

Chapter Title: Introduction

Book Title: Real Gangstas

Book Subtitle: Legitimacy, Reputation, and Violence in the Intergang Environment

Book Author(s): Timothy R. Lauger

Published by: Rutgers University Press. (2012)

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5hjfvv.4>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

Rutgers University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Real Gangstas*

Introduction

ON THE NORTHEAST SIDE of Indianapolis, along a busy highway, large spray-painted letters mar an unremarkable brick building. Plainly written in black paint, without much creativity or attention to style, the letters spell out the name of a local street gang—DFW Boyz. Lacking traditional gang signifiers like bright colors, numbers, pitchforks, a crown, the Star of David, or other discernable gang jargon, the writing does not resemble stereotypical gang graffiti. If one is bound by preconceptions of gang signifiers, the writing can be easily mistaken for the work of a preadolescent child or a wannabe playing the part of a gang member. Drivers passing through the area may not notice the writing; it probably blends into the tapestry of the surrounding urban environment. Perhaps it is just another symbol reminding them of what goes on in the poorer neighborhoods that are adjacent to the highway. Yet to the tagger and his peers, the name is meaningful. The moniker “DFW Boyz” represents a defining element of the gang’s collective identity; they are down for whatever.¹ Being down for whatever means taking advantage of opportunities for such activities as robbery, burglary, or overt manipulations of weaker peers to obtain money. It also implies a willingness and ability to fight whenever necessary. The letters on the building are an outward manifestation of an identity that many of the gang’s members embrace and enact on a day-to-day basis.

By publicly displaying “DFW Boyz” on the side of the building, the tagger, an active gang member named Layboy, was not simply expressing a salient part of his identity; he intended for peers to see his work. Only a few days after tagging the building, Layboy proudly showed me the graffiti. He boasted about how nearby surveillance cameras recorded the act, but the black hood on his sweatshirt provided enough of a disguise to foil authorities. His motivation for the act, although simple,

was illustrative of the day-to-day concerns of many gang members. The graffiti was not intended to mark gang territory. Although a few members of the DFW Boyz lived nearby, this location only served as a temporary hangout for gang members, and it was also home to a few other gangs that invariably encountered the DFW Boyz. The graffiti was also not intended to send a secret message to other gang members, as its content was clear to anyone in the area. Instead, it merely announced the presence of the DFW Boyz. It was a crude and largely unplanned effort to maintain or increase the gang's visibility in this northeast side neighborhood. Being known in the streets of Indianapolis is vitally important to the gang member's daily negotiation of his or her social environment, and so the name was displayed on the brick building for all to see.

Understanding the everyday concerns of gang members is essential for gaining insight into some of their more troubling activities. Spray painting "DFW Boyz" on a building was not the most serious crime that I had been exposed to while hanging out with members of the street gang. For months, members of the gang had regaled me with tales of robbery, fighting, and intimidation. On a few occasions, I was more involved in those activities than I would have liked. Yet the motivation and rationale for such behavior was often revealed through the banality and tedium of their daily lives. My exposure to serious criminal behavior was accompanied by seemingly endless hours of boredom and inactivity, as I observed gang members go about their daily routines. Yet such observations increased my familiarity with both members of the DFW Boyz and the Indianapolis streets. Conversations between gang members that had previously seemed trite became consequential, and I became more attuned to whom they were interacting with and talking about. Their conversations and interactions, which initially seemed mundane, revealed numerous insights that helped explain why gang members were so willing to rob, fight, and intimidate.

My exposure to active gang members occurred during an eighteen-month ethnographic study in the streets of Indianapolis. My research began February 2007 and ended in early August 2008. I spent much, but not all, of that time with Layboy, his brother Shawn, and some of their closest associates within the DFW Boyz. These active gang members play a central role in this book, and, as will be evident in the ensuing chapters, they gave me unlimited access to their lives. This

exposure revealed that gang members were immersed in a complex social environment that heavily influenced their behavior. More specifically, they routinely engaged in meaningful social interactions with members of other gangs, and these intergang interactions often produced the motivation for an array of problematic behaviors. Indeed, Layboy's graffiti, his need to be known in the streets of Indianapolis, and his gang's violent behavior were largely produced by awareness of and interactions with other gangs. Yet a more nuanced examination of these intergang interactions also demonstrated that gang members were not passive figures in the face of overpowering peer pressure or cultural values. They actively interpreted the nature of each encounter with other gangs. They constructed the meaning of each intergang interaction and created characterizations of their counterparts. This book examines how complex intergang interactions influenced gang members' behavior.

THE INTERGANG ENVIRONMENT

In Indianapolis, and in many other cities, select neighborhoods provide ideal settings for the formation and proliferation of street gangs. Yet street gangs rarely evolve into large-scale organizations that dominate extensive geographical areas within a city. They are, more commonly, smaller collections of loosely organized youths that may or may not control a small amount of turf (Decker and Van Winkle 1996; Klein and Maxson 2006), and poorer sections of the city tend to be home to numerous intersecting street gangs. Multiple gangs share space within the urban landscape, and interactions between these groups are common, yet varied. The resulting network of interactions between these street gangs produces the intergang environment, which is vital to understanding the daily concerns of gang members. Quite simply, gangs are not islands in the street.² They engage in meaningful interactions with other gangs in their respective communities. Through this book I hope to develop a more thorough understanding of the intergang environment and demonstrate that intergang interactions significantly influence the perceptions and behaviors of gang members. In short, I argue that intergang interactions involve a process whereby gang members observe, interpret, and assess the behaviors of their peers. Understanding this process provides insight into some of the motivating factors that can produce violence, and to further this understanding the material that

follows closely examines the nature and consequences of intergang interactions.³

The notion of an intergang environment accounts for the collection of gangs within a given area. With the exception of research on conflict or threat between gangs (see Decker 1996; Decker and Van Winkle 1996), scholars have largely ignored the influence that intergang interactions have on gang members. In fact, as I entered the research field, my interest in such interactions was nonexistent, and I realized their significance only after months of research. As gang members consistently talked about peers and provided frequent commentary about other local gangs, I unexpectedly began to appreciate the creative potential of their routine social interactions. They were actively involved in constructing social boundaries, interpreting and creating meaning during social interactions, and labeling peers. This book relies on my personal observations of active gang members, interview data, and recorded conversations between gang members to capture this creativity, and it substantially enhances an otherwise barren conception of intergang interactions.

Gang members spend much of their time observing and assessing the behavior of their peers. This attentiveness to peer behavior commonly extends beyond the internal social dynamics of a single gang and becomes an enduring characteristic of intergang interactions. In fact, the gang members in this study did not spend much time or energy evaluating the behaviors of their close associates. They looked outward to assess the actions of peers who were claiming membership to an array of gangs, cliques, or hoods. Although at times the dynamic of threat or conflict characterized intergang interactions, a subtler, but equally important, dynamic between gangs often influenced gang member behavior. Gang members observed their peers with a degree of skepticism, as they believed that too many supposed gang members were not real gang members. They were known as wannabes who were perpetrating a fraud. This belief dramatically affected intergang interactions.

The notion of “being real” was a central concern of the gang members in this study, and it is, therefore, a central theme in this book. In Indianapolis, a gang member’s definition of “real” was socially constructed through his or her experiences and interactions with close associates. Each gang formed a collective identity that was embraced and enacted by members and then publicly displayed to peers. Self-defined

gang members were fully confident in their status as real gang members. Yet considerations of “real” became problematic when a gang or gang member’s internal certainty was not consistent with the evaluations of others. What happened when self-defined gang members were confident in their status as real gang members but some peers disagreed? What happened when pervasive skepticism in the intergang environment created widespread disagreement about who was and who was not real? These questions were particularly important in Indianapolis, where intergang interactions were often permeated by doubt and derision.

Confronted with skepticism that was often publicly expressed by peers, gang members in Indianapolis struggled to gain and maintain legitimacy in the intergang environment. To gain legitimacy and minimize dismissive appraisals, gang members had to develop well-known reputations for violence. Other forms of verifying legitimacy were ineffective. For example, superficial signifiers of gang membership such as signs, colors, and codes could not be used for validation. They were too easily mimicked and were often viewed with skepticism. Consequently, gang members used routine conversations and street gossip to disseminate their violent exploits throughout the intergang environment. They developed violent self-characterizations and openly disparaged peers during public and private conversations. As gossip circulated and peers heard about these disparaging comments, intergang hostilities were either born or intensified. Intergang conflict, therefore, began as a slowly evolving process between two gangs that were attentive to street gossip and motivated by the struggle for legitimacy in the intergang environment.

RESEARCHING GANGS BY BECOMING MARGINAL: THE EMERGENCE OF TIM TIM

“Tim Tim,” said TJ, as he emerged from an apartment complex. The greeting had been a ritualized element of our interactions for a few months.

“What what,” I responded accordingly, much to TJ’s delight. This had become my routine retort.

“Hey, you want to be down with us?” asked Layboy as we stood outside. “We can jump you in. You can bang.”

The question reflected a desire to observe my response more than an actual invitation to join the gang. I turned toward Layboy and simply

looked at him with a raised brow in an attempt to communicate, “You have got to be joking.”

Laughter erupted from a couple of gang members behind us and Shawn said, “He could be an assassin.”

This was not the first time Shawn had characterized me this way. My role as a researcher often caused me to quietly watch and listen to the boys as they went about their daily activities. Although most of these activities were mundane, my unwavering behavior in the occasional tense situation was apparently consistent with individuals in the street who listened first and acted with little warning. I never corrected Shawn’s mischaracterization, but I was pleased that my role with the gang had transitioned from outsider to marginal insider. After months of frustration, mistakes, awkward situations, and failed attempts to access gang members, this newfound comfort coincided with a sense of familiarity for Shawn, Layboy, TJ, and the DFW Boyz.

The success of a qualitative study is largely contingent on the researcher’s ability to establish relationships with selected research participants. Most researchers begin at a point of complete detachment and must work their way into being a recognized and trusted community participant. At some point, individuals allow the researcher to peer into their lives, record conversations, and participate in their activities. Still, the degree of involvement needed for a successful study is debatable (Adler, Adler, and Rochford 1986). Too much inclusion places the researcher at risk for “going native,” or uncritically embracing and accepting the views of others as his or her own (*ibid.*; Gold 1958; Hammersley and Atkinson 1995; Monti 1992). This can reduce the researcher’s ability to analytically engage his or her research environment, and it can lead to description without analysis. But with too little inclusion the researcher cannot become sufficiently familiar with research participants or the subject matter. Qualitative researchers must struggle to find an imperfect balance between the conflicting needs of intimacy and objectivity.

Achieving intimacy is the researcher’s first concern, and perhaps my biggest challenge was getting access to a substantial number of gang members who were willing to participate in the study. A major flaw in my research design hindered this process: I originally relied too heavily on one community leader who promised, and repeatedly failed, to put me in contact with active gang members. For too long I patiently trusted

his assurances that gang members were going to come by and talk to me. He did occasionally have people stop by his community center for interviews, but a few months into the research I had not established consistent relationships with gang members. Although I spent much of this time passively sitting around the center, naively waiting for the research to come to me, I was unknowingly establishing connections that would later lead to successful research. Despite his deficiencies, the aforementioned community leader did have diverse contacts. I became familiar with the local community by working at nonprofit organizations, talking with residents, and canvassing northeast Indianapolis neighborhoods by car and foot.

Within the confines of one community organization, I had a serendipitous encounter with someone who greatly influenced my understanding of the Indianapolis streets. One evening, while I waited for an interview, an unfamiliar man named Sidney came by to talk to the organization's executive director. Given that Sidney was unemployed and looking for a job, he proudly showed me some job application materials that drastically underrepresented his work capabilities. After some discussion, I offered to help him create a more professional résumé that would greatly aid his job search. This simple gesture, which initially served to alleviate my boredom, provided the foundation for a long and productive relationship. Although only in his mid-forties, Sidney had been arrested twenty-seven times as an adult, and he had spent much of his adult life in state and federal prison. He had never been a gang member, but he had been heavily involved with various criminal activities that ranged from selling pharmaceuticals to routinely robbing drug dealers. For the duration of my research, Sidney, who was an uneducated, intelligent, and skilled laborer, struggled to find and maintain gainful employment. When I met Sidney, he was still dealing with some minor court cases, owed several thousand dollars in child support payments, and was living in a broken-down RV. He was also struggling with his desire to desist from the criminal lifestyle, and he often lamented the temptation to get fast money illegally.

In the following months, Sidney became my first reliable contact. My relationship with Sidney not only led to a number of additional research participants and new theoretical insights, but it also established a basic model for relating to the individuals in this study. My role in the research field was not necessarily guided by a job description or a specific

activity but by an ascribed identity that arose when I interacted with research participants (see Venkatesh 2002). To Sidney I was a symbol of an external and unreachable world that was taking a rare glimpse into the conditions of inner-city life. Although I never expressed any political views, I was a sign of hope and a possible political ally. In fact, Sidney often tried to motivate me to run for political office. Although he was excited about the project, Sidney was also keenly aware of being manipulated, and he resented anyone who leveraged his disadvantageous life circumstances for selfish gain. Some community leaders promised Sidney jobs and politically orchestrated court leniency in return for unconditional obedience to their work demands. Given that he was typically unpaid and often unrewarded, Sidney dramatically compared himself to a slave and told me that he was treated better in prison. Accordingly, I had to demonstrate a genuine concern for his life and for the community, or he could have quickly labeled me as a slave master.

I could only demonstrate such concern with short-term contributions to the lives of Sidney and other individuals participating in this study. At times these contributions can violate the idealistic ethic that researchers should not disturb the natural processes they study, but they can also mute the self-serving nature of qualitative research. When pursuing the goals of research, the researcher continually tries to get generally unmotivated individuals to talk about the intimate and often illegal aspects of their lives without promising much in return. After a given period of time, the researcher leaves the research site to further his or her academic career and advance the scientific understanding of an issue only to leave participants in the study with very little for their efforts. In the case of adolescent gang members, this dynamic of the research process may cause them to be abandoned by another adult, this time in the person of the researcher.

The participants in this study seemed to understand that I would be the one to benefit most from this study, and they often talked about helping me with my research. Yet such altruism would not have sustained productive field research. For example, Sidney's lack of income severely hindered some basic requirements for the research. He did not have the ability to buy, maintain, and operate his own vehicle. Although I usually provided transportation for Sidney, when he did have to find transportation it usually cost him money. Given that he used a

pay-by-the-minute phone, each phone conversation cost money that Sidney did not have. For such things I provided him with meager and informal monetary reimbursements. I also periodically took him out to eat and paid for his meal. Sidney perceived these small gestures as adequate reimbursements for his efforts rather than charity, and he did not try to exploit our growing relationship by asking for more.

Over the course of the project, my role in Sidney's life transitioned from outsider, to marginal insider, to friend and confidant. By the end of the research, I had driven him to court numerous times, been a character witness for him during a sentencing hearing, visited with his mother multiple times, and kept him company while he was on house arrest. Sidney provided me with moral support when I dealt with frustrating community members. He changed his life dramatically during my time in the research field and, during one conversation, he noted my role in his transformation by saying that I had been a pallbearer for his former self. My departure from field research was not easy for Sidney, as I moved eight hours away to begin my career, and in our last phone conversation he spoke of visiting me the following summer. He died in a freak accident only a few weeks later.

My relationships with other research participants did not equal my friendship with Sidney, as I more effectively balanced the need to remain somewhat detached and objective while gathering data about the more intimate aspects of gang members' lives. Numerous scholars advocate that researchers achieve a marginal role with the individuals they study (Gold 1958; Hammersley and Atkinson 1995; Horowitz 1986; Junker 1960). If the researcher is successful in achieving a marginal role, he or she becomes a known and accepted part of a new social world but is not bound by relational obligations. He or she is free to enter and exit the research participant's life as needed. As such, there is an established unidirectional intimacy so that studied individuals are willing to discuss sensitive aspects of their lives without expecting the researcher to reciprocate. In effect, individuals experience no social consequences for talking openly with the researcher, as the information is not going to be used in a socially manipulative way or be spread through a social grapevine. This marginal role ensures the researcher access to research participants and reduces the emotional involvement that might hinder analysis and theory construction.

Marginality in this study, however, was contingent on routine contact with established gang members, and for months I relied on a chain referral system that produced in-depth interviews but did not provide opportunities for extensive observation of active gang members. During this time, I volunteered at a small nonprofit youth organization and interacted with a group of gang members. I oversaw their activities at the community center, but I did not inquire about their gang activities. Selecting key informants was vital to this study, and failing to pick the best informants would have led to a problematic study (Fleisher 1998). Given that I needed to find a few key informants who were knowledgeable, connected, and willing to participate in the study for an extended period of time, this decision signified a key juncture in the research. After I observed and interacted with Shawn and Layboy for a few months, they seemed to be the best candidates to serve as key informants. They were both intelligent and articulate teenagers, natural leaders who garnered respect from younger and older peers. Furthermore, most of their extended family members were heavily invested in gang life.

I eventually discussed the study with Shawn and Layboy, who were willing to provide access to their daily routines and social connections. Although my preexisting relationship with Shawn and Layboy increased their willingness to participate in this study, they also perceived the study to be beneficial. Given that Layboy, Shawn, and many other gang members in this study were accustomed to constant lectures from adults, their relationship with me transcended their usual interactions with adults. They appreciated the opportunity to be heard. As in other studies, some of the gang members in this study suggested that their participation was cathartic (see Decker and Van Winkle 1996). More importantly, gang members were enamored with the idea of being the focus of a possible book. As I will discuss in later chapters, they were fixated on becoming known entities in the streets of Indianapolis, and being the subject matter of a book reinforced their significance.

Similar to Sidney, Shawn and Layboy's initial interest in the study would have been short-lived if I had not been sensitive to their life conditions. They desired summer jobs, and, after their mentor had repeatedly ignored their pleas for assistance, I volunteered to help them. My offer to help led to a lengthy process of driving to prospective employers, filling out applications, and hoping for interviews. They

were granted a few interviews and some places seemed interested in hiring the boys, but they never found jobs. Such failure was personally disappointing, but the effort substantially increased their comfort with me and proved vital to the research process. These outings often led to lengthy and informal discussions about life, the streets, and gangs. Their efforts in this study also warranted nominal monetary reimbursement. Although no one was paid for participating in the study, I gave Layboy and Shawn varying small amounts of money for tracking down prospective research participants. Often this compensation occurred when one of their pay-by-the-minute cell phones was out of minutes and they needed to contact people. Shawn and Layboy understood this informal arrangement to be equitable compensation for both their sacrificed time and the expenses that accompanied their efforts.

My time with the DFW Boyz and other research participants was generally spent observing mundane activities. I often drove the boys around the city in search of job opportunities or other gang members to interview. We frequently hung out in various apartment complexes, houses, or street corners and talked about an array of topics. During these times I was usually content to simply listen to the natural flow of teenage conversation, but, at times, I asked pointed questions about the topic of their discussions. Sometimes I conducted in-depth, though unstructured, one-on-one interviews with select individuals. I use both forms of data in this book, as they both provided unique insights into members' lives. In total, I interviewed and/or observed fifty-five street offenders, most of whom were active gang members. Some of these individuals were not affiliated with the DFW Boyz, but I spent most of my time with members of that particular street gang.

As I gradually became closer to Layboy, Shawn, and a core group of the DFW Boyz, I became familiar with an expanding network of gang members and was able to access some of the more privileged details about their activities. Members of the DFW Boyz initially seemed to withhold information from me, but by the end of my research they openly discussed specific instances of gunplay by gang members. They allowed me to examine the more intimate areas of their life through lengthy conversations about childhood anger, sex, and violence. By that point in the research, I had established a pattern of routinely interacting with a core group of gang members. Even members who were not close

to me accepted my role among their peers, and they did not seem bothered by my presence. Only a few members viewed me as a potential snitch and were guarded in my presence. Still, the group did not grant me full insider status. There were times when they held conversations behind closed doors, and in some instances they asked me to stay behind while they confronted members of other gangs (see chapter 7). As I exited the research field, I realized with regret that another year of field research might have enhanced the research experience, but after eighteen months of data collection, conversations had become redundant, and time had run out.

THE ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

The theoretical argument that unfolds over the course of this study is grounded in observation and interview data. True to the ideals of grounded theory and theoretical emergence (Glaser and Strauss 2006), these data largely guided the development of the argument in this book. Few, if any, of the ideas in this study existed before research began. They were slowly constructed, as I became more familiar with the salient concerns of the individuals in this study. The components of the argument were not subtle aspects of members' lives that I selected to fit a previously constructed argument. Instead, they represented consistent themes that reemerged throughout the research process.

Chapter 1 introduces the reader to the research site, Indianapolis gangs, and the DFW Boyz. Largely inspired by Elijah Anderson's (1999) trip down Philadelphia's Germantown Avenue, it discusses the ecological or socioeconomic conditions within the research area that provide an ideal environment for developing and maintaining street gangs. Not surprisingly, the area is poor. This chapter also reintroduces the reader to the notion of the intergang environment and discusses the concepts of an intergang field (which is produced when individuals attempt to establish boundaries for the intergang environment), intergang interactions, and legitimacy.

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 demonstrate how gang members become immersed in a paradox of legitimacy. Chapter 2 combines observational and interview data from this study with the findings of the broader gang literature to explain why individuals join gangs. The rationale for joining a gang further illuminates the false promises of gang membership, and it helps explain why gang members remain invested in gang life. Youths often join gangs because they falsely believe that gangs will help

them resolve a set of problems related to street activity. The prospective gang member views the gang as a source of protection, respect, and friendship, or as a collectivity that will increase one's ability to make fast money through illicit activities.

Chapter 3 looks more closely at gang members' confidence in their position within the boundaries of the intergang field and the contrasting general skepticism of the intergang environment. The individual labels himself or herself as being a real gang member, but peers often disagree and subsequently belittle his or her claims to gang membership. This disagreement typically does not occur between members of the same gang, but between members of different gangs, and it reflects a basic contradiction in the intergang environment. Individuals join gangs that exhibit high levels of certainty about their gang status, but the broader intergang environment is dubious about those claims. In effect, all self-defined gang members believe that they are real gang members, but they also believe that many other self-defined gang members falsely claim gang affiliation. As a result, interactions between members of different gangs involve a process of observing, interpreting, and evaluating the actions and claims of other self-defined gang members.

Chapter 4 fully develops the paradox of legitimacy by recognizing the inevitable problem that arises when peers question each other's gang status during social interactions. Although gang members often label their peers as wannabe gang members, they are also at risk of being similarly labeled. Therefore, all self-defined gang members are eventually confronted with the problem of gaining and maintaining legitimacy. This is especially problematic when no agreed-upon standards exist to clearly differentiate real gang members from so-called fake gang members. In Indianapolis, the intergang environment lacks such agreed-upon standards, so the environment is characterized by innumerable self-serving understandings of gang. Therefore, a field boundary is created individually and is largely subjective. Consequently, any gang member can be labeled as fake at any time, and all gang members continuously struggle to gain or maintain legitimacy in the intergang environment.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7 describe how gang members negotiate the paradox of legitimacy and examine the consequences of the struggle for legitimacy in the intergang environment. Chapter 5 argues that although the intergang field lacks clear standards for establishing legitimacy, gang

members do embrace a common expectation that legitimate gang members should be willing and able to use violence. A single violent act typically does not effectively communicate one's status to a broad audience, however, and gang members must continuously work to establish a widely accepted reputation for violence. To overcome the paradox of legitimacy, gang members must be widely known in the streets for their willingness and ability to use violence.

Chapter 6 argues that one's reputation is not simply the by-product of periodic violent events. Gang members develop their reputations when they gather with peers and talk about their social environment. In these social settings, gang members gain new information about their social environment, negatively gossip about peers, and develop self-characterizations that are congruent with the environmental expectation of violence. The resulting flow of information is a vital component of the intergang environment, and it is closely linked to the origins of intergang conflict. The information that circulates during routine peer interactions eventually disseminates throughout the intergang environment. During routine conversations, gang members ridicule other gangs, and other gang members. They sometimes suggest that these other gang members are not real gang members; they are wannabes. These comments are often disseminated into the intergang environment and become known to the dismissed gangs or gang members. Such gossip fuels hostility and increases the probability of conflict.

Chapter 7 examines the street beef, or the prolonged intergang conflict. Intergang conflicts are grounded in concerns of legitimacy, as groups observe and ultimately dismiss each other. Intergang conflicts gain momentum as gang members feverishly gossip and disseminate negative portrayals of their counterparts into the intergang environment. Consequently, intergang interactions become increasingly hostile, and everyone involved in the petty street beef gradually becomes immersed in a series of escalating threats that can quickly turn to violence.

Chapter 8 concludes the book by discussing the prospects of intervention. I describe my efforts to intervene in the lives of Shawn, Layboy, and TJ, and I contemplate the inherent challenges that confront the boys. The chapter also discusses the potential for and difficulties associated with change. It then ends with a harsh reminder of what gang life entails, and how the prospects of change can dissipate quickly.