissions process, career exploration and assistance in preparing for college entrance examinations (McElroy and Armesto, 1998).

Upward Bound projects bring low income, first generation and underrepresented high school students to college campuses after school, on weekends and during the summer (The Pell Institute, 2009). It engages participating students in an extensive, multi-year program designed to provide academic, counseling, study skills and tutoring services along with a cultural

enrichment component, all of which enhance their regular school program prior to entering college. Most Upward Bound programs also provide participants with a college experience through a five- to eight-week, full-time residential summer program at a postsecondary institution. "The summer experience is reinforced with weekly tutorial and mentoring services during the school year" (McElroy and Armesto, 1998).

Educational Opportunity Centers (EOC) provides counseling and information on college admissions and financial aid options to qualified low-income, first-generation- college, and underrepresented minority (TRIO-eligible) adults who want to enter or continue a program of postsecondary education. "The goal of the EOC program is to help these adults successfully negotiate the college application process and successfully complete degree programs" (McElroy and Armesto, 1998).

Upward Bound Math/Science Program (UBMS) initiative establishes specialized Upward Bound centers designed to strengthen the mathematics and science skills of TRIO eligible high school students. "The goal of the program is to help these students recognize and develop their potential to excel in these and related fields, and to encourage them to pursue postsecondary degrees and careers in mathematics- and science- based fields" (McElroy and Armesto, 1998). "The UBMS projects provide intensive instruction and innovative curricula

during both the academic year and summer in math and science, as well as in other subjects and foreign language skills” (The Pell Institute).

“Student Support Services (SSS) programs provide college students from disadvantaged backgrounds with assistance in meeting basic college requirements, opportunities for academic development, and motivation to successfully complete their postsecondary education” (McElroy and Armesto, 1998). “These programs enable students to successfully begin their college career, persist in their studies, and ultimately earn a bachelor’s degree” (The Pell Institute, 2009). “The goal of SSS is to increase the college retention and graduation rates of its participants and facilitate their transition from one level of higher education to the next” (McElroy and Armesto, 1998).

The Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program prepares TRIO-eligible participants who are enrolled in institutions of higher learning, and who have demonstrated strong academic potential, for doctoral studies by involving them in mentoring, internship, and research, and other scholarly activities. “Student Affairs staff work closely with program staff to help McNair participants meet their undergraduate requirements, investigate graduate opportunities, enroll in graduate school, and successfully complete advanced degrees” (McElroy and Armesto, 1998).

The Role of Churches

"The church has been a staple hold in the African American community since the early 20th century" (Isaac, Guy & Valentine, 2000). Within the community the church serves a multitude of purposes, including the distribution of knowledge and education. Policies which have separated schools for churches have not had a positive impact on African American students. The elimination of school and church has destroyed a critical piece in the African American parents' ability to receive appropriate information and knowledge. "If schools and African American community churches collaborate, to provide educational services and resources for congregation members, their link could to improve African American students' achievement in education" (Holloman, Gasman & Anderson-Tompkins, 2003).

"Education and the African American Church have a strong rich history dating back o slavery" (Holloman, Gasman & Anderson-Tompkins, 2003). "African Americans have always looked to the Church for education" (Isaac, Guy & Valentine, 2001). Post Civil war the Freedman's Bureau and other religious organization establish schools for African American students. "These churches laid the foundation for educating African American students" (Durham, 2003).

The trusting relationship between African American churches and families has been well document. "African American preachers are known to be someone you can depend on for moral and social problems. History tells us African American Churches are at the forefront for promoting social change. African American Churches are essential to gain support and cooperation from the African American community" (Holloman, Gasman & Anderson-Tompkins, 2003). Mt. Olivet After school program, in Ohio, has proven that communication between school and church can help improve African American students' social behavior and academic performance (Gardner, Cartledge, Schley, Woolsey, Schley & Utley, 2001).

Chapter 3 – Methodology

Imperial Courts youths have dealt with inequalities in educational and career resources leading many to feel helpless regarding their future goals. Many of these youths turn to gangs, crime, drugs and teen pregnancies as a result of such inequalities as a way out. In this study, I used the information provided by members of the community in their effort to improve school graduation rates, college going and completion rates, adolescents' gang membership and career enhancements.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore the perception of adolescents of the Imperial Courts about gang membership, school completion and career opportunities.

Research Questions

1. Why do adolescents in the Imperial Courts Housing Project join gangs?
2. Why do adolescents, who are gang members, from the Imperial Courts Housing Project not graduate from high school?
3. What are the needs of adolescents from the Imperial Courts Housing Project for access to educational and career resources?

Research Population

The following study was conducted with youths of the Imperial Courts Housing Projects with cooperation of the Imperial Courts Recreational Center. The sample was selected due to the community high rates of drop outs, juvenile with criminal records, juvenile participation with the neighborhood gang and violence, exposure to drugs and alcohol, and high teen pregnancies rate. All adolescents are current residents of the Imperial Courts Housing Projects and have some type of affiliation with the Imperial Courts Recreational Center either through their participation in sponsored programs and/or sport leagues.

The Imperial Courts Housing Projects are located in the heart of Watts where gang violence and membership is the dominant norm. The Projects are made up of predominately African Americans. It is home to one of Los Angeles largest street gang and the youths of the Imperial Courts are appealed by the operations, activities and the support given to them from the gang. This gang adds support to these youths who lack support in the educational system and in their homes.

Youths were informed about the study by a community leader. If interested, youths' names were given to the primary researcher who made contact with both the youth and parent(s) to explain the purpose of the research, how they were identified and why they were selected.

Instrument

I developed the survey used in this study for specific use in this project. The 23 item survey contained questions that were intended to collect information about school completion, academic and career resources and gang membership. I developed the survey through resources and information provided by my Foundation Educational Research course and Survey Method in Education Research course.

Subject Descriptions

Due to the confidentiality of this research project and the subjects all being under the age of eighteen, pseudonyms were used for all subjects. These are not the actual name of the subjects who participated in these interviews.

Subject 1, DaShon Brown

DaShon is middle child of three boys who is considered a violent member. Both his brothers are part of the neighborhood gang. Born and raised in the Imperial Courts Housing Projects (IChP), DaShon knows firsthand the structure and hardships of gang membership. DaShon is a second generation gang

member as both his parents were born and raised in the ICHP and also part of the same gang. His parents were not known to be violent gang members, but his father was well known for his fighting ability. He has an uncle who is serving a life sentence and his older brother is serving a seven through ten years prison sentence. He has a host of uncles, aunts and cousins from the same gang due to the make-up of his parents. DaShon chose a Fireman or a professional boxer as a career choice.

Subject 2, Jerry Polk

Jerry lives in the housing projects with both his parents (which is not typical), his older sister and younger brother. As with interviewer 1, Jerry is a second generation gang member as his father is very actively involved in gangs. His mother is a non-violent member but would not hesitate to get involve in minor disputes. His older sister is currently a senior in high school who has aspirations to play community college basketball. Jerry, who is fourteen and a freshman in high school, would also like to pursue a basketball career. Jerry considers himself as a member of the gang but understands his part within the gang. Just as I was, Jerry is not expected to engage in criminal activities because he elected to pursue sports. The community will support his decision and will allow him the opportunity to achieve his goals.

Subject 3, Tinisia Melchor

Tinisia's father was a former crew leader. Tinisia is the youngest of three on her mother side. Her parents were never married and did not have any more

children with each other; her father has a host of childbearing out of wedlock relationships in the community. This is the typical lifestyle of the norms in the community. She is not a violent gang member but dates the most violent habitual members. Even though she is currently in school, her involvement with the gang members can expose her to a life of drugs and sex. Teen girls who engaged in relationships with gang members usually become parents and eventually single parents because the gang members have more than one girlfriend. As a career choice, Tanisha selected Pediatrician because she like working with kids.

Subject 4, Dayon Knox

Dayon is the oldest of five; his mother had him at the age of fourteen. Dayon has a host of family from the gang. Dayon never had a relationship with biological father, but his step dad was very active in his life. He witnessed his cousin death as a result of gang violence. Dayon is not part of a crew that's involved in gang or criminal activities. Regardless of gang membership, I believe Dayon will graduate from high school because of his family support. Despite the age disparity, his mom has strong values and belief. She comes from a family that has two sisters in college and one brother who plays basketball for a well known high school in another district. Dayon did not have a career choice but stated that he would attend the University of Southern California if he had the opportunity.

Subject 5, Antwan Rizzo

Antwan comes from one of the largest family in the ICHP. His father side consists of fourteen aunts and uncles. Both his parents were born and raised in the housing projects. His father is a non-violent member who is addicted to drugs whereas his mother is a non-violent member. Antwan has a host of uncles and cousins in prison. He is the second of three siblings who was thirteen years old when he became an active member; his involvement in the gang is very serious. He is a violent gang member who witnessed two cousins' deaths as a result of gang violence. Because of the deaths of his two cousins, Antwan became very violent as he had a great relationship with one of the cousins. The death of his cousins triggered a rage inside of him which I believe will land him in prison or dead. What was interesting about Antwan interview was his career choice. When asked about career selection, Antwan stated a career as a mortician.

Subject 6, Otis Fulcher

Otis, just as Antwan, comes from a large family. He is the youngest of four siblings. Otis is a third generation gang member as both his father and grandfather are members of the gang. His grandfather, who was a crew leader, was murdered in the late 1980s' as a result of gang violence. He never had the opportunity to meet his grandfather. His father is not known to be a violent member but had his run-ins with the law. His father was a drug lord who main mission as part of the gang was to supply drugs to the minor drug dealers within the community. Otis has a host of family in prison. One of his uncles is serving life

in prison for violent crimes. Besides the death of his grandfather, Otis witnessed the death of two uncles. Otis is carrying on a tradition in his family as a violent gang member. Otis was four or five years old when he first started his gang membership because his family promotes gang membership at a young age. When asked about a career choice, he stated "some kind of Business" because he loves money and knows how to manage money.

Subject 7, Melvin Newell

Melvin is the oldest of three boys. All his brothers are members of the gang. Melvin is a third generation gang member as his father and grandfather was part of the gang. His father, who has life in prison, was a violent member. He is carrying on his father tradition as he served four years in the California Youth Authority. Melvin also comes from a large family that promotes gang membership at a young age. He is a violent member who was twelve years old when he became an active member. Melvin was only eight years old when his father went away to prison. He has a host of uncles and cousins in prison. He witnessed the deaths of two uncles and a cousin due to gang violence. What was surprising about this interviewer with the history of his family background, when asked about a career choice, Melvin picked a career as a Probation Officer because that's what he wanted to do as a child.

Subject 8, Joseph Abner

Joe is the oldest of four. Joe is also a third generation gang member as both his father and grandfather were members of the gang. Sadly for Joe, his

grandfather was murdered as a result of gang violence while his father passed away in prison. He never had the opportunity to meet his grandfather as he passed before he was born. He was twelve years old when his father passed away in prison. Joe is another youth who comes from a large family that promote gang membership at a young age as he was only ten years old when he became an active member. When asked about role model or who do you look up to, he stated that his father was his role model. Joe did not have a career choice but stated that if possible, he would attend the University of Oregon. As with all the youths, Joe did not know about college procedures nor did he know about the right classes to get into college.

Subject 9, William Paige

William is a second generation gang member and is the youngest of three siblings. His father was murdered as a result of gang violence when William was seven years old. His older brother is a violent member while his sister is considered a non-violent member. His sister has children with a violent member. William crew does not engage in criminal activities but rather enjoy engaging in gambling and women. Despite his involvement, William is a bright young man who possesses excellent leadership skills who would have benefited from educational programs. William dropped out of high school when he was in the tenth grade due to his mother passing. After his mother passing, William went through an emotional roller coaster as he currently is residing with his step father in which they do not have a great relationship. When asked about college

selections, William stated that he would attend Clark University in Atlanta to pursue a career as a Personal Trainer.

Subject 10, Jaron Morgan

Jaron is the third oldest of eight siblings. He is a second generation gang member as both his parents were violent gang members. As a result of gang violence, Jaron's father was murdered when he was ten years old. His mother is addicted to drugs and an alcoholic. In addition to the large number of siblings, he comes from a large family that consists of a host of aunts, uncles and cousins from the gang. His older brother is currently serving a ten years prison sentence. Jaron is a violent gang member who uses hard core drugs typically not use by his peers. He served jailed time for drug sells and weapons charges. Jaron was twelve years old when he became active in criminal activities. When asked about a career choice, Jaron stated that he would have pursued a career as a music producer.

Subject 11, Dontay Lawson

Dontay is the youngest of three boys. He is a second generation gang member as both his parents are former gang members. His parents were not violent members but his father was a well known drug dealer who drove fancy cars and wore expensive jewelry. Both his older brothers are members of the same gang but not consider as violent members. In fact, his older brother completed a program that assisted drop-outs to earn their high school diploma and admissions to a major university. The program was around for just one year

due to budgetary issues. Dontay crew consists of individuals who commit violent crimes and participate in gang activities. Dontay started his gang membership at the age of nine. When asked if his school provided enough information to help him obtain a career, he stated "no, school is for squares". What was interested about this youth is the answer he provided when asked about if he could attend any college, which college would you choose and why? He stated that he would attend the University of Connecticut because he wants to travel and experience more than what he is experiencing now, which is "this". "This" refers to the gang life and his environment. He got really excited when asked if he could live on a college campus for six weeks in the dorms during the summer and attend simulated colleges classes as part programming, his eyes got wide open and he shouted out yes! The same reaction was given when ask about college tours.

Subject 12, Donovan Raymond

Donovan is a fifteen years old gang member who dropped-out of high school in the ninth grade. He is a second generation gang member who became an active member at the age of nine. His father is not a violent member but Donovan older brother and uncle are very involved with the gang. Donovan aspired to follow in the footsteps as his older brother and uncle. His mother is not an active member but currently date a violent gang member who is in prison. As a child, Donovan witnessed the death of his cousin and the life sentence given to another cousin for the retaliation death of their cousin. His

cousin was only thirteen years old when he was shot to death by a drive-by shooter as he and Donovan were heading to the store. Donovan was not hit by any of the gun fire. Surprising, Donovan was not involve in the retaliation attack for his cousin death because Donovan noted that was his favorite cousin.

Subject 13, John Roy

John is the middle of three boys who dropped-out of high school in the ninth grade. He is a second generation gang member as both his parents were member. Both John's older brother and younger brother are part of the gang but are not considered as violent members. John is not considered a violent member but had has altercations with neighboring gangs. John was also in juvenile detention over course of five years for grand theft auto and burglaries. He became an active member by the age of eleven where he spent the first of plenty of stays in juvenile hall. John comes from a large family where gang membership is the norm and promoted at young age. He has a host of family members in prison. Last year, John witnessed the death of his best friend murdered by the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) as they were in pursue of his friend after he fled when the LAPD noticed him acting suspicious. Currently, John is still coping with the death of his best friend. What's interesting about this youth is when asked about college selections and why you chose that college, John stated that he would attend the University of Maine to get away from all this gang violence. John expressed interests in obtaining information about earning his high school diploma or a GED program.

Subject 14, Tyrell Streeter

Tyrell is a seventeen year gang member who is actively involved in gang activities. He became an active member at the age of eleven. He is a violent member who also spent time in the California Youth Authority for robberies, home invasions and burglaries. He is a second generation gang member as both his parents were members. His father was a former crew leader who spent time in the prison system. His mother is not known to be violent but had altercations with other females in the community. Tyrell aspired to follow in the footsteps of his father, and rarely his older sister. His older sister is a violent member whose crew consists of all males. Rarely will you see his sister with females unless they are just as violent. Tyrell is a heavy drug user whose drugs consist of PCP and cocaine. He is a father of two as he had his first child at the age of fourteen. When asked about college selections, he stated that he would not choose a college because he would like to do what he is doing now because "that's all I know".

Subject 15, Leo Everett

Leo is a sixteen year old gang member who dropped-out of high school in the tenth grade. He comes from a large family that consists of eight brothers and three sisters. He is the youngest of the boys who all are members of the gang. He is a second generation gang member as his father was murdered due to gang violence when he was eight years old. Before the death of his father, Leo was not as involved in gang activities. After the death of his father, he

wanted to carry on in his father footsteps as he joined the crew who part take in criminal and gang activities. He has one older brother serving a life sentence while another brother is serving an eighteen year prison sentence. Leo began his gang membership at the age of twelve. Leo excels in sports. Leo stated that when he was a child, he used to watch football games on T.V. with his father and brothers hoping one day he could play professional football. He aspired to attend U.S.C. or the University of Norte Dame on a college scholarship and then get drafted to the N.F.L. Also, Leo mother is addicted to drugs and has major drinking issues. His fourteen year sister already has a six months old baby.

Subject 16, Ronicka Lyons

Ronicka is a sixteen year young lady who has two kids. She dropped-out of high school when she was in the ninth grade after the birth of her first baby. Ronicka lives in the housing projects with her mother as both of her baby's fathers are no longer around to help support the babies. Both of her baby's fathers are gang members while her second baby's father is a well-known violent gang member. Currently, he is awaiting a trial in which he may be convicted to serve between seven through ten years in prison. Her first baby's father is not as violent as the second, but he is known to be a minor drug dealer. She comes from a large family where both of her parents were members of the gang. She has three older brothers who are members. She was ten years old when she began her membership. She had an uncle who was murdered two years ago as part of a gang war. She is not a violent member but would not

hesitate to get involve into minor disputes. She is currently on probation for fraud and identity theft.

Subject 17, Sam Lewis III

Sam is a seventeen year old member of the gang who began his membership at the age of fifteen. He dropped-out of high school in the ninth grade due to the death of his father. Sam is a third generation gang member as both his parents as well as his grandfather were all part of the same gang. Actually, Sam is a bright, respectful and excellent young man who was mentally destructed after the death of his father. He is not a violent member but stated that he wanted revenge on the gang that murdered his father. He has an uncle who is really violent and would not hesitate to retaliate for the murder of his brother. Sam has a cousin who is serving a life sentence due to gang activities. When asked about college selections, Sam stated that would like to attend Harvard University because he heard that it is interesting and very challenging.

Subject 18, Wendy Hare

Wendy is a seventeen year old violent female gang member who dropped-out of high school in the ninth grade. She was nine year old when she began her gang membership. Since then, she has been to juvenile halls, ran away from home and was involved in a relationship with an older gang member. Surprising, she does not have any kids because teenage girls typically in her situation all had kids. She has two older brothers who are members of the

gang. Her older brother got married and moved to a Mid-Western state in hope of a better upbringing for his family and to escape the violence of gang wars. Her second oldest brother is a semi-violent member as he been in and out of prison. She has two uncles who are serving life in prison for gang activities. As a kid, her parents wanted her to graduate from high school and attend college to pursue a career in the medical field. When asked to pick any career, she chose a nurse because she like working with kids.

Subject 19, Charles Sharpe

Charles is an eighteen year old violent gang member who is diagnose with a mental health problem. He is a third generation gang member as his parents and grandfather was part of the gang. His father passed away when he was eight years old as a result of drugs. Interesting fact in this situation is that Charles's grandfather was part of Stanley "Tookie" Williams' (co-founder of the Crips) crew who terrorized the streets of Los Angeles back in the seventies. Charles uncle was released from prison after serving twenty-seven straight years in prison. Charles is the second oldest of four and is the oldest boy in his family. His older sister is not a violent member but her baby's father is a well-known drug dealer. His two younger brothers are members of the gang but are not violent members. In fact, his youngest brother is a top athlete at the local high school where he hopes to receive a football scholarship. Charles had minor run-ins with law enforcement for possession of drugs and weapons. He never served any major jail time but served time in juvenile halls.

Chapter 4 – Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore the perception of adolescents of the Imperial Courts Housing Projects about school completion, gang membership and job opportunities from the perspective of current youth gang members who reside in the Imperial Courts. The research population was youths who identified themselves as member of the neighborhood gang. Youths were interviewed one on one by the researcher specifically for this study, designed to gather information about school completion, educational and career resources, gang membership and role models. I used qualitative analysis to explore the participants' responses. Nineteen youths participated in this study who all resides in the Imperial Courts Housing Projects.

Ages:	14 years old	15 years old	16 years old	17 years old	18 years old	Total Subjects:
Females:	0	0	1	1	1	3
Males:	2	1	2	7	4	16

The findings of the study are reported in context of three research questions: (1) Why adolescents join gangs?, (2) Why adolescents are not graduating from high school ?, and (3) The need for access to educational and career resources.

Group 1

In this group of questions, youths were asked questions about school and gang membership. The second question in group one asked youths, "Do you attend high school, if yes, which high school and if the youth responded as no, they were asked, "what was the last grade you completed"? Five youths responded that they are currently attending high school and fourteen stated that they dropped-out. Of the fourteen youths who indicated that they dropped-out, five dropped-out in the ninth grade, four dropped-out in the tenth

grade, three dropped-out in the eleventh grade, one dropped-out in middle school and one youth stated that he didn't remember what grade he dropped-out. Of the five youths who stated that they were in school, two are in the ninth grade, two are in the eleven grade and one is in the twelve grade.

The third question in group one asked, "Do you remember your last GPA"? Only two youths stated that they remember their last GPA while the reminder of the youths indicated that didn't remember. Surprisingly, the two youths who indicated that they remember their GPA were youths who had dropped-out. What was so amazing about these two individuals were their GPA's when they dropped-out. One had a 3.0 and the other had 3.67.

The fourth question in group one asked the youths if they knew the highest grade level completed by their parents/guardians. Three participants stated the twelfth, one stated the eleventh, one stated the tenth, one stated middle school, ten stated "I don't know" and three stated they weren't sure.

When asked if they are member of a gang, all nineteen youths indicated they belong to a gang. Ten stated that they joined the gang because they were born and raised in it with one of the ten stating that, "That's all I know". One youth said he joined because "it's a family thing; one said they made him; one said, "that's it, nothing else"; one indicated that it's been in him since he was ten; one stated that there's nothing else to do, I don't see another way;

one stated that it was boring; one stated that they were the only person he could run to; and one said that his big brother made him.

The ages vary when joined the gang. One joined when he was only five years old. Three joined when they were nine years old, four joined at the age of ten, two at eleven, four at twelve, two at thirteen, two at fifteen and one participant stated "all I can remember.

Group 2

Group two questions main focus were to identify the youth's knowledge about career and academic resources. When asked if they could pick any career as a job, two stated that they would be a Firefighter, two stated a Basketball player, one a Football player, two said business, two stated a Music Producer, one Pediatrician, one mortician, one Probation Officer, one personal trainer, one vet, one hair stylist, one dancer, one nurse and two stated that they don't know.

The second question in this group asked if they knew about career exploration. Of the nineteen participants, only one student stated that they knew about career exploration. When asked if their school provided enough information to help obtain a career, only two stated that their school had provided them with enough information about careers.

All but two youths, when asked if their school provided proper help with assignments or provided tutors to assist, eighteen of the youths stated no. What is amazing is that only two youths said they were placed in remedial courses.

Group 3

Group three questions were geared to focus on the youths' knowledge about college procedures. When asked if they could attend any college in the country, which college would they choose to attend. Four said they would attend USC (University of Southern California), three stated UCLA (University of California- Los Angeles), one Long Beach City College, one El Camino City College, one Loyola Marymount (CA), one Fresno State University because he has family there, one Wiley College (TX) because he had seen it in the movie (The Great Debaters), one University of Oregon, one Clark Atlanta because he had heard that it was a good school and that it's a Black College, one University of Maine because it's far away from here another youth stated the University of Connecticut because he wanted to get away from the gang violence, one said Harvard because it's a great school, one stated that it would be either USC or Norte Dame University because of their football team. One youth stated that he would not choose - "no college - because he "rather do what I'm doing now, that's all I know".

All youths were asked if they knew about college admissions procedures and all nineteen youths stated that they know "nothing" about the college

procedures. So, when asked if they knew about the classes necessary to get into college, again all nineteen youths stated that they were not familiar with the classes necessary to get into college. A question was asked if they were familiar with the college entrance exams, two stated that they are familiar with the college entrance exams with one of the participant who seemed confused and stated, "I think, like the SAT or something like that". When asked if they think college is affordable, eighteen youths said no with one of the youth saying, "unless I get a scholarship".

Group 4

Group four questions focus on demographics away from their community. When asked if they could attend classes on a college campus and live in the dorms for six-weeks during the summer, would you attend? All youths said they would attend the six-week summer program with a couple of the youths getting really excited and saying, "And it's free, yea I will attend"! Another youth said that, "it is nothing else to do around here". Also, when asked if they would attend college visits throughout the West Coast, all nineteen youths stated that they would attend.

Group 5

Group five questions concentrate on the community peers and future outcome. When asked if they have a role-model or someone they look up to, eleven of the youths stated that they do not have a role model nor do they look

up to anyone. One youth stated that his role model is Kobe Bryant (Basketball Player), one stated her sister, two said their dads, and one stated Lil Boostie (Rapper) and two stated their "hood homies, the big homies" which is a reference to the established gang member.

Number twenty-one in group five asked the youths, what your peers in the community expect from you. Seven said nothing while two stated, "to do violence, gang bang and to put in work for the hood", three stated, "just to do me", one answered dead or in jail, one said survival, one said that he didn't know what they expect from him, one stated "to keep it solid", one said to do right, another said to be a good citizen, and one said his peers want him to do good in college and not be like them.

When asked where do you see yourself in ten years, seven didn't know where they will be, one said in college, one said "ballin" which means having a lot of money, one stated that he never thought about that, one stated with a job, a house and a family, one said hopefully somewhere chilled out with a good job, one stated only time will tell, one said just to be alive, one said he don't know, hopefully something nice, one stated, "I don't know, whatever the future holds for me, one said surviving the hood, one stated probably trying to get an education, one said in the hood and another stated, "hopefully still living around here".

When the question was asked about what your parents/guardians want for your future, one said “they probably want a lot, but nothing”, one stated living healthy, one said to better myself, one stated that “I never even ask them that, one said they want more, another one said “I don’t know now”, one said they want me to get a job, they want me to go to school, one said that they want him to do right, one said to be alive, four didn’t know what their parents/guardian wanted for their future, one said survival, one said “to make sure I’m not dead or in jail, one stated that he didn’t know because they never talk about it, one said to get an education, one stated that her parents wanted her to be a Doctor or something and another stated that he remembered his father wanting him to play football.

Summary of Findings

1. In general, all youths indicated that they belong to the neighborhood gang. All reported that they were either born or raised in the community as part of their initiation into the gang.
2. All but one youth stated that they were not familiar with career exploration, nor while they were in school, all but two youths were not provided with enough information to help them obtain a career.
3. All youths stated that they would attend classes on a college campus and they would live in the dorms in the summer for six-weeks if given the

opportunity and all would attend college tours if the opportunity would to present itself.

4. Eighteen of the nineteen youths indicated that while in school, their school did not provide them with the proper help with assignments like tutoring.
5. All the youths indicated that they were not familiar the classes necessary to get into college and knew “nothing” about college admissions and procedures.

Youths reported their knowledge of gang membership by the age of fifteen with one of the youth stating that he joined the gang at the age five. Fourteen of the youths had already dropped out of school with one the youth who is currently in school saying that, “school is for squares”. Of the youths who dropped out, two knew their GPAs’ when they dropped out and the current youths, amazingly did not know their GPA. One of the current high school student stated that “the school has not issue them out yet”.

Youths also reported that they did not know their parents/guardian highest grade completed. Of the nineteen youths, five knew the highest grade completed by the people who care for them.

The interviews reveal that there is a high need for educational and career resources programs as well as positive role models for the development of these youths. Only one of the nineteen youths knew about career exploration. When asked about their career choice, only two of the youths stated that they did not

know what they wanted as a career. The other youths had career choices where a college degree is required. Surprisingly, one of the youth career choices was a probation officer. This was surprising for me due to the fact of the community perception of officers of any kind. Also, two of the nineteen youths stated that while they were in school, they felt that their school provided enough information to them to obtain their career choice. One of the two youths was the youth who stated that they knew about career exploration. The other youth was asked again if he knew about career exploration and he stated that he did not know about career exploration.

College awareness was remarkably unheard of among the youths. Unanimously, all nineteen youths did not know anything about college admissions nor did they know about the necessary classes required for college admissions. Only two of the nineteen youths were familiar with the college entrance exams with one of the youth stating, "I think, like the SAT or something like that". All but one youth think college is not affordable.

Academic programs that are geared and whose objectives are outlined to assist with college procedures will allow for the youths a better chance of obtaining careers in which they think are not attainable. These academics programs will expose the youths to different perspectives that will introduce them to a lifestyle outside of their normal setting. It will expose the youths to

traveling and open up network outlets that will allow for the youths to advocate for themselves.

Summer camps and camps that allowed for youths to stay overnight would be very beneficial. All nineteen youths interviewed stated that would attend a six-week live-in summer camp held on a college campus if the opportunity would present itself. When asked this question, one of the youth got really excited and stated, "and it's free" and another youth stated, "there's nothing else to do around here". Along that same line, when asked if they would attend college visits and tours, again all nineteen youths stated that they would attend.

The youth who stated, "there's nothing else to do around here" is the typical behavior among majority of the youths growing up in the Imperial Courts. When asked why you joined the gang, for the most part, all stated that they were born and raised in the Imperial Courts. Some added that it was a family thing, that's all I know, that's it (nothing else), nothing else to do (I don't see another way), nothing to do (it was boring) and that's all I know. Positive role models are non existence for the youths. When asked who their role models were, eleven of the youths stated that they did not have a role model nor did they look up to anyone. For two of the youths, older and well established gang members were individuals who they viewed as role models.

Conclusion

Understanding the lifestyle of a gang member and witnessing the negative outcomes of gang membership, I was resilient in the fact that I used my community hardships and tribulations as motivational tactics to place myself with the opportunity at a healthy lifestyle. I knew at a young age that I did not want to have such a lifestyle as a gang member. I witnessed to many long term prison sentences and deaths of peers, friends and family members due to gang violence. Therefore, I took advantage of certain opportunities in which most of my peers did not. I attended a variety of sport camps and participated in numerous parks leagues around the Los Angeles area to occupied my time away from criminal activities which exposed me to different outlets and networking channels. I enjoyed attending summer camping trips and overnight retreats sponsored by World Impact. World Impact is a community based church organization which provides faith and hope to the community as a whole but whose main mission and objectives were to provide a safe haven for the youths of the community. They provided the community with great mentors and role models who were always present in the community providing fun activities for the youths and having great give a ways.

The results of this study revealed that there is a high need for academic programs such as TRIO programs. TRIO programs could expose participants and

their family to academic and career resources in which they are lacking. These federal funded programs will bring the trust back into the parents who lost confidence or whose belief is negative towards the public school system that was unfair and unjust to them and teach the youths how to advocate for themselves. The TRIO programs host a six week live-in summer academic program held on a college campus in effort to simulate a real college experience in addition to the academic resources provided throughout the academic school year. All of the youths in the study indicated that if they had the opportunity to live on a college campus for six weeks and attend simulated college courses just as a college student, they all would attend. All the youths in the study also indicated that if the opportunity would present itself, they would attend college tours. TRIO programs will encourage and promote lifelong learning and will help mold these youths into productive citizens and to have an impact on the world, their family and their community.

Recommendations I

What would be very beneficial for the development of these youths of the Imperial Courts is exposure to a more positive environment outside of their community and access to different outlets, career awareness, and educational resources. Within the Housing Projects, there is a recreational center for the adolescents to participate in a variety of sports, wellness and cultural enrichment programs. Currently, the recreation center is not providing the

necessary resources and/or activities that will give these youths a better direction in life. During the 1980s' and 1990s', under the directions of and effective leader, the recreational center was a place where youths could engage in a variety of activities. Today's Imperial Courts youths are stripped from such opportunities and are making poor decisions that will lead to a life of self-destruction.

The Imperial Courts Recreational Center (ICRC) mission should be to provide the youths of the Imperial Courts with access to career and educational resources. The mission of the Imperial Courts should state;

“The Mission of the ICRC will be to provide fundamental support services to low income/first generation youths of the Imperial Courts Housing Projects in their preparation to complete middle and high school. The ICRC will provide access to college entrance and career awareness programs through sports and sponsored programs. Through sports and sponsored programs, the youths will better understand the purpose of teamwork, leadership, sportsmanship, and wellness. The goals of the ICRC will be to shape these youths into more productive individuals and decrease the numbers of drop-outs and increase the rates of enrollment and graduates from post-secondary institutions. The ICRC will provide support, motivation, and encouragement to challenge each participant's educational and career achievement and to prepare them for the

pursuit of post-secondary education. The ICRC will pride itself on putting the youths in the right position to succeed in life and encourage life-long learning”.

The leader’s strategy to provide these resources to the community and adolescents should be through a variety of hands-on educational and career workshops. The participants of the workshops should consist of the youths and their parents who are currently residing in the housing projects. The workshops should be hosted twice a year (Fall & Spring) to enhance the awareness of the participants and their families.

Participating families should be given two surveys during the workshops; pre-workshop survey measuring the extent of their current knowledge and a post-workshop survey measuring the impact of the workshop on the participants’ knowledge of existing resources and to determine if knowledge was gain during the workshop. Separate surveys should be created for parents and students. The workshops should be held on weekends when families are more likely to be available. A variety of educational and career youth program representatives should disseminate information about their services. These academic and career resources will expose participants and parents to career exploration, academic enrichment programs, post secondary exposure, scholarship information, job shadowing, tutorials and college preparedness. Each participating organization should facilitate a twenty minute session explaining their program services.

The workshop should consist of oral presentations and power point presentations as well as hands-on scenarios. The presenters should provide students and parents with written materials on their programs. In addition, there should be thirty minutes or so provided at the end of the workshop for parents to meet with organization representatives individually. The adolescents and parents session should run concurrently.

Recommendations II

The structure of the ICRC should be split into three departments. The three departments should include; an Academic/Education Department, Athletic Department and a Community Outreach Department. The leader should oversee the entire organization, ensuring that the organization is improving on a daily basis. Each department should be responsible for doing their specific job description and implement activities and events to enhance the awareness of the adolescents. Each department should be operated by a professional employee and have the opportunity to have a part-time assistant to assist with the daily operations.

The Academic Department should handle all school related issues. The Athletic Department should be responsible for all sporting activities, wellness, teamwork and sportsmanship issues. The Community Outreach Department (preferably someone from the community, if qualified for the position) should be responsible for the discipline, mentoring, tradition, leadership, community

services, volunteer, job shadowing, work studies and cultural enrichment activities. All departments should work with one another to ensure that the ICRC is operating effectively and efficiently. All departments should meet on a weekly basis to keep everyone aware of the vision, mission and objectives of the ICRC.

Structure of the Imperial Courts

<u>Athletics</u>	<u>Academic</u>	<u>Community</u>
<u>Outreach</u>		
Leadership	Leadership	
Leadership	Cultural Enrichment	Cultural
Enrichment	Cultural Enrichment	
Responsibilities	Responsibilities	
Responsibilities		
Discipline	Discipline	
Discipline		
Tradition	Technology & Computer Awareness	
Tradition		
Teamwork	Educational Enhancement	Mentoring
Sportsmanship	Life-Long Learning	Life-Long
Learning		
Wellness	Career & College Selection	
Family Activities		

One strategy to help build a framework for the community outreach department will be to implement hands-on activities. The community should be invited to attend special events involving the adolescents in their support in a wide-range of activities such as Speech & Debate tournaments, talent shows, drama productions, sporting venues, banquets and special ceremonies. The leader of the ICRC should implement four annual community and family involvement activities. For example, in the winter, the ICRC should host a Chile

cookout, in the fall they should have a trash pick-up day, in the spring they should promote a 'Spring Walk' and at the beginning of the summer they should host a potluck community picnic. The important factor here is for the organization to stay consistent and to understand the community values, preferences and demands. The implementation of the community involvement plan will allow the community to know the personnel on a personal level and allow the community to understand the educational and career programs and procedures carried out by the ICRC.

Community support will be important for the organization to gain. One effective strategy to gain the support of the community is to get the family of the adolescents to trust in the mission, believe in the vision and understand that the most important thing is that the focus will be on the adolescents. Once the organization gets the family to trust and believe in the organization mission, the organization then need for the family to help the recreation center recruit and educate the community as a whole to gain their support and trust in its mission. It will be vital for the organization to identify the community leaders, positive role models, potential leaders, etc., to educate and influence them for the betterment of the community and adolescents.

There should be focus groups consist of ICRC personnel, adolescents, community leaders, family members and school personnel that should meet on a monthly basis to address critical issues and topics facing the organization and

community. The focus groups gathering will allow the community and school personnel to understand the sporting, cultural and educational programs and procedures and will ensure institutional legitimacy.

When the community involvement plan is completed and in effect, it will be interesting to see how the community as a whole responds to the success of the adolescents when they first start the program until the day they finished. I understand that it will take time to gain the trust of the community when the programs first get started. By implementing family activities, community relations activities and other special events that would bring personnel and the community together would be a great start on building that trust. With the many external strategies of communication that will be intact to get the support of the target audience, it will be nice to see the community support the mission. The focus groups will allow the community to express their opinions and/or concerns about anything that is an issue. One of the goals is to get the community wanting more of what the ICRC is doing and to get them excited about finding future and potential leaders to have the power to influence the adolescents of the community.

Recommendations III

Local colleges need to have a special program intact in their education department that focus on parental support services for underrepresented families. They should train their future teachers on educational and career

resources that are essential for the potential growth and development for underrepresented communities. Local high schools need to provide professional developments for their teachers annually to keep them abreast on the on-going problems that these families deal with on a daily basic. They should host focus groups with community leaders, families and other supporters to encourage lifelong learning.

Local colleges with TRIO or similar academic support programs should promote and do presentations to communities where educational and career resources are lacking. They should invite qualified families to open house events to explain their services. The opportunities that these programs provide are wonderful for networking, career explorations and college preparedness.

Recommendations IV

Teachers, entertainers, professional athletes, attorneys, entrepreneurs, business owners, doctors, dentist, CEOs', Fortune 500 Companies personnel and other influential individuals who were born and raised in improvised neighborhoods need to be visible in their community hosting leadership conferences, empowerment forums, talent shows, medical seminars and other important skill building and enhancements workshops displaying the necessary steps involve in becoming a successful individual. They need to invite powerful leaders, speakers and celebrities addressing issues on resilience and the negative and positive encounters they were faced with when overcoming

barriers along their journey. They need to act as mentors and role models to the youths due to the fact that so many of the youths admire them and would like to emulate their lifestyle. The youths need to understand the sacrifices and the hard work they need to commit to become successful in that field.

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Appendix A

A Message from Knowledge

A Message from Knowledge



I would like to greet the readers with PEACE. My name is Knowledge. When I say peace I not only wish you peace in life but I also want you to recognize that Proper Education Always Creates Elevation which is vital to all human life, without it we couldn't become self sufficient as a people.

However, I'm a 22 year old young black man who's currently serving a 10 year sentence in prison do to my lack of peace in my life. This is my first time being incarcerated as an adult in which I've been locked down since the age of 18. So for the first 18 years of my life I grew up in the Imperial Courts Projects in Watts CA.

During my youth I've heard a many different stories about life in prison as a Project Crip, which from a young ghetto child's point of view was glorifying. It was something that I and others my age wanted to do, and that's gain a reputation as being hard a straight gangster, get on swell, [buff] and come home as a locster who's done time survived it and back in the bricks being hood rich with a name that rings with fear and respect. So I sought all of the above. I couldn't wait to kill someone so I could go to the pen get blasted up [tattoos] get into some riots with blacks and other races, get buff, and come home looking and feeling like a legend.

Now I'm experiencing it from first hand stuck with 10 years of my life gone. IS IT REALLY WORTH IT? Honestly NO!

See, when I was told about the pen I wasn't told that I would be oblivious to my homies on the streets, them not sending me any money, letters, and pictures. I wasn't told that my homies would be out there nailing my women as she began to turn her back on me and there was a great possibility that my family would turn their backs on me. I wasn't told that I would be lonely and lost as a ghetto child in a man's body searching for a since of direction that I had to seek from within myself.

As a young black man in prison all odds are against me, I could loose my life at the blink of an eye behind the color of my skin or the area I grew up in. We live in bathrooms! We eat like savages and are controlled like children. We're told when to eat, when and where to sleep, when to go outside as well as when to lock up, and when to speak.

All of these controlling issues can easily ruin a man and his consciousness if you do not have the mental strength to face your opposition head on and turn a negative into a positive, but you must know what is negative and what's not because our minds could easily lead us wrong when we lack the proper understanding of our position in life. So you must know thy self. I mean really take the time to look inside of your soul to find out who

You are as a person and not the image you made for yourself. In my case that was being MOE CORLEONE from PEE JAY WATTS CRIP. Now I wasn't born with that name nor mentality. That's something that was put inside of me by my wanting to live the mafia life as well as the people I looked up to as an influence.

Some may fool themselves into believing that they were born to live life on the edge and maybe not even live to see the age of 25 because of the color they wear or the street that they grew up on. Us black men are constantly dying behind something that we DO NOT OWN! Because if the white man wants to bring down whatever block he pleases he will bring in his troops and do so.

I recognized this as being our need for growth, and that life is bigger than red and blue, and if I make that right turn down a positive road it's a great possibility that I would live to see the age of 65 instead of 25.

I really begin to realize what CRIP used to be about and that's its name COMMUNITY REVOLUTION IN PROGRESS. A fight for change in our community. Why not do so? Instead of making the streets unsafe for kids and our elders by shooting, burning down blocks, allowing no one to visit the area if they're not from the neighborhood. Just blatantly stealing kids' youth giving them 3 options of death, jail, and lost on drugs. I'm going to start with self then help my community by being and living like a real CRIP of COMMUNITY REVOLUTION IN PROGRESS fighting to change myself and my surroundings.

To do so I had to look outside of my immediate homies and expand my closed mind. I had to do a lot of reading and contemplating on what I read so I could grow mentally and reinvent myself as a young black male who grew up in poverty, live the struggle, walked on thin ice faced with 3 options death, jail, or sprung out on drugs, but kept a strong mind and made it out of poverty.

As you can see prison was my destiny, but I do have a second chance at life. So after giving the streets and negativity 18 years of my life I choose to give the positive the rest of my life however long that may be?

I begin to come into the teachings of the 5% Nation of GODS AND EARTHS. Which completely changed my life. I've been exposed to knowledge that I wouldn't have thought twice about paying attention to on the streets because I was too trapped in the streets searching for the wrong type of guidance.

I met a many great men in this HIDDEN UNIVERSITY who's helping mold me into a power refined black man. I went from wanting to be referred to as a mafia don, a hard-core gangster who's for himself and life is not really an issue to being called by the name KNOWLEDGE and being recognized as that strong black man of influence who never stopped fighting his struggles of mental growth and who's looking to succeed in life on a positive note as well as help bring together my people and not help tare them apart.



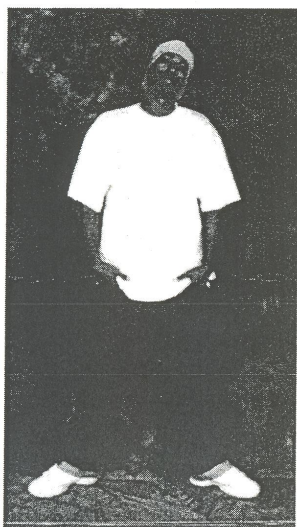
However my first year at trying to change it was hard to be excepted by a few of my child hood associates that weren't used to seeing me from a positive perspective. They rejected every part of my change, basically saying "MAN DON'T LIVE LIFE TO THE FULLEST AND ENJOY IT WHILE IT LAST, LETS KILL OR BE KILLED. THAT'S ALL WE KNOW AND LIVE FOR." WOW! I couldn't let that happen. I couldn't be stupid. Why choose 3 options when I can choose millions?

Whoever that feels that they want to die early or spend the rest of there lives in prison behind stupidity they must be insane! I've had a many fights and arguements behind my change. Those who choose 3 options look at my change as being soft because they are still BLIND, DEAF, AND DRIVEN by stupidity.

Out of 100% of the people who know me as a person 98% of them say "Knowledge, continue on your road to success. I'm glad that you woke up at an early age instead of at an old age, us black people need more people like yourself."

So this message is to all. The 2% of the people that want to see me stay BLIND DEAF AND DRIVEN they mean nothing to me and there opinion holds no weight!

So black men if you find yourselves in a situation to where someone is trying to hold you back from succeeding in life. Keep holding on and march with your heads to the sky and your eyes on the prize SUCCESS! Letting no one stop your destiny, but always be aware that you have an opposition against you so continue to grow and educate yourself so that you can become self-sufficient, positive person of influence.



PEACE,
KNOWLEDGE

Maurice Kelly

Appendix B
IRB Approval



Your project has been approved by the IRB.

Project Title: Perception of Adolescents of the Imperial Courts Housing Project about gang membership, school completion and job opportunities

Approvers Comments:

Dear Mr. Gaston and Dr. Dlugosh,

Your Full Board project # 11854 titled "Perception of Adolescents of the Imperial Courts Housing Project about gang membership, school completion and job opportunities" has been approved. You are authorized to begin your research.

The stamped and approved informed consent forms have been uploaded to NUgrant. Please use these forms to make copies to distribute to participants. If changes need to be made, please submit the revised informed consent forms to the IRB for approval prior to using them.

Your official approval letter will be uploaded to NUgrant when it is ready. Please allow a few days for creation of the official letter and signature from the IRB chair.

Cordially,

Rachel Wenzl
Research Compliance Services Specialist
Human Research Protection Program

Appendix C
Agency Approval Letter

07/13/2011 09:50 FAX 402 472 8338

UNL OFFICE OF TRIO PROGR

002/003

July 12, 2011

Institutional Review Board (IRB)
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
1400 R St.
Lincoln, NE 68588

Dear IRB Committee:

It is my pleasure to write a letter in support of Mr. Dion Gaston to conduct his Master's Thesis research on our youths who are dropping out of school and joining the neighborhood gang at our facilities. Gang membership and high drop-out rates are a serious issue that the community faces.

I, Gregory Thomas, who is a community leader and Facility Director at Imperial Courts Recreation Center will assist Mr. Gaston with selection of the participants. Mr. Thomas has worked in the Watts Community encompassing Imperial Courts Recreation Center for the past 10 years.

Mr. Dion Gaston exemplifies the citizen we would like to instill in all our youths. He is a positive role model for our youths and the community. It is imperative that our youths have interactions and be associated with a positive citizen from their community. Our community lacks the opportunity to produce positive role models for our youths; having one from our community is a positive thing for our youths.

In conclusion, I fully support the effort of Mr. Dion Gaston as he is pursuing his requirements for a Master's Degree. Our youths will have the opportunity to visit with someone who was, not too long ago, in the same situation as them. They will be provided with information that could have a positive affect on their lifestyle.

Sincerely,

Gregory Thomas 
Facility Director
Imperial Courts Recreation Center

Appendix D
Parental Informed Consent Form



IRB# 20110911854FB
Date Approved: 09/15/2011
Valid Until: 08/16/2012

PARENTAL INFORMED CONSENT FORM

IRB # 11854

Dear Mr. /Mrs. Doe

I would like to first introduce myself. My name is Dion Gaston and I'm writing to ask you for your consent of your minor child to participate in my research. As you are aware with the low educational and career aspirations among the youth of the Imperial Courts, I'm seeking to find the perception of adolescents (ages 14-18) of the Imperial Courts about gangs, school completion and job opportunities. Your child was selected as a part of this research because of their involvement with the community recreation center.

The research will take place in a private room (audio tape recorded, optional) at the Imperial Courts Recreation Center. All interviews will be conducted in a one-on-one session with me. There will be about twenty questions ask during the interview which should take about 45 – 60 minutes.

The results of this interview will help us understand why having federal funded educational resource and outreach programs are great opportunities for the development of youths. These are academic programs with the mission to provide resources to students and their families to successfully complete high school and entrance into college. The benefit for your child's participation will be their knowledge on existing educational and career resources opportunities. This study is intended for research information only and that intervention resources or programming will not be provided. Information about how to seek out these programs will be issue at the conclusion of the interview.

The answers that your child will provide will completely be confidential and only be use within my research. Any information provided about gang members will be kept confidential and there will be no names associated with the information given to us. After completion of my thesis, all records will be maintained for a year and will be dismantled. However, this is a completely voluntary study. You and your child are free to decide not to participate in this study. If you or your child decides not to participate in the study, it will not negatively affect their relationship with the community leader, the recreation center, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln or me. Your child can also withdraw at any time during the interview.

There will be \$10 issue to all participants. Participants must complete the interview in it's entirely to receive the \$10 even if they decide not to be audio tape recorded. There are no foreseeable risks to your child for participating in the study. The information provided by your child will not be reported to Law Enforcement, probation or parole agencies. I was encouraged by the community leaders, parents and current gang members to do this study. As you may be aware, I was born and raised in the Imperial Courts and understand firsthand the difficulties and hardships the community present.

1400 R ST / Lincoln, NE 68588



IRB# 20110911854FB
Date Approved: 09/15/2011
Valid Until: 08/16/2012

If you have any questions or comments concerning this study, you can contact me at (402- 472- 6030) or Dr. Dlugosh at (402- 472-0975). We'll be happy to answer your questions as best to our knowledge. Sometimes study participants have questions or concerns about their rights. In that case, you should call the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board at 402- 472-6965.

Thank you for your assistance in this important research.
Sincerely,

Dion T. Gaston
Investigator

DOCUMENTATION OF INFORMED CONSENT

YOU ARE VOLUNTARILY MAKING A DECISION WHETHER OR NOT TO ALLOW YOUR CHILD TO PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH STUDY. YOUR SIGNATURE CERTIFIES THAT YOU HAVE DECIDED TO ALLOW YOUR CHILD TO PARTICIPATE HAVING READ AND UNDERSTOOD THE INFORMATION PRESENTED. YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS CONSENT FORM TO KEEP.

Child's Name

Signature of Parent

Date

Audio Tape Record Option: Yes/No

IN MY JUDGEMENT THE PARENT/LEGAL GUARDIAN IS VOLUNTARILY AND KNOWINGLY GIVING INFORMED CONSENT AND POSSESSES THE LEGAL CAPACITY TO GIVE INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY.

Signature of Investigator

Date

Appendix E
Youth Assent Form



IRB# 20110911854FB
Date Approved: 09/15/2011
Valid Until: 08/16/2012

YOUTH ASSENT FORM

IRB # 11854

Dear Joe,

My name is Dion Gaston and I grew up in the Imperial Courts. As a kid growing up in the Projects, I know firsthand the issues you face. What I'm doing now is trying to see if you were provided with resources that would help you finish high school, graduate from a four-year college and have a job that you would love to do, would you take advantage of the opportunities? You were selected to participate in my research to find out the perception of adolescents of the Imperial Courts about gangs, school completion and job opportunities. You were selected because of your involvement with the community recreation center.

The results of this interview will help us understand why having federal funded educational resource and outreach programs can increase the high schools' graduation rates and entrance into college. These are programs with the mission to provide resources to students and their families to successfully complete high school and college. There are no foreseeable risks for participating in this study. The information that you share will not be share with the police, probation or parole officers. Any information provided about gang members will be kept confidential and there will be no names associated with the information given to us. As I mentioned above, I grew up in the Projects and know 90-100% of your older homies. I was encouraged by parents, community leaders and your homies to do this research.

All interviews will take place in a private room (audio tape recorded, optional) at the gym in a one-on-one session with me. There will be about twenty questions ask during the interview which should take about 45-60 minutes. The benefits for you in this research will provide you with information about getting back in school, having the opportunity to get into college and to have a successful career. This study is intended for research information only and that intervention resources or programming will not be provided. Information about how to seek out these programs will be issue at the end of the interview.

Everybody will get \$10 for their participation even if you decide not to be audio recorded. To get the \$10, you have to finish the entire interview session with me. However, this is a completely voluntary survey and if you feel that you cannot assist me, it will not negatively affect you relationship with the community leader, the gym, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln or me. You can also withdraw at any time during the interview.

If you have any questions or comments concerning this survey, you can contact me at (402- 472-6030) or Dr. Dlugosh at (402- 472-0975). We'll be happy to answer your questions as best to our knowledge. Sometimes study participants have questions or concerns about their rights. In that case, you should call the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board at 402-472-6965.

IF YOU SIGN THIS FORM IT MEANS THAT YOU HAVE DECIDED TO PARTICIPATE AND HAVE READ EVERYTHING THAT IS ON THIS FORM. YOU AND YOUR PARENTS WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS FORM TO KEEP.

Signature of Subject _____

Date _____

Signature of Investigator _____

Date _____

Audio Tape Record Option: Yes/No

Appendix F
Community Leader Script
Script

Community Leader Script

Within the structure of the recreation center, there are a variety of sport leagues ranging from basketball, soccer, flag football and baseball where the youths are involved. The community leader will identify suitable participants to the Primary Investigator (PI) through their involvement within the recreation center's structure. After suitable participants are identified, the PI will make all contacts to potential families by phone. If potential families are willing to participate, the PI will ask for their mailing address to send out the consent forms.

Script

As a past resident of the Imperial Courts, I'm seeking to understand the perception of adolescents of the Imperial Courts Project about gangs, school completion and job opportunities. I know firsthand about the difficulties, temptations and hardships that the community faces. The finding of the study will determined if federally funded educational and career outreach programs are needed in the community. These programs provide educational and career resources to low-income and first generation families. These are programs with the mission to provide resources to students and their families to successfully complete high school and college. Information about how to seek out these programs will be issue at the end of the interview. Participation would require you to participate in a one on one interview lasting approximately 45-60 minutes. All participants will receive \$10 for participating. Participants must complete the interview in it's entirety to receive the \$10. However, this is a completely voluntary study and if you feel that you cannot assist me, it will not negatively affect your relationship with the community leader, the gym, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln or me. You can also withdraw at any time during the interview. If you are interested, you will be mail an Informed Consent form along with a returned postage that needs to be return a week prior the interview. Participants will not be allowed to participate without Informed Consent.

Appendix G

Interview Questions

Interview Questions

Group 1

1. How old are you?
2. Do you attend high school? If yes, which high do you attend? If not, what was the last grade level you completed?
3. Do you remember your last grade point average (GPA)?
4. What is the highest grade level completed by your parents/guardians?
5. Are you a member of a gang?
6. Why did you join?
7. How old were you when you first started claiming the gang?

Group 2

8. If you could pick any career, what career would you choose and why?
9. What do you know about career exploration?
10. When you were in school, did you feel your school provided enough information to help you obtain a career?
11. When you were in school, did you get proper help with assignments, i.e. tutoring?
12. Were you ever placed into remedial classes?

Group 3

13. If you could go to any college, which college would you choose and why?
14. What do you know about college admissions' procedures?
15. Are you familiar with the classes necessary to get into college?
16. Are you familiar with college entrance exams?
17. Do you think college is affordable for you?

Group 4

18. If you could attend classes on a campus and live in the dorms for six weeks during the summer, would you attend?

19. If you had the opportunity to visit colleges throughout high school, would you attend?

Group 5

20. Do you have any role model; who do you look up to?

21. What do your peers in the community expects from you?

22. Where do you see yourself in ten years?

23. What do your parents/guardians want for your future?

FINAL QUESTION

24. Is there anything else you would to add or ask?

Appendix H

Program Contacts Information



Program Contacts Information Sheet

Program	Host College	Phone	Email	Target Schools
Classic Upward Bound Upward Bound Math Science	El Camino College- Compton Educational Center (Formerly known as Compton College)	310-900-1600, x 2752		Centennial HS, Compton HS, Dominguez HS, LB Jordan HS, Lynwood HS, Paramount HS
Educational Talent Search	Cal State University-Long Beach (CSULB)	562-985-5387	ets@csulb.edu	Centennial HS, Compton HS, Dominguez HS, Lynwood HS, South Gate HS, Banning HS, Carson HS, Gardena HS, Narbonne HS, San Pedro HS
Classic Upward Bound	Cal State University-Long Beach (CSULB)	562-985-5520		Centennial HS, Compton HS, Dominguez HS, Lynwood HS, Milikan HS, Banning HS, Carson HS, Gardena HS, Narbonne HS, San Pedro HS, LB Jordan, LB Poly, Lakewood HS, Paramount HS
TRIO Programs; Classic Upward Bound Upward Bound Math Science Educational Talent Search	University of Southern California (USC)	213-821-2402	www.usctrio.org	Gompers MS, Markham MS, L.A. Jordan HS, Locke HS, Verbum Dei HS, Washington Prep. Fremont HS, Crenshaw HS, Dorsey HS, Jefferson HS