ARE CHANGING MASCULINITIES IMPORTANT FOR GANG DISENGAGEMENT?

by

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ABSTRACT

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Thesis directed by Associate Professor David C. Pyrooz

Within the last decade, a small but growing field of qualitative research has suggested that masculinity changes are helpful for gang disengagement. There are several gaps in this literature: the contribution of masculinities to disengagement has not yet been tested in quantitative research; few studies have provided qualitative narratives demonstrating that masculinity change could theoretically precipitate disengagement; and the types of masculinities that reforming gang members transition towards are unclear. The types of masculinity discussed in this study include: traditional masculinity (breadwinning/employment, avoidance of femininity, self-reliance, stoicism, and homophobia); positive masculinity (good family relationships, kindness, community service, and spirituality); and violence-oriented masculinity (toughness, retaliation in the face of disrespect, and use of violence to gain respect). A mixed-methods study was used to address these gaps, with a quantitative sample of 70 individuals referred to a gang disengagement program in Denver who were surveyed across two waves, and a qualitative sample of 10 individuals who were interviewed in-depth. Quantitative analyses measured associations between changes in endorsement of masculinities over time and changes in gang embeddedness over time, and vice versa. Gang embeddedness change was significantly and positively associated with violence-oriented masculinity change and traditional masculinity change (especially breadwinning and avoidance of femininity) in both directions; however, effect sizes were highest when masculinities change were the dependent variables, shedding light on the temporal order. Overall, quantitative results suggested endorsement of traditional masculinity

and violence-oriented masculinity decreases during gang disengagement. Qualitative findings showed that the disengagement narratives of 6 of the 10 participants portrayed masculinity change as a precipitating factor in their disengagement, with most newly endorsing a combination of some aspects of positive and traditional masculinity and reducing endorsement of violence-oriented masculinity during disengagement. Masculinity maturation emerged as a theme, as participants realized that the gang lifestyle was incompatible with adult masculinity, serving as a motivation for disengagement. Constructions of masculinity while actively in the gang were similar to the street code (see Anderson 1999) and also incorporated some aspects of traditional masculinity. Consistency and divergence between quantitative and qualitative findings are discussed. In terms of policy, the findings suggest masculine role models promoting certain types of masculinity could be an effective gang intervention strategy for older adolescents and adults. Future research is needed to better understand the relationship between masculinity change and gang disengagement.

DEDICATION

To my dog Bear, who helped me start this dissertation.

And to my dog Penny, who helped me finish it.

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

In 2019, I visited a halfway house just a couple miles north of downtown Denver. I had arranged an interview with a man living there, Silas,[1] who had been referred to a gang disengagement and crime reduction program. I was nervous—unsure if the correctional officers would truly give me access to interview a resident there, unsure if Silas would be willing to talk once we met in person. Fortunately, my fears were laid to rest. The staff were friendly enough, and Silas greeted me warmly and brought me upstairs to an empty group therapy meeting room where we could conduct the interview in privacy.

Silas was a Latino man in his thirties, looking robust and physically fit. He gave off an air of a traditional masculine man: stoic, solid, dependable. He was exceptionally polite. Over the course of our interview, he candidly spoke about his past experiences as a gang member and his recent journey to disengage from his gang. He already referred to himself as a *former* member. According to him, he had little contact with his former gang, seeing them less than once a month. It became clear during the interview that my initial impression of his traditional masculine "vibe" was accurate: he emphasized self-reliance and having future employment as integral to his journey to continue reforming himself, qualities considered to be traditionally masculine (Kimmel 1997). Silas was being released from prison and would spend a limited time in the halfway house before officially going back to the community. I left the interview impressed by Silas's commitment to improving his life and determination to leave his gang behind.

About a year later, I spoke to Silas on the phone for our follow-up interview. He was trying to speak quickly to me while on break at his work site, where he served as manager of a construction crew. Silas had been difficult to reach for months—apparently, he was working

[1] A pseudonym. Some details of his case have been changed to protect anonymity.

more than 60 hours per week at this job. In the limited time we spoke on the phone, Silas confirmed that he was still a former gang member (not a current one), and that he had not committed any crimes since release. By all accounts, it seemed that Silas was a poster child for successful gang disengagement. He appeared to have few remaining emotional, physical, or instrumental ties to his former gang, he was back in the Denver community with respectable well-paying employment, and he had been out of the gang for over a year.

A few months later, Silas was arrested for accessory to first degree murder.

News articles about the case state that it was Silas's friend who murdered two people after getting into an argument with one of them in public, which escalated to blows and then finally to gunshots; but it was Silas who helped his friend flee the scene of the crime. A news photo of Silas's friend shows a man with visible neck tattoos. I have not been able to speak confidentially to Silas about this event while he's been in prison. The circumstances seem to indicate, however, that Silas's friend was likely associated or formerly associated with Silas's former gang, based on his willingness to escalate to lethal violence in public after an argument, his neck tattoos, and his association with Silas.

Silas's story illustrates several key points that are central to this dissertation: the enormous difficulty of the gang disengagement process; the question of whether commitment to traditional masculinity can be effective for successful gang disengagement; and the easy escalation to serious violence among gang members after public verbal conflict. My dissertation grapples with issues of gang disengagement and how it may relate to endorsement of traditional masculinity, violence-oriented masculinity, or other kinds of masculinities. Why was commitment to traditional masculinity not enough for Silas to successfully "get out"? Did it fail him? If so, where? Or was the real problem that he retained aspects of violence-oriented

masculinity, a form of masculinity emphasizing violence which is typically promoted by gangs? To what degree did Silas actually change his masculine identity?

If we zoom out from Silas's case, we are left with a broader question: Is it important for a disengaging gang member to adjust their idea of manhood in order to succeed? This question motivates my dissertation. I begin here by introducing key information on gangs, gang violence, masculinities, and gang disengagement, leading to a description of how my own original research will fill gaps in the literature of gang disengagement and masculinities, and the importance of doing so.

Street gangs have long been associated with crime and violence (Thrasher 1927). Involvement in illegal activity is typically part of the requirement for groups to be considered gangs: one of the most widely accepted definitions for a street gang currently is "Any durable, street-oriented youth group whose involvement in illegal activity is part of its group identity" (Klein and Maxson 2006:4).[2] In particular, violence is a crucial feature of gang life. Gangs use violence to defend their territory, respond to symbolic attacks (e.g., graffiti defacement), and retaliate for physical attacks from other gangs (Decker 1996). Violence among gangs can also occur simply because different groups spend time in the same public space (Decker 1996; Decker and Van Winkle 1996). Organizational violence typically facilitates cohesion among gangs (Decker 1996; Sanchez-Jankowski 1992; Thrasher 1927). Rival gangs often perpetuate a cycle of violence through a process of social contagion, wherein they must consistently retaliate against each other to avoid being labeled an easy target (Papachristos 2009). Robust evidence has shown that gang involvement increases individuals' offending and victimization (Melde and Esbensen 2013; Pyrooz et al. 2016; Pyrooz, Moule, and Decker 2014; Thornberry et al. 1993;

[2] However, gangs are not always composed entirely of youth. While gang membership peaks in adolescence, some individuals remain gang members through much of adulthood (Pyrooz 2014b).

Watkins and Melde 2018; Wu and Pyrooz 2016).

Some researchers have argued that gang involvement and gang violence allow young marginalized men to accomplish a version of masculinity promoted by gangs when traditional pathways to achieving masculinity are blocked (Baird 2019; Barker 2005; McLean and Holligan 2018; Zubillaga 2009). The idea of accomplishing masculinity harkens back to foundational gender theory. Gender is thought to be something one can "do" as a "routine, methodical, and recurring accomplishment" (West and Zimmerman 1987:126). One may accomplish gender via practices and possession of symbolic qualities attributed to masculinity and femininity (Connell 1995; Schippers 2007; West and Zimmerman 1987). For example, someone may accomplish normative femininity in many contexts by wearing makeup, caring for children, or being accommodating and nurturing. Culturally exalted or "traditional" masculinities in Western societies often include practices and qualities such as achieving financial wealth, acting as an economic provider for family via employment, self-reliance, heterosexuality, stoicism, risk-taking/daring, willingness to use violence when necessary, authority over women, homophobia, and repudiation of anything feminine (Carrigan et al. 1985; Connell 1995; Kimmel 1997; Schippers 2007). One's accomplishment of gender may also be an integral part of identity—for example, identifying as a father, a "badman" (Reid 2017), or a breadwinner (Deuchar and Weide 2018), which can be seen as part of one's "masculine identity" (Deuchar and Weide 2018; Forkby, Kuosmanen, and Örnlind 2020; King and Swain 2022; Leverso and Hess 2021).

Of these, economic success and breadwinner status appear to be the most important worldwide indicator of traditional masculinity and thus is most damaging to masculine accomplishment if not accessible. Structural conditions blocking access to well-paid, stable, dignified, and/or context-traditional masculine employment are a major factor to precipitate boys

and men to look for alternative ways of achieving masculinity (Baird 2012, 2018, 2019; Barker 2005; Davies 1998; Kersten 2001; McLean and Holligan 2018; Streicher 2011; Zubillaga 2009). Gang members tend to display exaggerated or extreme versions of traditional masculinity which over-emphasize aggression and violence (Baird 2019; Barker 2005). Most studies of gangs and masculinities demonstrate that gangs promote a version of masculinity in which aggression, violence, and having a tough reputation are the most important features (Baird 2018, 2019; Barker 2005; Davies 1998; Kersten 2001; McLean and Holligan 2018; Streicher 2011; Zubillaga 2009). Of course, criminology has long documented the emergence of subcultural norms encouraging violence, retaliation, and increased emphasis on reputation and respect developing among boys and men in marginalized communities, often referred to as the street code (Anderson 1999; Black 1983; Cohen and Nisbett 1994; Horowitz 1983; Jacobs 2004; Katz 1988; Kubrin and Weitzer 2003; Rich and Grey 2005; Tedeschi and Felson 1994).

Within the last decade, a small but growing field of qualitative research has suggested that masculinity changes are helpful for gang disengagement and criminal desistance among gang members (Armstrong and Rosbrook-Thompson 2017; Deuchar et al. 2016; Deuchar and Weide 2018; Flores 2014; Forkby et al. 2020; Søgaard et al. 2016). Gang disengagement—which can include reduction in gang embeddedness[3] and membership de-identification (Sweeten et al. 2013)—is often gradual and non-linear, wherein the exiting member may go back and forth between disengaging and returning and may continue to retain social, emotional, or instrumental ties to the gang for quite some time (Decker and Lauritsen 2002; Decker et al. 2014; Pyrooz and Decker 2011). To facilitate gang exit, several gang intervention programs have used the strategy

[3] Gang embeddedness refers to the degree of involvement an individual has with a gang, including intensity of contact, number of social gang connections, depth of identity, etc. (Pyrooz, Sweeten, and Piquero 2013). Reductions in gang embeddedness can be used to measure gang disengagement (Sweeten et al. 2013).

of promoting individual change away from violence-oriented masculinity and toward other versions of masculinity (Deuchar 2018; Deuchar and Weide 2018; Flores 2014). Flores (2014) argued that these intervention groups denigrated gang masculinity[4] as inferior while instead promoting elements of traditional masculinity, such as being a breadwinner, having self-reliance, and being a committed husband and father. The process appeared to be successful for some disengaging gang members, though Flores did not argue whether changes to masculinity were truly a cause or merely a consequence of disengagement. Deuchar and Weide (2018) took a bolder stance, reporting that gang interventions which promoted masculinity changes were effective in causing gang disengagement and criminal desistance—so much so that removal of the programs led to relapses for program participants.

Leverso and Hess's (2021) theory of age-graded masculinity maturation among gang members implied that changes to masculinity accomplishment can cause gang disengagement. They argued that as boys become men, "A disconnect between perceptions of age-appropriate masculinity and gang masculinity creates a masculinity dilemma where individuals begin to question the value of the gang as a useful institution for one's masculinity" (2). Men begin to doubt that gang membership is congruent with age-appropriate masculine values *before* they choose to leave the gang. Masculinity maturation refers to the gradual shift that disengaging gang members make, as they move from practicing gang masculinity to practicing "more normative masculinities" via institutions such as family and employment (2).

Still, there are continued questions as to the importance of changing masculinities in the gang disengagement process. So far, the contribution of masculinities to disengagement has only

[4] Gang masculinity in this dissertation simply refers to masculinities promoted by gangs, which tends to over-emphasize violence but also encompasses a wide range of practices, qualities, and identities including but not limited to patriarchal relations with women (Barker 2005), substance use (Flores 2014), loyalty, courage (White 2008), and homophobia (Panfil 2017).

been documented in qualitative research. Most of the participants were in gang intervention programs designed to promote specific versions of masculinity, which introduces doubt of whether changing masculinities are actually relevant to the gang disengagement process outside of these specific programs (Deuchar 2018; Deuchar and Weide 2018; Flores 2014). It is also possible that the connection between masculinities and disengagement is spurious. While researchers implied that the gang intervention programs which promoted changing masculinities were generally successful (Deuchar 2018; Deuchar and Weide 2018; Flores 2014; Søgaard et al. 2016), the success of these programs may be related to other intervention mechanisms involving employment, mental health, social support, or prosocial activities rather than masculinity itself. Moreover, the temporal order of this potential relationship between masculinity change and gang disengagement is unclear. Although researchers such as Deuchar and Weide (2018) and Leverso and Hess (2021) theorize that masculinity change can precede and even cause disengagement, other research raises the possibility that masculinity is simply part of a bundle of attitudes, practices, and identities that change *after* gang disengagement (see Densley and Pyrooz 2019; Melde and Esbensen 2014; Sweeten et al. 2013; Weerman, Lovegrove, and Thornberry 2015).

Quantitative data could help address these doubts and provide evidence that masculinities are—or are not—important in the disengagement process. While some quantitative research has shown that gang members endorse stronger norms of violence to achieve respect than their non-gang peers do (Matsuda et al. 2013),[5] little to no quantitative research has examined changes to endorsement of violence-oriented masculinity as individuals *disengage* from gangs. Furthermore, little to no quantitative research has studied associations between endorsement of traditional masculinities and levels of gang involvement at all, much less changes in endorsement of

[5] The measures used in this dissertation for violence-oriented masculinity are the same as the measures used to study violence norms in Matsuda et al.'s study, which I elaborate on further in the literature review and methods.

traditional masculinities during gang disengagement. Providing statistical evidence on this topic could isolate the association between changes in masculinity and disengagement and rule out other explanations, as well as shedding light on the temporal order. It could either support the prior qualitative research or call it into question, advancing this new field regardless.

In addition, more qualitative data is needed regarding whether and how masculinity change could precipitate gang disengagement. Some studies arguing that masculinity change causes disengagement use ethnographic observation of specific intervention programs (Armstrong and Rosbrook-Thompson 2017; Deuchar and Weide 2018). Most of these studies lack individuals' detailed disengagement narratives establishing masculinity change as a potential precipitating factor for disengagement (see also Forkby et al. 2020). Using narratives to imply a cause and effect would advance the theoretical contribution of masculinity change as a potential precipitating factor of gang disengagement.

More qualitative data is also needed regarding the characterization of the new type(s) of masculinity that reforming gang members transition towards. Initially, researchers described these reformed masculinities as *traditional* masculinity oriented toward breadwinning, romantic partnerships, self-reliance, and homophobia (Deuchar et al. 2016; Flores 2014; Panfil 2020; Søgaard et al. 2016); however, more recent research has contradicted this and instead described the reformed masculinities as *positive* and emphasizing relationships with family, kindness, emotional openness, and community service (Deuchar 2018; Deuchar and Weide 2018; Forkby et al. 2020). The body of work in this literature is still quite small, and additional qualitative data is needed to further explore and characterize the nature of these reformed masculinities. Quantitative data too can test the endorsement of traditional masculinities among disengaging gang members.

Filling these gaps for the gang disengagement literature is vital. Gang disengagement is strongly associated with reduced offending and reduced victimization (Bendixen, Endresen, and Olweus 2006; Gatti et al. 2005; Pyrooz, Decker, and Webb 2014), meaning that any advances in understanding how to precipitate gang disengagement will go a long way toward reducing gang-related crime at an individual and population level. Understanding how masculinities factor into the process of disengagement is particularly crucial, as gang intervention programs are already using strategies that invoke changing masculinities (Deuchar and Weide 2018; Flores 2014). Whether these strategies are effective has implications for public policy.

To fill in these gaps in the literature, my dissertation examines masculinities and gang disengagement using both quantitative and qualitative methods. My research questions are as follows:

1) Are endorsements of violence-oriented masculinity and traditional masculinity associated with gang embeddedness?

2) Are changes in individuals' endorsement of masculinities associated with changes in their gang embeddedness, with gang embeddedness change as the dependent variable?

3) Are changes in individuals' endorsement of gang embeddedness associated with changes in their endorsement of masculinities, with masculinities change as the dependent variables?

4) How do active gang members construct masculinity?

5) How do disengaging and former gang members construct masculinity?

6) If masculinities are changing surrounding disengagement, what role does masculinity change play in gang disengagement?

The first three research questions were answered with quantitative data. I used data from

a two-wave survey of 114 gang-involved youth and adults in Denver who were referred to a gang disengagement program, 70 of whom were surveyed across two waves. The survey contained scales measuring gang embeddedness (Pyrooz, Sweeten, and Piquero 2013), endorsement of violence-oriented masculinity (Stewart and Simons 2006), and endorsement of traditional masculinity in the United States (Levant, Hall, and Rankin 2013; Thompson and Pleck 1986), in addition to a whole host of potential variables from criminological theory which I used to rule out alternative explanations. The two waves of data allowed me to measure changes in masculinities endorsement and gang embeddedness over time and use these changes in statistical analyses. The last three research questions were answered with qualitative data. I conducted 10 in-depth interviews with disengaging and former members who had originally participated in the two-wave survey. These participants are valuable for in-depth exploration of masculinities and gang disengagement, considering they were all referred to a gang disengagement program.

The mixed methods approach used here is tailored to the exploratory nature of this dissertation. There are many unanswered questions in this new field of masculinities and gang disengagement; some are suited to qualitative methods, and others, to quantitative. Triangulation, or mixing methods in order to shed light on a topic, can deepen our understanding of how masculinity change and gang disengagement may be related and aid in interpretation of findings (Olsen 2004).

Masculinities have been generally neglected in criminology and the study of gangs until recent decades. However, it is naïve to assume that masculinity has little to do with gangs (or crime), when such a large percentage of gang members are boys and men. Gender is a massive and deeply embedded social structure, influencing nearly everything in the social world for individuals (Connell 1987; Risman 2004). Gender profoundly impacts essential aspects of an

individual's life such as self-conceptions, labor opportunities, access to power, everyday interactions, mannerisms and presentations of self, and cultural expectations of oneself (Connell 1987; Ridgeway 2011; Risman 2004; West and Zimmerman 1987). Gender constrains behavior in some situations and provides opportunities in other situations (Martin 2004). Furthermore, gender intersects with class and race to amplify every aspect already listed (see Crenshaw 1991). It seems more reasonable than not to assume by default that masculinity is important in gang involvement.

In the following chapter, I review the relevant literature and theoretical frameworks for masculinities, crime and masculinities, gangs and masculinities, gang disengagement, and masculinities and gang disengagement. I begin with a discussion of crucial theories of masculinities which heavily influence the study of gangs and masculinities, including that of gang disengagement.

CHAPTER 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Theories of Masculinities

Hegemonic and Dominant Masculinities

The most influential theory of masculinity has been that of hegemonic masculinity, which proposes that there are multiple masculinities which are constructed and organized in a hierarchy (Carrigan, Connell, and Lee 1985; Connell 1987, 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). "Hegemonic masculinity" was originally conceived as the type of masculinity considered to be both *culturally idealized* and *connected to the structural legitimation of men's dominance over women* at any particular historical time and location (Carrigan et al. 1985). Those masculinities which are considered "beneath" hegemonic masculinity are referred to as subordinate or marginalized masculinities. Aside from heterosexuality and perhaps Whiteness, original theorists (Carrigan et al. 1985; Connell 1987, 1995) did not identify the other practices or qualities that constitute hegemonic masculinity in Western cultures. However, what constitutes hegemonic masculinity can change based on the locale and specific social environment, varying by geographic levels from local groups as small as a family or organization, to countries, to global and transnational culture (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Connell later defined hegemonic masculinity as "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (1995:77), notably not including any mention of cultural ideals in the definition. This definition also centered hegemonic masculinity squarely as a configuration of *practices* rather than a collection of traits.[6]

[6] Several scholars have criticized Connell and other masculinity theorists for not specifying what configuration of practices masculinities in general have *in common*. The only clear answer in Connell's theory seems to be that they are enacted by male bodies (Schippers 2007; Schrock and Schwalbe 2009). It is certainly unsatisfying to consider anything enacted by a male body to be a type of masculinity; it seems associated with biological essentialism and

Some early usages of the new concept of hegemonic masculinity described the practices that hegemonic masculinity might encompass. Kimmel's (1997) argued that the new spirit of capitalism of the 1800s brought a new hegemonic masculinity to the United States: the "Marketplace Man." Ever a true capitalist and entrepreneur, Marketplace Man was constantly in competition with other men and derived masculine status from business success and ever-increasing wealth. This model of masculine success continued into Kimmel's time of writing. Kimmel argued that financial success, in conjunction with homophobia, stoicism, self-reliance, risk-taking, physical strength, and repudiation of the feminine constituted culturally idealized masculinity in the United States at the time of writing.

Instead of conceptualizing hegemonic masculinity as configurations of practices, Schippers (2007) argued instead that there are a collection of *qualities* imbued with symbolic meanings that men and women are expected to possess, and hegemonic masculinity is the idealized version of these for men. These qualities include being an economic provider or breadwinner to family, physical strength, ability to use violence when necessary, and authority. She emphasized the patriarchal aspect of hegemonic masculinity by arguing these qualities legitimate an ideology of men's dominance over women.

A major point of confusion and contention as the theory of hegemonic masculinity developed over time has been whether it refers to masculinity which is culturally idealized or masculinity which legitimates men's domination over women. The culturally idealized version of masculinity may *not* always be the same as that which legitimates men's domination of women

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threatens to reinforce gender difference (Schippers 2007). Miller (2002) brought up this issue, saying: "Selective attention to difference results in the argument that women's actions are always an articulation of 'femininity' and men's of 'masculinity', even when oppositional or diverse femininities and masculinities are being described and even when there is behavioral similarity across gender" (441). This debate is not in the scope of my dissertation, but it should be acknowledged. Sometimes men consciously "do" femininity, and, women, masculinity (see West and Zimmerman 1987).

in any given time period or location. Yang (2020) discussed this point of confusion, arguing that hegemonic masculinity is the culturally idealized masculinity but is *not* required to legitimate patriarchy. On the other hand, Messerschmidt (2016) argued that hegemonic masculinity *is* required to legitimate patriarchy, and instead dominant masculinity is the one most celebrated or common. The difficulty here lies with Connell's original conception, and there is no clear answer. However, what is clear is that lumping both concepts together under one term is likely not effective. From here, I will refer to culturally idealized masculinity as "dominant masculinity" (see Messerschmidt 2016 for example) while hegemonic masculinity will refer to that which legitimates patriarchy.

Changing Masculinities

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) argued that it is certain that hegemonic masculinity will at some point be challenged. Relations between women and men are changing in Western cultures, which is a source of tension for hegemonic masculinity in these contexts (Carrigan et al. 1985). Hegemonic masculinity can incorporate subordinated practices in order to adapt to changing times (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Demetriou 2001). Incorporating pieces of gay culture, for example, can help some masculinities appear more accepting of femininity while not actually advancing women's rights (Demetriou 2001).

Bridges and Pascoe (2014, 2018) theorized that some changing masculinities are "hybrid masculinities," defined as "selective incorporation of identity elements typically associated with various marginalized and subordinated masculinities and—at times—femininities into privileged men's gender performances and identities" (Bridges and Pascoe 2018:258; see Demetriou 2001 and Messner 1993). Newer trends in embracing symbolic feminine territory in this population include "metrosexuals," "hipsters," the practice of "manscaping," increased emotionality, and

continually increasing acceptance of gay marriage (Anderson 2009; Bridges and Pascoe 2018; McCarthy 2021). Anderson (2009) argued that decreasing homophobia and embrace of feminine practices were ushering in an era of inclusive masculinities. Since then, some scholars have documented more inclusive or alternative masculinities becoming more dominant (Anderson and McCormack 2018; Flecha, Puigvert, and Ríos 2013; Kaplan, Rosenmann, and Shuhendler 2017). According to at least recent one study, American and British men agree that society as a whole no longer values the previously dominant traits of homophobia, avoidance of femininity, and stoicism (Iacoviello et al. 2022). Dominant masculinity in the United States appears currently to be in a state of flux.

In addition, note that Bridges and Pascoe described identity elements as part of masculinity. Major gender theorists have defined masculinities as inclusive of practices (Connell 1995), qualities (Schippers 2007), and now identities (Bridges and Pascoe 2018). Multiple prior works exploring masculinities and gang disengagement have also placed identities front and center as part of masculinities (Armstrong and Rosbrook-Thompson 2017; Deuchar 2018; Deuchar and Weide 2018; Forkby et al. 2020). Throughout my dissertation, I will refer to masculinities as encompassing practices, qualities, and identities in accordance with theory and these prior works. Practices specifically refer to behavior (e.g., fighting). Qualities refer to traits (e.g., being strong). Finally, identity refers to one's image or concept of oneself (e.g., "I'm a badass."). Allowing these diverse definitions of masculinities lets this study be inclusive of various interpretations of masculinities.[7]

[7] This is by no means meant to be an exhaustive definition of masculinity. Masculinity is not easily defined, although a leading definition is from Connell (1995): "'Masculinity', to the extent the term can be briefly defined at all, is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture" (71). Masculinity can clearly encompass a wide range of social phenomena, but I focus on practices, qualities, and identities constructed as masculine in the context of gangs and gang disengagement.

Traditional Masculinity

The term *traditional masculinity* has become widely used in social science research, although it is not universally defined (Everitt-Penhale and Ratele 2015; see Rogers, DeLay, and Martin 2017 for an example). It may have become common due to the ambiguity of what dominant masculinity in the Western contexts currently encapsulates and the confusion over what hegemonic masculinity refers to. The term is especially widespread in the development of survey questions that measure attitudes toward certain masculinities, such as the well-known Male Role Norms Inventory (MRNI) measure (Levant, Hall, and Rankin 2013; Thompson and Bennett 2015). Everitt-Penhale and Ratele (2015) argued that traditional masculinity refers to various different concepts in the literature and is often conflated with hegemonic masculinity. They recommended future researchers clearly define what traditional masculinity refers to in their studies if using the term.

Throughout this dissertation, I use *traditional masculinity* to refer to practices, qualities, or identities that were theorized to be part of dominant and hegemonic masculinity during the 1980s through early 2000s in the United States, which includes financial success, acting as an economic breadwinner to family, heterosexuality, homophobia, stoicism, self-reliance, use of violence when necessary, physical strength, authority, risk-taking, and avoidance of femininity (Carrigan et al. 1985; Kimmel 1997; Schippers 2007). I do not use the term dominant masculinity to describe this type of masculinity because evidence and theory suggests it is no longer completely dominant (Anderson and McCormack 2018; Bridges and Pascoe 2018; Iacoviello et al. 2022); nor do I use the term hegemonic masculinity because of both the confusion surrounding its definition and that I do not focus on the relations between men and women in this dissertation. Instead, using *traditional masculinity* to describe this version of

masculinity is consistent with other research such as that using the MRNI (Levant et al. 2013). Although the MRNI's authors described traditional masculinity as being dominant prior to the feminist deconstructions of gender starting in the 1960s and 1970s, they are referring to these same attributes which others theorized to be dominant at least through the early 2000s (Carrigan et al. 1985; Kimmel 1997; Levant and Richmond 2007; Schippers 2007). While traditional masculinity may be less dominant in the U.S. now, many people still idealize it, and it remains relevant for gang-involved individuals[8] (see Flores 2014).

Measuring Traditional Masculinity

Quantitative measures of the endorsement of traditional masculinity have become commonly used in social science research, although still are rarely used in the study of gangs. As mentioned before, the MRNI measures endorsement of traditional masculinity across several different domains, including homophobia, stoicism, self-reliance, and avoidance of femininity (Levant et al. 2013). The MRNI is validated and has been used in a wide variety of research (Levant and Richmond 2007). Studies using the MRNI's short form measure have examined the effect of traditional masculinity endorsement on men's suicide risk (Walther et al. 2022), risky behaviors such as substance use, risky sexual practices, speeding (Giaccardi et al. 2017), and risky COVID-19 health practices (Levant et al. 2022). These studies overall show that traditional masculinity endorsement is associated with increased risk-taking behavior, which in turn is often paired with criminal behavior (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990).

Evidence also suggests endorsement of masculinities can change within individuals over short periods of time (Courtenay 1998; Gupta et al. 2013; Lam and Lefkowitz 2016; Marcell et al. 2011; Rogers, Updegraff, et al. 2017; Rogers, DeLay, et al. 2017). Longitudinal studies

[8] This is elaborated on further in upcoming sections.

measuring traditional masculinities endorsement across 2 to 3 waves among adolescent boys and young adult men found universally that masculinity endorsement changed significantly within individuals during the study periods. Samples from these studies ranged from boys aged 11 at the start (Rogers, DeLay, et al. 2017) to young men aged 23 at the end of data collection (Courtenay 1998; Marcell et al. 2011). The time between waves of data collection for many of these studies were short; for some, only 6 to 9 months separated the waves (Lam and Lefkowitz 2016; Rogers, DeLay, et al. 2017), while others separated waves by 1 year (Gupta et al. 2013; Rogers, Updegraff, et al. 2017) or by 2 to 3 years (Courtenay 1998; Marcell et al. 2011). According to these studies, boys' traditional masculinity endorsement increases significantly and steadily during ages 11 to 14 (Gupta et al. 2013; Rogers, Updegraff, et al. 2017; Rogers, DeLay, et al. 2017), then declines in either late adolescence or emerging adulthood (Lam and Lefkowitz 2016; Marcell et al. 2011). That these studies show significant individual change in traditional masculinity endorsement over periods of time as short as 6 months shows that traditional masculinity endorsement can be unstable and dynamic, especially in adolescence and young adulthood.

Until this point, I have discussed broad theories of masculinities and measurement of traditional masculinity, meaning to provide a crucial foundation for understanding how masculinities may interplay with gang involvement. Now, I move focus onto theories and evidence of masculinities and *crime*. Most research on gangs and gang disengagement originated within the field of criminology, and criminological writings have been foundational for studies of gangs and masculinities.

Crime and Masculinities

Messerschmidt's Theory of Structured Action

Messerschmidt's (1993) theory of structured action was formed in order to answer the question of why men disproportionately commit crime. Messerschmidt argued that men and boys have been seen as "default," meaning gendered processes that might contribute to their crime and delinquency have been ignored. According to Messerschmidt, "Criminology has asked 'why is it that women do not offend?' rather than 'why do men disproportionately commit crime?'" (1993:1). To answer this question, he argued that class, race, and gender interact with power and economic structures to enable and constrain individuals in their behavior. All individuals engage in behavior with a purpose, and for males, accomplishing masculinity is part of behavior and is guided by social structure. To put it simply, as Messerschmidt (1993) said, "Men do masculinity according to the social situation in which they find themselves" (84).

As discussed previously, traditional masculinity in contemporary Western societies is considered to include practices such as achieving financial wealth, acting as an economic breadwinner for family, heterosexuality, stoicism, risk-taking, self-reliance, willingness to use violence when necessary, physical strength, homophobia, and repudiation of anything feminine (Carrigan et al. 1985; Connell 1995; Kimmel 1997; Schippers 2007). However, men and boys in marginalized racial and economic positions encounter structural difficulties with achieving wealth and acting as breadwinners. Messerschmidt argued that men and boys can construct criminality as a resource for accomplishing masculinity. Minor crimes such as vandalism and petty theft are a resource for middle-class White boys to accomplish masculinity by demonstrating traditionally masculine ideals such as risk-taking, while at the same time not truly endangering their financial success in the future. However, because men and boys of

marginalized economic and ethnic status are less able to leverage financial success to enact masculinity, they are more likely to see aggression and violence as ways to successfully enact it instead. Messerschmidt specifically discussed how constructions of masculinity among economically marginalized, ethnic minority boys can lead to violence and group turf wars. He argued that these boys know that a traditionally masculine future of achieving financial wealth is unreachable for them and that joining a violent street group[9] instead is a resource for accomplishing masculinity. Violence is one of the few forms of masculinity that is accessible, especially in the context of turf wars among street groups in which boys can gain status and respect by being violent (Messerschmidt 1993).

Crime and Masculinities

Numerous studies have documented men and boys accomplishing a version of masculinity through crime and violence, ranging from bar fighters (Copes, Hochstetler, and Forsyth 2013; Ellis 2016), corporate managers (Messerschmidt 1997), mass killers (Madfis 2014), fraternity brothers (Martin and Hummer 1989), and men heavily embedded in criminal street life (Mullins 2006; Winlow 2001). Among wealthier or middle-class men, committing crime to achieve masculinity is less common (or at least, less documented), but nonetheless still occurs. For example, corporate managers attempting to "do" masculinity via excessive risk-taking has led to corporate crime (Messerschmidt 1997).

Despite some documentation of wealthy men committing crime to achieve masculinity, economic marginalization and downward mobility is most commonly cited as the precipitating factor for men to turn to crime and/or violence in order to achieve some ideal of masculinity other than legally-achieved wealth (Ellis 2016; Madfis 2014; Mullins 2006; Winlow 2001).

[9] Messerschmidt used the word "group" rather than "gang," but considering he referenced turf wars, applying his argument to gangs is reasonable.

Mullins (2006) studied men involved in criminal street life in St. Louis and found that weakened social institutions and lack of structural opportunities prevented people in struggling communities from completing education and acquiring jobs. The few available jobs were seen as both demeaning and too low-paying compared to criminal careers (Mullins 2006). Similarly, formerly working-class men in Northeast England struggled to find work in the wake of deindustrialization and turned to criminal enterprises instead (Winlow 2001). In these cases, men developed ways of achieving not only income but masculinity through crime and violence. Winlow (2001) observed that idealized masculine qualities in these deindustrialized English communities shifted from hard work, physicality, workmanship, skill, and providing for one's family to new ideal masculine qualities of crafty (criminal) entrepreneurship, caginess, and verbal wit. Other traditional masculine qualities of self-reliance, readiness to fight, and skill at fighting were amplified. While Winlow's study is but one example, the amplification of the importance of violence has been seen over and over in studies of masculinities in economically disadvantaged communities (Anderson 1999; Ellis 2016; Mullins 2006).

According to Mullins (2006), the men involved in criminal street life in St. Louis were highly concerned with violence as integral to masculinity. Projecting images of toughness, potential violence, and dominance over others were key to maintaining a masculine reputation and gaining respect. Independence and self-reliance were also important qualities of their ideal masculinity. Their masculine reputations were constantly under scrutiny to an onerous extent. Information flow on the street was inconsistent and patchy, meaning not all people in the neighborhood would hear about their most recent victories. These conditions meant that men had to prove their masculinity repeatedly.

As Mullins (2006) said, "The key way to earn and maintain reputation was to prove you

were more violent and ruthless than your street associates" (102). One way to prove this was to successfully fight someone who already had a tough reputation. If someone wronged these men, they were expected to retaliate in a certain fashion or else be labeled as a "punk" (demeaning term for a weak, cowardly, or gay man). Carrying out a violent retaliation successfully displayed masculine ideals of dominance over others, control, and independence to the community. If a man was successful in maintaining a strong reputation, Mullins argued that he had "enhanced masculine capital," giving him respect and honor in the community. This masculine capital allowed men to achieve their social goals within their own community.

Mullins (2006) is far from the only researcher to document norms encouraging violence, retaliation, and increased emphasis on reputation and respect developing among boys and men in marginalized communities (Anderson 1999; Black 1983; Cohen and Nisbett 1994; Horowitz 1983; Jacobs 2004; Katz 1988; Kubrin and Weitzer 2003; Rich and Grey 2005; Tedeschi and Felson 1994). The most influential of these has been Anderson (1999), who observed that high rates of poverty, legal cynicism, social marginalization, and racial discrimination in Black neighborhoods of Philadelphia led some residents to embrace a set of norms of cultivating respect through toughness, violence, and retaliation which he labeled the "street code." These street code norms are very similar to those described by Mullins (2006). Endorsement of the street code corresponds with behaviors such as projecting a persona of fearlessness, engaging in provocative or threatening behavior toward others, and aggressively addressing perceived slights or insults (Anderson 1999). Anderson's participants believed following the street code would protect them from future victimization. However, the street code can also be seen as a violence-oriented masculinity that men and boys may follow in order to create an attainable masculine identity in the face of structural disadvantages.

Several prior scholars have argued that Anderson's street code is a version of marginalized masculinity oriented toward violence (King and Swain 2022; Reid 2017; Stuart 2020; Wilkinson 2001). While Anderson's evidence is generally interpreted to mean following the street code is a means of gaining respect in one's community, King and Swain (2022) contended that following the street code is a means of achieving masculinity which *in turn* gains respect in the community:

> For Anderson, a chief concern for these individuals is acquiring a masculine identity that generates peer admiration. Thus, respect and masculine identity are often two sides of the same coin for many young inner-city men, enabling their bravado and a propensity for violently responding to disrespect. (3)

Such an idea is not new, especially as Mullins (2006) found that gaining "masculine capital" is essentially the same as gaining respect.

Indeed, qualitative evidence suggests subcultural norms characteristic of Anderson's street code also constitute a version of masculinity highly oriented toward violence (King and Swain 2022; Mullins 2006; Reid 2017; Wilkinson 2001). Scholars including King and Swain (2022), Reid (2017), and Wilkinson (2001) all found practices characteristic of Anderson's street code in the disadvantaged urban communities they studied, including gaining respect (sometimes via unprovoked violence), retaliating violently in response to disrespect, displaying toughness, showing bravado, weapons carrying, risk-taking, and using violence in general. They all argued that these practices constituted a version of masculinity endorsed by their low-income, urban, usually racial/ethnic minority young male participants. These practices are shown to be more than simply subcultural norms by the way the study participants framed them. The participants repeatedly contrasted these violence-oriented practices with being feminine, gay, or "a pussy" if one did not adhere to them (King and Swain 2022; Reid 2017; Wilkinson 2001). Reid explained that her participants dichotomously labeled their peers as either "badmen"—street code followers

who were willing to use violence and defend their reputation—or "pussies"—weak men who did not use violence or did not retaliate when challenged. Similarly, Wilkinson's participants labeled non-violent or weak men who did not live up to the street code as "punks" or "herbs" and treated them poorly:

> Others in the setting degrade, dominate, and victimize those individuals who have punk or herb characteristics, typically via direct or implicit emasculation of the "weaker" males. Punks and herbs also are called "soft," "sucker," "wimp," "pussy," "bitch," "ass," and "chump." (249)

The language "bitch" and "pussy" both allude to women, while "punk" and "bitch" can be derogatory references to gay men. The contrast between violent and feminized constructions of masculinity is so strong that it can even apply to the music these young men listen to. When King asked a participant if he listened to any music *other* than that which highlighted violence, he responded, "This mans thinks I'm pussy, fam! You think I'm pussy? Nah...I don't follow that fuckin gay shit, man" (12). The characterization of not following the street code as feminine or gay establishes following the street code and using violence as a desirable form of masculinity in contrast. Dominant masculinity in Western cultures has historically been constructed in direct opposition to femininity and homosexuality (Kimmel 1997).

Furthermore, Wilkinson (2001) and Reid (2017) both argued showing disrespect towards other young men are actually attacks against their manhood, which is why it necessitates violent responses. Reid's participants felt shamed and humiliated when disrespected and felt that their masculinity was called into question in front of other people in public. Wilkinson likewise classified displays of disrespect as intentional attempts to downgrade the target's masculine identity. When an interviewer asked, "So what usually happens when [a person] gets like this with you in your face or something?", the participant replied, "Oh, man, that's like, testing your

manhood" (243). In these cases, one's reputation within the street code was synonymous with one's successful achievement of a masculinity oriented toward violence.

Even though some girls do endorse the street code, girls tend to score significantly lower than boys on street code endorsement (McNeeley and Hoeben 2017; Melde et al. 2020; Nowacki 2012; Taylor et al. 2010). When girls do enact the street code, they generally use less violence than boys do (Jones 2008). Boys tend to use guns or other weapons and are more comfortable with escalation to lethal violence; girls tend to avoid weapons and believe lethal force is foolish (Jones 2008). Even among street criminals, women are far more likely than men to resolve conflicts peacefully and without guns (Mullins, Wright, and Jacobs 2004). It seems likely that the true goal of men and boy's enactment of the street code is to gain "masculine capital" (Mullins 2006) rather than protection, especially considering street code adherence is actually positively associated with violent victimization (Stewart, Schreck, and Simons 2006).

Gangs and Masculinities

In the following section, I review the literature regarding masculinities and gangs, including both self-identified gang members and individuals who are somewhat embedded in gangs without membership. Gang embeddedness refers to the degree of involvement an individual has with a gang, including intensity of gang contact, number of social gang connections, depth of gang identity, etc. (Pyrooz, Sweeten, and Piquero 2013). Gang embeddedness is a relatively new construct, and gang embeddedness without membership has only recently been studied, so it is not surprising that the masculinities and gangs literature has not yet incorporated discussions of gang embeddedness. Reviewing this literature based on gang membership rather than embeddedness is the most fruitful avenue to give context to this dissertation.

Masculinities, Gang Involvement, and Gang Violence

Some gang scholars in recent decades have built on theories of crime and masculinities to study how gangs provide the means to accomplish a version of masculinity to marginalized males (Baird 2012, 2018, 2019; Barker 2005; Davies 1998; Hagedorn 1998; Kersten 2001; McLean and Holligan 2018; Panfil 2017; Streicher 2011; Stuart 2020; Zubillaga 2009). This research has examined marginalized males' accomplishments of masculinity through gang membership and gang violence in wide variety of geographic contexts, such as Germany (Kersten 2001), Glasgow (McLean and Holligan 2018), Colombia (Baird 2012, 2018), Chicago (Stuart 2020), East Timor (Streicher 2011), Cape Town (Jensen 2008), Caracas (Zubillaga 2009), and even Victorian-era England (Davies 1998). Although very little research has *measured* endorsement of masculinities among gang members, one study suggests that "gang culture" promotes endorsement of traditional masculinity, as youth residing in areas with high gang activity endorsed traditional masculinity more strongly than youth that did not (Luyt and Foster 2001).

Most studies of gangs and masculinities discuss how blocked opportunities to achieve traditional masculinity provide an important incentive to join gangs and participate in gang violence, regardless of geographic context. The blocked pathways vary based on context, but there are widespread similarities across the globe (and across time). Commonly, structural conditions blocking access to well-paid, stable, dignified, and/or context-traditional masculine employment are a major factor to precipitate boys and men to look for alternative ways of achieving masculinity (Baird 2012, 2018, 2019; Barker 2005; Davies 1998; Kersten 2001; McLean and Holligan 2018; Streicher 2011; Zubillaga 2009). This could be seen even in Victorian-era England, where working-class adolescent boys were too young for respectable

employment in manual labor. In current times, impoverished young men in urban centers of Belize and Colombia acutely feel that structural conditions blocking dignified employment have marginalized, excluded, and emasculated them (Baird 2018, 2019). Boys in Caracas, Venezuela, likewise feel humiliated by their poverty and angered at the blocked opportunities for social mobility (Zubillaga 2009). Worldwide, boys from low-income families (especially in developing nations) often face pressure to leave school and work to help support their families at a young age (Barker 2005), further impeding their ability to find viable employment as they age into men. Developed countries, however, are not exempt from structural conditions that create difficulty for young men to find feasible employment. Boys in Glasgow, Scotland, face post-industrial structural conditions lacking the manufacturing jobs that young men there once flocked to (McLean and Holligan 2018). Similarly, in deindustrialized Germany, young men who would have been working class employees of factories in the mid 20th century now lack the resources to attract wives and become "family men" (Kersten 2001). The jobs that replaced manufacturing are sub-par: "tertiary sector jobs, feminized work that [young men] deeply detest and find unmanly" (Kersten 2001:249). Some contexts have extremely specific ideas of traditional masculine employment that have been disrupted; for example, in East Timor, traditional masculine models were that of national resistance fighters for liberation from Indonesia (Streicher 2011). Nonetheless, now that their liberation fight is won, men are encouraged to achieve mature masculinity, power, and agency via employment in urban areas as breadwinners for their families, but large-scale unemployment in East Timor makes this dream extremely difficult to accomplish and leaves few economic pathways for men (Streicher 2011).

If blocked pathways to employment make achieving traditional masculinity difficult, then how exactly do gang membership and gang violence help boys and men to accomplish another

version of masculinity? Gang members tend to display exaggerated versions of traditional masculinity which over-emphasize violence and some other aspects of traditional masculinity such as having authority over women (Baird 2019; Barker 2005). As discussed in prior sections, traditional masculinities typically include many practices or qualities other than employment, including heterosexuality, stoicism, risk-taking, self-reliance, willingness to use violence when necessary, having authority over women, and homophobia (Carrigan et al. 1985; Connell 1995; Kimmel 1997; Schippers 2007). These aspects of masculinity are still available to impoverished and marginalized young men regardless of income (Messerschmidt 1993).

Of those aspects, aggression and violence have certainly been the most amplified for gang members (similarly to the amplification of violence for street criminals or marginalized men following the street code as discussed previously). Most studies of gangs and masculinities demonstrate that gangs promote a version of masculinity in which aggression and violence are the most important features (Baird 2018, 2019; Barker 2005; Davies 1998; Kersten 2001; McLean and Holligan 2018; Streicher 2011; Zubillaga 2009). Even as far back in time as Victorian England, boys in the street acquired masculine honor and reputation by using violence to defeat rivals and defend their territory (Davies 1998). In current East Timor, gangs actively instigate violent clashes with other gangs as a resource for earning male honor (Streicher 2011). Gangs even have an amplification effect upon an individual boy's level of violence, as seen in Colombia, where "Once in the gang, the youths become increasingly 'bad,'" and gang leaders "tend to be the más malos, the 'baddest'" (Baird 2018:183). Learning violence appropriately is critical to progress in these gangs; Baird (2018) made sure to note that violence is used strategically and performatively according to context, illustrating that gang violence is indeed a calculated choice rather than a result of poor impulse control. Violence has also been shown to

boost gang boys' masculine identities, allowing them to identify with traditional masculine roles of "warrior" and "protector" (Streicher 2011; Zubillaga 2009). So important is violence to gang versions of masculinity that when Barker (2005) conducted a worldwide study of gangs and described just three main facets of gang masculinity, all three were centered around violence:

> Participating in gangs is a mostly male phenomenon that generally implies projecting or adhering to a specific version of masculinity characterized by:
>
> • the use of armed violence to achieve one's goals, and a willingness to kill if necessary
> • callous attitudes toward women, including violence against women
> • an exaggerated sense of male honor and a propensity to use violence in minor altercations and insults. (68)

Another important aspect of aggression in gangs is not just the physical act of violence, but "toughness," which seems to be characterized by the passive threat or ability to become violent at a moment's notice (Baird 2018; White 2008). Strategies such as gym musculature and/or weapon carrying increase the likelihood that one is seen as tough (McLean and Holligan 2018).

Across contexts and locations, being a gang member brings respect to young men (Baird 2012, 2019; Davies 1998; Kersten 2001; Streicher 2011; Zubillaga 2009). Respect is widely desired across marginalized young men, especially those embedded in criminal street life (Anderson 1999; Rich and Grey 2005). While respect can be a dividend of gang membership, being respected can also be a facet of accomplishing masculinity in gangs (Leverso and Hess 2021; Zubillaga 2009). In some contexts, being "respected" is synonymous with being feared (Baird 2012) or with having status (Baird 2019).

Based on the evidence of the amplification of violence among gang members, I argue gangs tend to promote a violence-oriented masculinity that is synonymous with that of the street code. This violence-oriented masculinity is a combination of practices, qualities, and identities that emphasize toughness, aggression, retaliation in the face of disrespect, and use of violence to

gain respect and enhance reputation. Violence-oriented masculinity can also be seen as a form of exaggerated traditional masculinity based on its amplification of the use of violence. However, gangs also promote additional aspects of masculinity that are not directly tied to violence. While gangs promote violence-oriented masculinity, it is but one dimension of the masculinity practices promoted by gangs.

Multiple scholars have argued that patriarchy or domination over women is an important facet of masculinities among gangs (Baird 2019; Barker 2005; Hagedorn 1998). Baird (2019) observed that gang masculinity in Belize promoted patriarchal gender relations such a degradation of women and sexual violence against women. Barker (2005) similarly found widespread disrespect toward women and general violence against women among gang members. While Hagedorn (1998) agreed that men in gangs in the United States generally treated women poorly, he pointedly questioned whether their treatment of women was actually any different than that of mainstream American men, wondering whether gang members were simply following American traditional masculinity in this case.

Access to material goods and illicit income that gangs may provide can be seen as part of achieving manhood. Young men in gangs often still face pressure to earn money, and drug trafficking as facilitated by gangs can be a lucrative alternative source of masculine employment (Barker 2005). Furthermore, possession of material goods such as motorcycles and expensive clothing and shoes are seen as "localized signifiers" of successful masculinity (Baird 2012:184). Displaying this material wealth in public is a strategic performance of masculine success (Zubillaga 2009). Gang members also tend to be most successful with sexual access to desired women in their communities, which contributes further to their accomplishment of masculinity (Baird 2012). Of course, earning this material wealth and sexual access are also simply benefits

of gang membership (Baird 2012, 2018; Barker 2005). It appears to be a positive feedback cycle, wherein gang membership accomplishes masculinity, which earns material and sexual benefits, which further accomplishes masculinity, which reinforces gang members as models of successful young men in their communities.

Gangs certainly can define what a successful model of masculinity looks like in a community compared to other models of manhood (Baird 2018; Barker 2005; Zubillaga 2009). This was documented in several urban centers of South America, where the most violent and feared gang members were the most respected type of men (Baird 2018; Barker 2005; Zubillaga 2009). Conspicuous displays of material goods and "masculine capital" among gang members were quite influential for boys seeking manhood, giving the gangs "power to become ontologically significant for local meanings of masculinity," (Baird 2018:208). Nevertheless, it should be noted that what is deemed masculine according to gangs can vary among gangs from different ethnic groups in the same community (White 2008). For example, Samoan gangs and Asian gangs in the same communities in Australia had differing perceptions of the meanings of weapons use for achieving masculinity. Samoans preferred unarmed physical combat to demonstrate their fighting prowess and derided the Asians who preferred to carry weapons as "wimps" (White 2008).

A variety of other practices and qualities have been shown to be facets of gang masculinities across the world, though none so clearly common across contexts as violence. These other facets tend to be exaggerated versions of aspects of traditional masculinities, and they include the following: domination over others (Baird 2019; McLean and Holligan 2018); disparagement of cowardice (Baird 2019); protection of their communities (Streicher 2011); loyalty (White 2008); courage and fearlessness (White 2008); authority and command (Zubillaga

2009); risk-seeking (Kersten 2001); and heterosexuality and homophobia (Panfil 2017). Most notable among these is arguably heterosexuality and homophobia in American gangs. While Panfil (2017) did study gay gangs, her participants' experiences as closeted gay men belonging to straight gangs were harrowing. According to most gang members, gay men do not possess the toughness necessary for gang membership, nor can they even really be considered men (Panfil 2017). If the closeted gay members in straight gangs were outed, their entire gangs' reputations would have been damaged.

Gang youth currently attempt to damage their rivals' reputations by publicly questioning or invalidating their performances of violence-oriented masculinity (Stuart 2020). Using social media, they attempt to frame their rivals as inauthentic—not truly as tough or violent as they pretend to be. Strategies to invalidate their targets' performance of masculinity range from the less effective (sharing compromising photos), to the more effective (publicly calling on rivals to come to their territory for a fight and then recording when no one shows up), to the most effective (forcing a lone rival at gunpoint to insult his own gang/dead homies on camera) (Stuart 2020). These can have serious consequences for the gang member being invalidated.

All this discussion of masculinity among gangs seems to have a glaring omission: female gang members. However, even girls in gangs can feel pressure to conform to violence-oriented masculinity. Miller's (2001) book, *One of the Guys,* provides a glimpse into the deeply gendered structure and processes of gangs by focusing on girl gang members in majority-male gangs. The girls wanted to be equal members of the gang and often tried to prove that they were just as tough and aggressive as the boys were—that they were "one of the guys." Miller argues these gang girls were trying to accomplish a version of masculinity. Yet, according to the girls' narrative accounts, they were never accepted as one of the guys. Boys were still perceived as

tougher and more violent than the girls. In fact, boy and girl members of the same gang were held to different standards of toughness and violence, and girls were devalued as members for this reason. Girls were not expected to use lethal weapons such as guns—in fact, the girls were often excluded from doing so by male leadership. Furthermore, unlike the boys, they were not expected to attack rivals unless directly challenged (Miller 2001).

These gendered practices were enforced by boys with the goal of accomplishing masculinity via domination over girls (see Connell 1995). Girls in the gang reported being routinely disrespected and sexually harassed by their own gang "brothers" (Miller 2001). It makes little sense for boys to degrade fellow members if the goal is to build a strong gang—but it certainly makes sense if the goal is to accomplish masculinity by establishing a hierarchical relationship over girls. Studies have also shown that sex composition of gangs affects the level of violence (Peterson, Carson, and Fowler 2018). Males in sex-balanced gangs exhibit the highest levels of violent offending among gang males, likely because they are trying to maintain a dominant position over the females (Peterson et al. 2018). This behavior certainly makes sense if males were using gangs as a means of accomplishing masculinity.

Masculinity as Ancillary to Gangs

Despite the evidence that achieving masculinity is a feature of gang involvement, it is possible that achieving masculinity is generally more of a byproduct of gang life than an intentional motive for gang membership and gang violence. Many gang members may value toughness, aggression, and violence for practical reasons. The group processes of threat and contagion encourage the use of violence and the presentation of toughness (Decker 1996; Decker and Van Winkle 1996; Papachristos 2009). Put simply, gang members must be able to defend themselves and win fights against rival gangs, or else their gang is at severe physical risk. Decker

and Van Winkle (1996) argued that gangs form primarily due to threat from another group, and that individuals also become gang members for protection from outside threats. Threat is known to build gang cohesion through fear of retaliation and the need to unite against the threat (Decker 1996; Decker and Van Winkle 1996; Papachristos 2009). The process of contagion spreads gang violence through a cycle of retaliatory attacks, as gangs must retaliate for rivals' attacks or else risk being perceived as easy targets (Papachristos 2009). Gang members often claim that they have no choice but to use violence—it "just comes to" them; they have no choice but to retaliate against other gangs, defend their turf, and defend their graffiti symbols (Decker 1996; Decker and Van Winkle 1996).

In a similar vein, economically and racially marginalized males may embrace toughness and violence as a method of protecting themselves against individual victimization (Anderson 1999; Harding 2014; Jacobs 2004; Katz 1988; Kubrin and Weitzer 2003; Singer 1986; Weitzer 1999), rather than an intentional achievement of masculinity. Legal cynicism is common among marginalized young men, and many believe protection must come from themselves and their own actions rather than police (Moule et al. 2019). While some of the cited work may not be discussing gang members in particular, it is reasonable to assume that gang members are recruited from those pools of marginalized youth who see toughness and aggression as a way to protect themselves (see Pyrooz and Densley 2015), especially if joining a gang for protection is common (Decker and Van Winkle 1996).

Gang entry and continued membership has been shown to affect a variety of individuals' practices, attitudes, and identities outside of masculinities. Melde and Esbensen (2011) found onset of gang membership increased individuals' acceptance of the use of violence, anger identity, commitment to antisocial peers, association with delinquent peers, and unstructured

socializing. Similarly, Melde and Esbensen (2014) found gang entry increased individuals' acceptance of the use of violence, negative peer commitment, and unstructured socializing, and it reduced association with prosocial peers and school commitment. Weerman, Lovegrove, and Thornberry (2015) examined the effects of both joining a gang and continued stable gang involvement on a host of attitudes and practices. Gang joining increased risky time spent with peers, delinquency, and marijuana use, and it reduced commitment to school and attachment to parents. Stable gang involvement increased marijuana use while it reduced parental attachment and commitment to school. Furthermore, qualitative studies have shown that gang members develop collective gang identities and unique identities as part of specific roles within the gang (Lauger 2020), and these identities are performed in practices involving appearance, violence, and claiming gang status (Garot 2010; Lauger 2020). As gang involvement can change individuals' attitudes, identities, and practices, their endorsement of masculinities may be one of many attitudes affected by gang involvement.

Indeed, several studies found endorsement of the street code and/or masculinities inclusive of violence increased after joining a gang or were higher among incarcerated gang youth than incarcerated non-gang youth (Alleyne et al. 2016; Matsuda et al. 2013; Scott 2014; Scott and Bennett 2022). As discussed in a prior section, the street code can be seen as a form of violence-oriented masculinity. These studies suggest that gang involvement can directly increase endorsement of violence-oriented masculinity in a measurable way.

Given the evidence that gang entry and continued involvement significantly changes a variety of attitudes, practices, and identities among individuals, it is reasonable to think that masculinities are simply one of many that are changed throughout the contours of gang involvement. If this is true, it calls into question whether masculinities are a causal agent for

gang involvement and behavior or merely a consequence of it such that marijuana use is. In the literature's current state, the importance of masculinities to gangs is muddled. Masculinities would be very consequential to the gang literature if they do indeed promote gang violence beyond that which would happen due to the group processes of threat and contagion, and beyond that of people attempting to ward off victimization in the future. However, this is not entirely clear from the literature. In addition, the literature appears conflicted on whether achieving masculinities are a primary motivation for joining a gang; some studies examining masculinities argue that (Deuchar 2018; Forkby et al. 2020), but studies focusing on gang entry do not often mention masculinity as motivation (Decker and Van Winkle 1996; Densley 2015; Vigil 1988). This subtle question as to the importance of masculinities continues when it comes to gang disengagement, as masculinity change as a cause of disengagement would be imperative to study, but masculinity change as a consequence of gang disengagement would be less important. In the following sections, I discuss the literature on gang disengagement and eventually review how masculinities may be a part of the disengagement process.

Gang Disengagement

Life course criminology has long documented one of the most robust and enduring patterns of crime known as the age-crime curve: Offending on a population level sharply increases during adolescence and peaks in late adolescence, subsequently swiftly declines during young adulthood, and continues to decline gradually over the remaining life course (Farrington 1986). The age-crime curve is constant across geographic contexts and across time (Hirschi and Gottfredson 1983). The focus of the current study is on gang disengagement, not criminal desistance, but theories of why offenders desist from crime form the foundations for many theories of gang disengagement, including those of gang disengagement and masculinities.

Gang disengagement can include both a reduction in gang embeddedness and membership de-identification (Sweeten et al. 2013). Reduced gang embeddedness has been used as a measure for gang disengagement in recent research, although most of the research on disengagement has focused on changes in membership status (e.g., Bubolz and Lee 2021). Regardless, gang embeddedness is closely associated with membership status, with lower gang embeddedness predicting an earlier exit from the gang and vice versa (Sweeten et al. 2013). Gang involvement and subsequent disengagement typically follow the same trajectory as the age-crime curve, with membership at a population level peaking in adolescence then declining over the course of adulthood (Pyrooz 2014b). In the following section, I describe relevant theories of criminal desistance which later informed theories of gang disengagement.

Theories of Criminal Desistance

One influential theory of criminal desistance is that of the maturity gap (Moffitt 1993, 1997). Moffitt theorized that criminal offenders can be categorized into two groups, adolescence-limited offenders and life-course persistent offenders, of which the adolescence-limited offenders are a vastly larger category (Moffitt 1993).[10] Most adolescents who offend do so because of the "maturity gap," when young people have matured biologically and desire autonomy, but they are not yet allowed to occupy adult social roles such as having well-paying employment, driving, and serious romantic relationships. These adolescents perceive delinquent youth as having more autonomy, more money, and better success with desirable sexual partners. Once these adolescents age and are given adult social status, they no longer are incentivized to commit crime, and most quickly desist (Moffitt 1997).

[10] However, evidence suggests that the reality is not so neat and tidy—even the most serious chronic offenders do eventually desist from crime, but they desist at a later point in the life course than most other offenders (Sampson and Laub 2003).

Another influential developmental theory of criminal desistance is the aged-graded informal social control theory (Sampson and Laub 1993, 2005). This theory extends Hirschi's (1969) theory of informal social control via social bonds to explain transitions from crime to conformity among adults. Adult institutions of informal social control such as marriage and employment can represent "knifing-off" points that aid in individual transitions. However, the quality of these experiences is most important for crime desistance (e.g., a *good* job or a *good* marriage is necessary). These institutions can provide new social capital, new informal social control via supervision and monitoring, less risky routine activities, and identity change (Sampson and Laub 1993, 2005).

Theories of criminal desistance over the life course often incorporate cognitive changes to identity and emphasize human agency through intentional change to the self (Giordano, Cernkovich, and Rudolph 2002; Maruna 2001; Paternoster and Bushway 2009). Maruna (2001) theorized that identity transformation is integral to the fluid process of criminal desistance. Long-term offenders can desist from crime if they start identifying themselves as redeemed, as opposed to those who identified as being "condemned" to crime due to their structural circumstances. Using self-redemption narratives, they can "make good" with their lives and stop engaging in crime. The first step in redemption is "generativity," or aiding people who are in the same position the ex-offender used to inhabit. The second step is defining their "real" selves as different from their former self who committed crime. Finally, the third step in redemption focuses on forgiving themselves for past crimes, finding good in their prior criminal selves, and being accountable for helping others.

Giordano et al. (2002) likewise put a spotlight on identity transformation, putting forth a model of criminal desistance emphasizing life circumstances that become important in

adulthood, such as a spouse, children, employment, or experience with prison. These changes to life circumstances can act as "hooks for change." These hooks merely existing, however, are not enough on their own to provide an impetus for desistance for offenders experiencing structural disadvantages; offenders first must be cognitively open to change and receptive to the hooks once exposed to them. Successful hooks for change must include a clear cognitive process of imagining a "replacement self" which the offender can transform into. Engaging with the hooks can cause an identity transformation, which can further change the meanings and appeal of criminal offending into something less desirable. Giordano et al. also argued identity transformation may not be necessary for criminal desistance if offenders are experiencing advantageous structural conditions.

Finally, Paternoster and Bushway (2009) centered identity change to their theory of desistance as well and were more focused on negative aspects of the self. They argued that an individual has an idea of two versions of their possible self in the future which consists either of what they hope to become (termed the "positive possible self") or what they fear they will become (termed the "feared self"). When offenders start to think that they may turn into their feared self if they continue down the criminal path (e.g., in prison for life, alienated from their children, etc.), they experience a "crystallization of discontent" which provides the motivation to desist from crime and change their identity. This motivation leads to a change in behavior and social networks. Paternoster and Bushway explicitly differentiated their theory from Giordano et al.'s (2002) by arguing that identity change is necessary for all successful crime desisters, not just those experiencing certain structural conditions.

Theories of Gang Disengagement

The process of gang disengagement is, of course, not identical to the process of criminal desistance. Leaving a gang can be a long, difficult, and painful process (which will be elaborated on below). Research on gang disengagement has flourished in recent years (Bubolz and Lee 2021; Densley and Pyrooz 2019; Panfil 2020; Pyrooz and Decker 2011; Pyrooz, Decker, et al. 2014). Former gang members consider the benefits and consequences of leaving gangs before they decide to leave (Decker et al. 2014; Pyrooz and Decker 2011; Vigil 1988). Motives for leaving gangs are organized into "push" factors, which are internal to the gang and "pull" factors, which are external to the gang (Pyrooz and Decker 2011). Pull motives can include family or employment and act "as 'hooks' to restructure the lifestyle of gang members" (420). On the other hand, push motives come from within the gang and can precipitate cognitive changes for disengaging gang members. Some of the most common push factors include incarceration and violence (Decker and Lauritsen 2002; Vigil 1988). Although violence is normalized for gang members and tends to increase gang solidarity, experiencing violence oneself or seeing close friends or family experience it can still serve as the impetus to disengage (Decker and Lauritsen 2002). These pushes can encourage former gang members to find other social groups (Pyrooz and Decker 2011). Nevertheless, it is likely that cognitive/identity change precedes the motive for leaving, as gang members must first experience doubts and openness to change if structural turning points or hooks are to trigger a motive for leaving the gang (Roman, Pyrooz, and Decker 2017:320).[11] This could be consistent with aspects of both Giordano et al.'s (2002) and Paternoster and Bushway's (2009) theories of criminal desistance, as pull factors could act as "hooks for change," while push factors could cause a "crystallization of discontent."

[11] Leaving a gang does not always include intentionally changing one's gang member status. Sometimes leaving a gang means simply joining a different gang or leaving when the gang itself splits apart (Sanchez-Jankowski 1991).

Despite possibly strong motives to disengage, leaving is usually neither quick nor easy. Often disengagement is a gradual and non-linear process, wherein the exiting member continues to retain social, emotional, or instrumental ties to the gang for quite some time (Decker and Lauritsen 2002; Decker, Pyrooz, and Moule 2014; Pyrooz and Decker 2011). Departing members may officially notify their gang, which can lead to exit rituals such as being physically beaten (Vigil 1988), but these exit rituals tend to be rare and only happen when a member leaves abruptly (Decker and Lauritsen 2002; Pyrooz and Decker 2011). Otherwise, being beaten out is a "predominant myth" (Decker and Lauritsen 2002). Decker and Lauritsen (2002) were one of the first to document just how gradual the process of gang disengagement can be, finding that "former" gang members continued to maintain emotional ties to and spend time with members of the gang (Decker and Lauritsen 2002).

Drawing from Ebaugh (1988), Decker et al. (2014) argued that disengaging from a gang is a process of role transition, wherein individuals slowly change the role they occupy and adjust their identities as they do so. Ebaugh (1988) argued that one gradually changes from one role to another through a series of stages: first doubts, anticipatory socialization, turning points, and post-exit certification. Decker et al. (2014) applied this framework to the narratives of 260 former gang members, finding that narratives of gang leaving generally follow Ebaugh's stages. Gang members first experienced doubts centered on relationships with their family, worries about violence, the lifestyle in the gang, and their gang's morality. These first doubts are consistent with a cognitive openness to change, as theorized by Giordano et al., and could coincide with thoughts about a "feared self" as theorized by Paternoster and Bushway. Next, gang members experienced anticipatory socialization as they mentally weighed out new roles, considering what exit might entail and what their lives might become, which is consistent with

Giordano et al.'s "replacement self". Many participants identified a specific turning point as a catalyst for disengagement; family was the most common "hook for change" (see Giordano et al. 2002), though experiencing violence and fear of prison were also factors. Many were drawn into non-gang life by the promise of maturation and adulthood. A specific catalyst such as violence appears compatible with causing a "crystallization of discontent" and further consideration of the "feared self" (Paternoster and Bushway 2009). Some of these turning points would be compatible with the "knifing-off" points discussed in Sampson and Laub's theory as well. As for post-exit certification, reference groups such as their family members, former gang, and former rivals could validate an individual's ex member status. One could also validate one's own identity as a former member. Identity changes did seem to hold true, as former members exhibited less concern over rival attacks to their former gang and showed less support for retaliation than current members. Despite this, ties to the gang often continued: "Disengagement is not a linear process, but rather a series of zigzags that occur over time," (Decker et al. 2014:280).

Even after gang disengagement, former members often still exhibit role residual—mannerisms, behaviors, and attitudes retained from their former lifestyle (Bubolz and Lee 2021). For ex gang members, their clothing, personal style, ideals of loyalty and brotherhood, and even acceptance of violence could still be reminiscent of gang culture. Bubolz and Lee delineated three types of role residual for former gang members: 1) symbolic (self presentation), 2) demeanor (behavioral manifestations), and 3) worldview (values). Role residual could emerge unintentionally or be intentionally used as a strategy. Most former gang members experience symbolic role residual, especially when it comes to preferences for certain colors and symbols. Almost half experience demeanor role residual; some dealt with unintentional issues including

anger management problems, aggressive mannerisms, and the compulsion to dominate others, while some used a gang-style demeanor strategically to deal with certain people. The only former gang members not to experience some role residual are those who left the gang due to a religious awakening (Bubolz and Lee 2021).

When leaving a gang, former members must ensure that their own gang and rival gangs know that they are serious about leaving. Effective signaling is important in increasing the success of gang disengagement (Densley and Pyrooz 2019). Signaling is most effective when it is both authentic and diminishes an individual's reputation as tough, strong, or loyal to the gang, because reputation is difficult to earn back once diminished. The consequences of certain signals would be costly if the person retained their gang membership. Some examples of such signals are: 1) strong displays of grief or remorse, which are difficult to fake and diminish a "tough guy" image, 2) injuries, which diminish reputation based on physical fitness, 3) participating in disengagement or recovery programs, which may show disloyalty to the gang, and 4) laborious education/training, which signals a commitment to conformity that is difficult to fake (Densley and Pyrooz 2019). These signals assure individuals' own gang and rival gangs that they are serious about leaving.

In this section, I have discussed leading theories of gang disengagement in general. Now, I turn to theories and evidence regarding how masculinities may play a role in the gang disengagement process.

Gang Disengagement and Masculinities

Within the last decade, a new field has emerged in the study of gangs: the role that masculinities may play in the process of gang disengagement and criminal desistance among gang members. A small body of work has examined this topic, composed entirely of qualitative

studies. Most of these studies focused on gang-involved individuals participating in gang intervention programs, thus allowing the researchers to observe the disengagement and criminal desistance process in real time (Armstrong and Rosbrook-Thompson 2017; Deuchar 2018; Deuchar and Weide 2018; Flores 2014; Søgaard et al. 2016). The masculinities embraced by active gang members were once again described as oriented toward aggression, violence, use of weapons, and impulsivity (Deuchar 2018; Flores 2014; Søgaard et al. 2016). Universally, these studies showed that gang members in the midst of disengagement and criminal desistance processes changed their accomplishment of masculinity from violence-oriented masculinity toward new masculinity practices, qualities, and/or masculine identities (Deuchar 2018; Flores 2014; Forkby et al. 2020; Leverso and Hess 2021). These reformed masculinity practices were described or implied as being effective for successful gang disengagement and criminal desistance across the board (Armstrong and Rosbrook-Thompson 2017; Deuchar 2018; Deuchar et al. 2016; Deuchar and Weide 2018; Flores 2014; Forkby et al. 2020; Leverso and Hess 2021; Søgaard et al. 2016).

Five of these studies stated or strongly implied that masculinity change can cause gang disengagement and criminal desistance[12] (Armstrong and Rosbrook-Thompson 2017; Deuchar 2018; Deuchar and Weide 2018; Forkby et al. 2020; Leverso and Hess 2021). Of these, both Leverso and Hess and Forkby et al. argued that this occurs *outside* of an intervention program, and their theories appear generalizable, although their arguments that masculinity change could cause disengagement were not particularly explicit, requiring close reading of the text. Leverso and Hess argued that meanings of masculine characteristics change as gang members age and

[12] Many of these studies seem to theoretically combine the processes of gang disengagement and criminal desistance among gang members (e.g., Deuchar and Weide 2018). I too have chosen to combine my own discussion of these processes in this section, considering that separating them out would be both repetitive and difficult from the limited data available.

mature, causing doubts about the gang as a useful masculine resource, which, in conjunction with other push and pull factors, can precipitate gang disengagement. Forkby et al. argued the restructuring of masculine identity along with other push factors and pull factors causes gang exit. The other studies using causal language were all within intervention programs meant to facilitate gang disengagement and/or criminal desistance, and they did not seem intended to be generalizable to the process of disengagement outside of intervention programs. However, they still are relevant. Deuchar and Weide (2018) argued that three separate gang interventions caused changing masculine identities and attitudes, which fostered desistance related attitudes and directly led to reductions in gang involvement and crime. Deuchar (2018) argued four gang interventions reshaped masculine identities and enhanced push and pull factors, causing gang disengagement and criminal desistance. Finally, Armstrong and Rosbrook-Thompson argued an intervention caused changes in masculine identities, which caused reductions in gang violence. While a few other studies also indicated that interventions changed constructions of masculinity, they never fully argued that this masculinity change caused gang disengagement and criminal desistance, although it seemed softly implied (Deuchar et al. 2016; Flores 2014; Søgaard et al. 2016). Overall, the consensus seems to be that masculinity change can precipitate gang disengagement, often in conjunction with other push and pull factors.

The current body of work has set up a subtle split regarding the aspects of masculinities that disengaging and desisting gang members gravitate towards. Nearly all agree that reforming gang members start to separate themselves from violence-oriented masculinity and instead place greater emphasis on family and legal employment. However, the field appears gently split between describing these masculinities that aid in gang disengagement as primarily a "positivistic" masculinity oriented toward caring for family and service to the community

(Deuchar 2018; Deuchar and Weide 2018; Forkby et al. 2020), or primarily as traditional masculinity (Armstrong and Rosbrook-Thompson 2017; Deuchar et al. 2016; Flores 2014; Panfil 2020; Søgaard et al. 2016). Many studies listed aspects of traditional masculinity which they argued were part of the reformed masculinities of disengaging gang members: independence, agency, and, self-reliance (Flores 2014; Søgaard et al. 2016), homophobia (Deuchar et al. 2016; Leverso and Hess 2021; Søgaard et al. 2016), avoidance of femininity (Deuchar et al. 2016; Søgaard et al. 2016), commitment to romantic partnerships (Flores 2014; Leverso and Hess 2021; Panfil 2020), muscularity (Deuchar et al. 2016; Søgaard et al. 2016), and employment/breadwinning.

Most of these studies show that disengaging gang members place greater value on legal employment and breadwinning, which contributes to their successful disengagement (Armstrong and Rosbrook-Thompson 2017; Deuchar and Weide 2018; Flores 2014; Leverso and Hess 2021; Panfil 2020; Søgaard et al. 2016). In some cases, young men in gang intervention programs drew on traditional masculine working-class narratives to construct new identities as "working men" with "proper" manual jobs in the legitimate labor market who could economically provide for family (Søgaard et al. 2016). As encouraged by the program, they also drew upon "achiever narratives" of skilled labor leading to financial success through individual responsibility (Søgaard et al. 2016). Another program aimed to help gang members realize the futility of financial success within a gang and the greater possibilities of money-making through legitimate entrepreneurship (Armstrong and Rosbrook-Thompson 2017). Leverso and Hess (2021), however, suggested that the degree to which forms of employment are seen as *traditionally masculine* is key to whether that employment is truly a "stronger resource for accomplishing masculinity than the deviant resources" (14) (e.g., truck driving versus fast food service). These

studies suggest many disengaging gang members want to transition into specifically being a "breadwinner" or economic provider for their families (Armstrong and Rosbrook-Thompson 2017; Deuchar and Weide 2018; Flores 2014; Leverso and Hess 2021; Søgaard et al. 2016). A new alternative masculine identity for a disengaging member can be based on being a breadwinner (Deuchar and Weide 2018). These new traditional masculine identity constructions based upon employment/breadwinning could aid in visualizing a "replacement self" or a "positive possible self" and support the anticipatory socialization stage of disengagement (Decker et al. 2014; Giordano et al. 2002; Paternoster and Bushway 2009). The new occupation may serve as a successful "turning point" or "hook for change" (Decker et al. 2014; Giordano et al. 2002; Sampson and Laub 1993) along with other pull factors.

Several researchers who observed masculinity changes among disengaging gang members did explicitly argue that the "new" masculinity being practiced was in fact traditional masculinity. For instance, the New Start gang intervention program in Copenhagen promoted the narrative that desistance from crime required independence and self-reliance, something that only the most resolute men could achieve—even comparing criminal desistance to a boxing match (Søgaard et al. 2016). The young men appeared to internalize and endorse these values during their desistance process. Søgaard et al. noted that the program "seemed to reinforce very traditional notions of manhood," (2016:115). Deuchar et al. (2016), who also discussed the New Start program, said that it "reinforced the working-class masculine identities" (735) and promoted traditionally masculine qualities, including legitimate employment and muscularity. Its participants also endorsed homophobia and rejected femininity, although the program itself did not explicitly promote that. Meanwhile, Flores (2014) found that two faith-based gang intervention programs in Los Angeles tried to instill reformed masculine identities centered on

breadwinning, independence, self-reliance, heterosexual marriage, empathy, nurturing, family, fatherhood, and service to the community; Flores argued this was analogous to traditional masculinity. His participants internalized and endorsed these values during their gang disengagement journeys.

Several other researchers argued that disengaging gang members newly embraced a much more positive, caring, and family-oriented version of masculinity—*not* a traditional version. For example, Forkby et al. (2020) argued that "[gang] exit was explained by their adoption of a different kind of attitude toward responsibility and care for others," including their children, wives, parents, and other family (165).[13] Furthermore, many of their participants newly wanted to be role models and mentors for their communities (Forkby et al. 2020). Deuchar (2018) observed that disengaging gang members in several different countries embraced softer versions of masculinity with the help of intervention programs based upon spirituality. His participants became less restrictive of their emotions, more embracing of love and kinship, more focused on being "family men", and they felt the need to serve their communities by sharing their redemption narratives. Likewise, after observing three gang intervention programs, Deuchar and Weide (2018) proposed that their disengaging participants constructed "positivistic masculine identities" (12) based on generativity (see Maruna 2001) and being family-oriented. Deuchar and Weide argued, "'Doing masculinity' began to be seen as being synonymous with doing the right thing as partners, fathers, and family men" (12). While Søgaard et al. (2016) argued that overall their reforming participants embraced traditional masculinity, they notably discussed how their participants also drew from a "wounded healer" identity wherein they mentored other youth and younger family members in a caring manner. In addition, as noted previously, Flores (2014)

[13] Forkby et al.'s participants were former gang members in Sweden who were not part of an intervention program.

identified generativity, empathy, and being family oriented as important attributes of reformed masculinity among his participants, even as he characterized it as traditional. Hereafter, the term *positive masculinity* (following the "positivistic masculinity" label) will refer to the practices, qualities, or identities that emphasize spending time with family, being "good" fathers, husbands, brothers, and sons, caring for others, empathy, kindness, spirituality, emotional openness, and serving communities through mentorship, role modeling, and generativity.

This newly positive masculinity causing gang disengagement is consistent with criminal desistance and gang disengagement theories, including Maruna's (2001) theory of the redeemed self, generativity, and community service. Deuchar and Weide (2018) and Flores (2014) both specifically drew on Maruna's theory when describing the reforming actions and identities of their disengaging participants. In addition, just as with traditional masculinity, new masculine identity constructions based on family relationships and community service could aid in visualizing a "replacement self" or a "positive possible self" and support the anticipatory socialization stage of disengagement (Decker et al. 2014; Giordano et al. 2002; Paternoster and Bushway 2009). High quality relationships with family can be effective "turning points" or "hooks for change" (Decker et al. 2014; Giordano et al. 2002; Sampson and Laub 1993).

While Leverso and Hess (2021) and Panfil (2020) did not take an explicit stance on whether their participants embraced a more traditional masculinity or a more positive masculinity, they each discussed the notion that gang involvement becomes incompatible with dominant adult masculinity (Carlsson 2013). Panfil's (2020) research with gay gang members exiting straight gangs revealed that as the gay members fully embraced their gay identity, they began to want "perceived respectable adulthood" (269) such as being employed, educated, and committed to fatherhood within the bounds of stable romantic relationships. Panfil referred to

these attributes as “culturally valued markers of masculine success,” (274) which the gay members saw as incompatible with the gang lifestyle, at least within straight gangs.

Leverso and Hess (2021) greatly expanded upon this idea, putting forth a full theory of masculinity maturation during the gang disengagement process. Leverso and Hess argued that as young gang members age into adulthood, “A disconnect between perceptions of age-appropriate masculinity and gang masculinity creates a masculinity dilemma where individuals begin to question the value of the gang as a useful institution for one’s masculinity” (2). Disengaging members thus distance themselves from violence-oriented masculinity and move toward masculinities focused on institutions of employment and family. However, Leverso and Hess (2021) also argued that the value placed on masculine attributes such as honor and respect does not change during disengagement, but rather the *meanings* of these attributes change for an individual over time. Having honor and being respectful was interpreted and practiced differently at different life stages. The “masculinity dilemma” described by Leverso and Hess could precipitate the first doubts stage of disengagement and continue in the anticipatory socialization stage as the young men consider how best to accomplish adult masculinity (see Decker et al. 2014). This dilemma could also cognitively open one’s mind in the event that a hook for change comes along (see Giordano et al. 2002). Finally, while Leverso and Hess and Moffitt (1993, 1997) both discussed maturation of adolescents in their desistance theories, that seems to be the only similarity in their theories. Moffit argued adolescents commit crime to accomplish an adult social role and stop once society deems them adult, while Leverso and Hess argued that adolescent gang members eventually realize gang involvement actively contradicts adult masculinity.

The literature on the role that masculinities play in gang disengagement has raised more

questions than it has given answers, as might be expected from such a new field. Most of these studies' participants were in gang intervention programs designed to promote specific versions of masculinity, which raises questions of whether their findings are relevant to the gang disengagement process in general. In most cases, the intervention programs themselves appeared to be the mechanism driving the individuals' transitions toward specific types of reformed masculinities (Armstrong and Rosbrook-Thompson 2017; Deuchar 2018; Deuchar et al. 2016; Deuchar and Weide 2018; Flores 2014; Søgaard et al. 2016; for exceptions, see Forkby et al. 2020; Leverso and Hess 2021; Panfil 2020). Would these disengaging gang members have changed their accomplishment of masculinity had the intervention not encouraged them to do so?[14] Would masculinities be important in gang disengagement processes if not for masculinity-focused interventions? Currently, only Forkby et al. (2020), Leverso and Hess (2021), and Panfil (2020) can confidently respond affirmatively.

Furthermore, only half of the studies on this topic are specifically about gang disengagement (Deuchar 2018; Flores 2014; Forkby et al. 2020; Leverso and Hess 2021; Panfil 2020) rather than criminal desistance among gang members. The other studies seem to lump the processes of disengagement and criminal desistance together (Deuchar and Weide 2018) or focus more of their attention toward the criminal desistance aspect (Armstrong and Rosbrook-Thompson 2017; Deuchar et al. 2016; Søgaard et al. 2016). Gang disengagement is most likely a longer and more difficult process than criminal desistance, often fraught with intensive signaling (Densley and Pyrooz 2019), zigzags of become less involved and then more involved (Decker et al. 2014), and an overall struggle of role exit from the group of friends that were so emotionally important (Bubolz and Lee 2021; Decker et al. 2014). Now that this literature is growing, gang

[14] It also raises questions of selection bias in joining an intervention program, although my dissertation does not address that.

disengagement and criminal desistance among gang members should be more clearly separated out theoretically as two different—but related—processes that masculinities may impact.

Quantitative data could address some issues in this literature and provide convincing evidence that masculinities are—or are not—important in the disengagement process. As noted previously, most of the evidence that changing masculinities are important in gang recovery comes from participants in intervention programs which promoted specific versions of masculinity, raising questions of whether masculinities are actually important to the disengagement process in general. One could also argue that a connection between masculinities and disengagement is spurious. While some researchers argued that the intervention programs they studied were successful in causing disengagement and desistance (Deuchar and Weide 2018), changing masculinity is only one lens with which to view these intervention programs. At its heart, Homeboy Industries is an employment and jobs placement program that surrounds its clients with a supportive community. New Start's boxing club offers a place to control anger management and learn discipline while providing access to therapy. The reasons for the success of these programs may have more to do with desistance mechanisms involving employment, mental health, or prosocial activities rather than masculinity itself. Quantitative evidence could help put these fears to rest. Survey data could show whether endorsement of violence-oriented masculinity is associated with gang involvement in the first place (as theorized) and whether endorsement of various types of masculinity significantly change over time as individuals disengage. This would be the first quantitative—and longitudinal—examination of the masculinity change-disengagement link. Simply demonstrating that measurable masculinity change does or does not occur surrounding disengagement advances this new field significantly.

If quantitative data indeed shows masculinity change occurring as individuals disengage

from gangs, more questions are raised as to the temporal order of this potential relationship between masculinity change and gang disengagement. As introduced in a prior section, it is possible that masculinities are simply one of many attitudes, identities, and practices that are changed throughout the contours of gang involvement, including during the gang disengagement process.[15] Melde and Esbensen (2014) found leaving a gang was associated with reduced endorsement of the use of violence, anger identity, negative peer commitment, and associations with delinquent peers. Sweeten et al. (2013) found that individuals' reduced gang embeddedness over time was associated with increased impulse control, suppression of aggression, and consideration of others, while reducing unstructured socializing. Furthermore, Densley and Pyrooz (2019) explicitly predicted that disengaging gang members likely undergo attitudinal shifts including changes in "gang masculinity" and street code endorsement (50). If masculinity is simply part of a bundle of attitudes and practices that change as a consequence of gang disengagement, then it may not be as crucial to study than if masculinity change precedes or precipitates disengagement. However, leading criminal desistance and gang disengagement theories support the idea that masculinity change can cause or precede gang disengagement. These theories place identity transformation and cognitive change as *preceding* criminal desistance and occurring at the *beginning* of gang disengagement (Decker et al. 2014; Giordano et al. 2002; Maruna 2001; Paternoster and Bushway 2009). Furthermore, whether masculinity change occurs before, during, or after disengagement may depend upon the type of masculinity. The violence-oriented type of masculinity that gang members increasingly endorse after joining (see Matsuda et al. 2013) seems more likely to decrease after disengaging rather than before, since gangs tend to amplify it. However, new endorsement of traditional masculinity or positive

[15] See Ferris (2015) for a discussion of identity change in ex-gang members.

masculinity would in theory be more likely to precede disengagement (Deuchar and Weide 2018). The question of temporal order appears to be a thorny issue and one which requires quantitative evidence and more qualitative evidence to shed light on.

In addition, more qualitative data is needed regarding whether and how masculinity change can potentially precipitate gang disengagement. Only five qualitative studies argued or strongly implied that masculinity change can cause gang disengagement and criminal desistance (Armstrong and Rosbrook-Thompson 2017; Deuchar 2018; Deuchar and Weide 2018; Forkby et al. 2020; Leverso and Hess 2021). Several of these focused on directly observing intervention programs and giving detailed evidence that these programs promoted masculinity change; however, they provided few direct quotes that showed masculinity change precipitated disengagement for their participants (Armstrong and Rosbrook-Thompson 2017; Deuchar and Weide 2018). Two of these studies used disengagement narratives to construct their arguments but still did not provide detailed narratives for individuals that could establish a potential cause and effect of masculinity change on disengagement (Forkby et al. 2020; Leverso and Hess 2021). Using narratives to suggest a cause and effect would advance the theoretical contribution of masculinity change as a potential precipitating factor of gang disengagement.

Much more qualitative evidence is needed regarding the type of masculinity that reforming gang members transition towards—traditional masculinity, positive masculinity, a combination of both, or something else entirely. So far, the body of work in this literature is still quite small, meaning that more qualitative data on this topic would be very welcome given the gentle split in the literature on this topic. In addition, testing masculinity changes among disengaging gang members using a quantitative dataset would shed light upon this debate. Being able to concretely quantify the degree of masculinity change for various types of masculinities

during disengagement could help settle this issue. Whether violence-oriented masculinity might specifically be reduced surrounding disengagement is something that should be explored more qualitatively as well.

Filling these gaps in the literature has enormous policy implications. Several gang intervention programs are already using masculinity change to promote gang disengagement (Deuchar 2018; Deuchar and Weide 2018; Flores 2014; Søgaard et al. 2016). These programs need to know whether masculinity change is truly an integral part of successful disengagement, whether it precedes and/or could precipitate the disengagement, and if so, which *type* of reformed masculinity is most important for successful disengagement. With this evidence, gang interventions can more precisely and effectively promote gang disengagement.

Current Study

The current study examines masculinities and gang disengagement using both quantitative and qualitative methods. My research questions are as follows:

1) Are endorsements of violence-oriented masculinity and traditional masculinity associated with gang embeddedness?

2) Are changes in individuals' endorsement of masculinities associated with changes in their gang embeddedness, with gang embeddedness change as the dependent variable?

3) Are changes in individuals' endorsement of gang embeddedness associated with changes in their endorsement of masculinities, with masculinities change as the dependent variables?

4) How do active gang members construct masculinity?

5) How do disengaging and former gang members construct masculinity?

6) If masculinities are changing surrounding disengagement, what role does masculinity

change play in gang disengagement?

The first three research questions were answered with quantitative data. I used data from a two-wave survey of 114 gang-involved youth and adults in Denver who were referred to a gang disengagement program, 70 of whom were surveyed across two waves. The survey contained scales measuring gang embeddedness (Pyrooz, Sweeten, and Piquero 2013), endorsement of violence-oriented masculinity (Stewart and Simons 2006), and endorsement of traditional masculinity in the United States (Levant, Hall, and Rankin 2013; Thompson and Pleck 1986), in addition to a whole host of potential variables from criminological theory which I used to rule out alternative explanations. The two waves of data allowed me to measure changes in masculinities endorsement and gang embeddedness over time and use these change scores.

The last three research questions were answered with qualitative data. I conducted 10 in-depth interviews with disengaging and former members who had originally participated in the two-wave survey. These participants are valuable for in-depth exploration of masculinities and gang disengagement, considering they were all referred to a gang disengagement program. The program overall did not appear to promote a specific version of masculinity, meaning that masculinity change in most individuals receiving program services would have occurred naturally during the disengagement process, albeit with some exceptions.[16]

This study fills in gaps in the literature on masculinities and gang disengagement by 1) focusing primarily on gang disengagement, not criminal desistance, adding to the small body of work on disengagement and masculinities; 2) testing the importance of changing masculinities to gang disengagement using a longitudinal quantitative dataset for the first time, adding a new type

[16] This statement is based on my qualitative analysis, which shows that only 2 of the 10 qualitative participants learned new masculinity practices from intervention workers. These findings are discussed in more detail in the Qualitative Findings chapter.

of evidence to the field; 3) quantitatively testing the importance of *traditional* masculinities as part of disengagement in particular, which is a subject of debate; 4) qualitatively exploring whether and how masculinity change could potentially precipitate disengagement using detailed disengagement narratives; 5) characterizing the new constructions of masculinity after disengagement, contributing to the debate regarding traditional versus positive masculinities; 6) establishing the relevance of masculinity change for disengagement among individuals who did not receive masculinity-related intervention services.

In this chapter, I have reviewed the relevant theory and literature underpinning the reasoning behind why and how this study has been conducted. Now I turn to the quantitative methods chapter, where I discuss the quantitative methods in greater detail.

CHAPTER 3: Quantitative Methods

Data

The quantitative data originates from an evaluation of a gang intervention program in the Denver area funded by the National Institute of Justice (Pyrooz 2023). The study's purpose was to evaluate the Gang Reduction Initiative of Denver (GRID), determining whether GRID was effective in reducing gang involvement and offending among the individuals referred. GRID's strategy for effecting change was a combination of street outreach mentorship and monthly multi-disciplinary team meetings of service agencies across the Denver area. Together, these agencies created an integrated plan to help referred individuals reduce gang involvement and offending, primarily by coordinating services to the individuals (for employment, addiction, mental health, tattoo removal, etc.). Outreach mentors met with individuals on their caseload multiple times per week, acting as a combination of counselor, mentor, gang expert, and an official link between the individual and the multidisciplinary team.

One hundred forty-three individuals were entered into the study during a 2-year period between June 2019 and June 2021.[17] While referral sources were varied, the most common referral sources from the Denver area included adult community corrections/halfway houses, juvenile probation, juvenile pretrial release, and human services. Individuals entered in the study were randomized into treatment or control groups upon referral to GRID. The treatment group was intended to receive GRID services, while the control group received business-as-usual services, which also could include other gang intervention services in the Denver area. Thirty-two percent of the control group received other gang intervention services.

[17] However, there was a period of around 6 months from April 2020 to October 2020 wherein study entrance was paused due to complications from the COVID-19 pandemic, although referrals to GRID continued in that time.

Study personnel attempted to contact each GRID-referred person by phone to conduct baseline and follow-up surveys. Gift card incentives were offered to those who completed a survey. Most surveys were conducted by phone, but some surveys were conducted in person either at the request of the participants or their supervising criminal justice agency, or because study personnel were not able to contact them by phone. Attempting to reach referred individuals in person included visiting their homes and their pretrial/probation case manager's office while the referred individual was there for a scheduled meeting. Study personnel often requested assistance (e.g., contact information, reminders, etc.) from GRID outreach workers and referring case managers with contacting referred individuals. Upon contact with the referred individuals, study personnel explained the study and read information from a consent form to try to gain informed consent (CU IRB Protocol # 18-0727). Parental consent for juveniles was considered "passive" such that parents could opt their child out of the study rather than study personnel being required to gain active parental consent to opt them in.

Most of the questions on the surveys were the same in both waves and intended to be directly compared across time. While the surveys covered a wide range of topics important to criminology across 24 domains, the topics most relevant to my dissertation were gang embeddedness, violence-oriented masculinity endorsement, and traditional masculinity endorsement.

The baseline surveys were conducted primarily within 3 months of referral, while the follow-up surveys were conducted primarily at least 9 months post-referral. Because we attempted to collect follow-up surveys from individuals who did not complete a baseline survey, some participants only participated in a baseline survey (n=20); some only participated in a follow-up survey (n=21); some participated in both a baseline and follow-up (n=75); and finally,

some did not participate in either (n=27). Overall, study personnel conducted 95 baseline surveys and 96 follow-up surveys, and 116 individuals participated in at least one survey. When all the surveys of the 116 participants were pooled together into one dataset for cross-sectional analysis, there was an initial sample of 191 surveys. However, 7 of the surveys were only partially completed, therefore missing large amounts of data, and these were excluded from the final cross-sectional sample for this study. The final sample for cross-sectional analysis was 114 participants with 184 surveys total.

The sample for change score analysis included only those who participated in both baseline and follow-up surveys, an initial sample of 75. However, 5 of those were removed from the sample due to not fully completing the surveys. The final sample for change score analysis was 70 participants who completed both surveys. Decisions addressing missingness are elaborated upon in analytic strategy sections in Chapter 4.

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics comparing three groups: 1) the initial sample of all 143 individuals referred to GRID during the study period, 2) the final sample of 114 participants who completed at least 1 survey, and 3) the final sample of 70 participants who completed both surveys. Comparing these groups is important for establishing whether the study participants were representative of people referred to GRID. The study participants do indeed closely mirror individuals referred to GRID. The group of total GRID-referred individuals did not differ more than a few percentage points from the total survey sample or the two-wave survey sample on any of the official report variables measuring race, gang involvement, crime involvement, employment, and education. Nor did the total and two-wave survey samples differ from each other by more than a few percentage points on any of these variables.

The median of the baseline survey duration was 50.3 minutes, while the median of the follow-up survey duration was 60.3 minutes. This added time was likely due to several survey sections being added to the follow-up survey that were not in the baseline survey. The mean time between referral date and baseline survey date was 1.4 months, and the mean time between referral date and follow-up survey date was 11.0 months. For the participants who participated in both surveys, the mean time between survey dates was 9.3 months.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics from Official Data at Referral

	Total Referred (N=143 individuals)			Cross-Sectional Survey Sample (N=114 individuals)			Two Wave Survey Sample (N=70 individuals)		
	N	Mean or %	(SD)	N	Mean or %	(SD)	N	Mean or %	(SD)
Age	143	20.47	(9.14)	114	20.94	(9.53)	70	21.24	(10.07)
Juvenile	143	71.3%		114	69.3%		70	71.4%	
Black	143	34.3%		114	35.1%		70	31.4%	
Hispanic	143	49.0%		114	47.4%		70	50.0%	
White	143	10.5%		114	11.4%		70	11.4%	
Other Race	143	6.3%		114	6.1%		70	7.1%	
Currently Employed	143	9.1%		114	7.0%		70	5.7%	
Currently in School	143	51.0%		114	50.0%		70	51.4%	
Interested Job Training	143	46.2%		114	44.7%		70	45.7%	
Gang Affiliation	143	88.8%		114	88.6%		70	87.1%	
Generational Member	143	25.2%		114	26.3%		70	22.9%	
Significant Gang Role	57	54.4%		46	54.4%		28	50.0%	
Family Gang Members	93	52.7%		74	54.1%		43	55.8%	
Wants to Leave Gang	67	73.1%		56	75.0%		35	74.3%	
Risky Activities	143	55.2%		114	56.1%		70	58.6%	
Recently Victimized	143	12.6%		114	13.2%		70	12.9%	
Criminal History	143	52.5%		114	52.6%		70	51.4%	

Nearly 90% of individuals referred to GRID during the study entrance period were officially designated as gang-affiliated by their referral source.[18] The mean age of individuals entered into the study was 20.5 years. According to official sources, 49.0% percent of individuals in the study were Hispanic, 34.3% percent were Black, 10.5% percent were White, and 6.3% percent were another race. All but one of the 143 individuals were male.

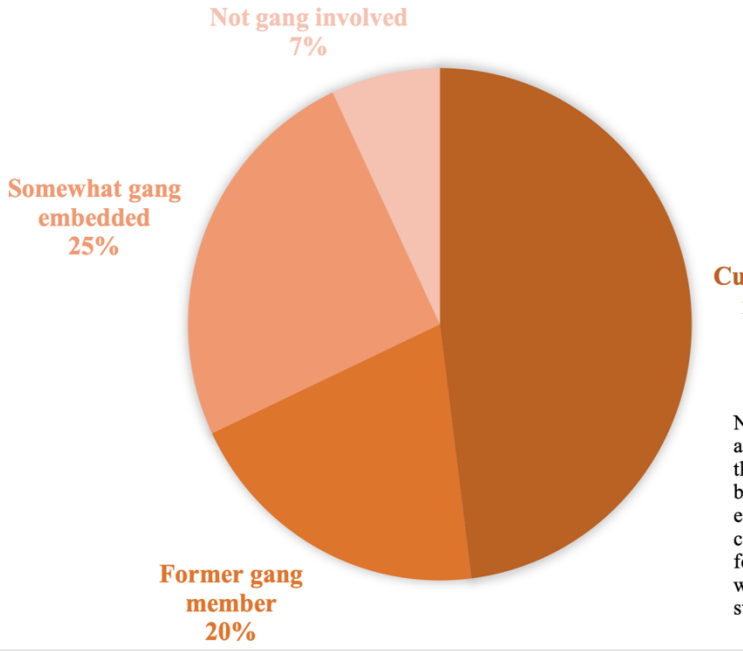
This dataset is useful for examining masculinities among a population of gang-involved individuals in the process of disengaging from their gangs. First, the dataset includes measures of gang embeddedness, violence-oriented masculinity endorsement, and traditional masculinity endorsement, as well as a myriad of potential control variables across 24 domains. Second, the questions on the surveys were the same in both waves and can be directly compared across time, meaning that individual change scores can be calculated among those 70 people who completed both surveys. Third, the sample was highly gang involved, as identified both by official sources at referral and by self-report in the surveys among the participants. Despite these beneficial aspects of the dataset, a limitation of the data may be its sample size, which poses the risk of limiting statistical power. Nevertheless, collecting multiple waves of individual survey data from gang involved individuals—most of them youth and many of them undergoing a difficult disengagement process—is no small feat, especially in the midst of a global pandemic.

The sample is indeed highly gang involved according to the self-report surveys that included gang embeddedness and membership data (n=116 individuals). Forty-eight percent (n=56) of the total participants surveyed identified as a current gang member during at least one

[18] Caseworkers making referrals to GRID were not given any formal definition of "gang-affiliated." In the referral form for GRID, caseworkers could check a box designating the referred individual as "gang-affiliated" without any further explanation, leaving the term open to each caseworker's own definition or interpretation. Data from self-report surveys suggests caseworkers designated individuals to be "gang-affiliated" if they were at least somewhat gang involved, regardless of whether they were officially gang members. See below for elaboration on the self-report data.

of the survey waves. Another 20% (n=23) identified as a former gang member during at least one of the survey waves; therefore, 68% of all surveyed participants identified as current or former gang members during at least one survey wave. An additional 25% (n=29) reported non-zero embeddedness in at least one wave. Only 7% (n=8) of the surveyed individuals reported no gang connections, and, on the flip side, 93% were gang involved in some capacity. (See Figure 1 for an illustration of individuals' gang involvement.) These self-report numbers appear consistent with the official data, in which nearly 90% were officially designated as gang-affiliated by their referral source, as mentioned above. Individuals who were not designated as gang-affiliated could have been referred based on suspected family, neighborhood, or friend gang connections. The few individuals who self-reported as not gang involved at all were retained in the study.[19]

Figure 1: Individuals' Deepest Gang Involvement During At Least One Wave (N=116)



[19] The cross-sectional analyses measured associations between levels of gang embeddedness and levels of masculinity endorsement; individuals who scored 0 on embeddedness would be welcome in those models. For the change score analyses, only 4 individuals reported embeddedness of 0 on both survey waves; I ran all change models with and without those 4 individuals, and significance levels and effect sizes were essentially the same, so they were retained in the change sample as well. Those individuals were referred to a gang disengagement program for a reason, and it seemed unwise to chip away at the change sample of only 70 without any change in results.

In this study, I conducted multiple types of analyses to answer different research questions, as described further in the Analytic Strategy subsection of the next chapter. Gang embeddedness, endorsement of violence-oriented masculinity, and endorsement of traditional masculinity are all dependent variables and key independent variables at different points in the analyses. I now turn to a description of the variables used in my analyses. The descriptive statistics for the variables below can be found in Table 2. All variables in the analyses are from the self-report data from the surveys with participants.

Dependent Variables

Gang Embeddedness

The gang embeddedness scale (Pyrooz, Sweeten, and Piquero 2013) uncovers the current depth of involvement an individual has with their gang or with gangs in general. Gang embeddedness is often used to measure gang disengagement (Densley and Pyrooz 2019). In addition, using a gang embeddedness scale to measure gang involvement is advantageous compared to using a dichotomous measure of gang membership because embeddedness captures an entire gradient of association with a gang, including the intensity of contact, number of social gang connections, depth of identity, etc. rather than the simplified dichotomy of member/non-member (Pyrooz et al. 2013). This is not to say that gang membership as a measure doesn't have its uses—it absolutely does. However, membership as a measure fails to distinguish people with no gang connections from individuals who are not official members but are nevertheless involved with a gang on a more peripheral level, which was common in this sample. Membership can also have a fluid definition; older adult men in the sample commonly told me they were leaders in the gang yet at another point in the same survey said they were *not* current

members. In reality, they were experiencing a nuanced social dynamic in which they were considered leaders but not expected to actively participate in illegal activities.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Survey Variables

	Total Survey Sample (N=184 surveys)[2]				Both Wave Completers (N=70 people) Baselines		Follow-Ups	
	M or %	(SD)	Med	Range	M or %	(SD)	M or %	(SD)
Dependent and Independent Variables								
Gang Embeddedness[1]	1.52	(1.15)	1.38	(0, 3.75)	1.63	(1.03)	1.40	(1.24)
Violence-Oriented Masc. [1]	1.52	(0.47)	1.57	(0.17, 2.86)	1.53	(0.48)	1.54	(0.44)
Traditional Masculinity[1]	1.63	(0.37)	1.65	(0.75, 2.81)	1.63	(0.35)	1.58	(0.39)
Stoicism[1]	1.36	(0.68)	1.33	(0, 3)	1.36	(0.65)	1.33	(0.73)
Breadwinning[1]	2.02	(0.49)	2.00	(0.5, 3)	2.01	(0.47)	2.02	(0.53)
Self-Reliance[1]	1.99	(0.47)	2.00	(0.67, 3)	2.00	(0.51)	1.93	(0.52)
Homophobia[1,3]	1.23	(0.64)	1.00	(0, 3)	1.27	(0.57)	1.09	(0.65)
Avoidance of Femininity[1,3]	1.36	(0.51)	1.33	(0, 3)	1.34	(0.49)	1.32	(0.54)
Demographic Controls								
Age	21.5	(9.7)	17.1	(13.3, 58.4)	21.4	(10.1)	22.1	(10.2)
Parent	24.5%				11.4%		11.4%	
Race/ethnicity								
Black	32.6%				31.4%		31.4%	
Hispanic	39.7%				40.0%		40.0%	
White	9.8%				10.0%		10.0%	
Asian	4.4%				4.3%		4.3%	
Multi-Racial	13.6%				14.3%		14.3%	
Socioeconomic Controls								
Legal Employment	20.9%				18.6%		24.3%	
Years of Education	9.9	(1.9)	10.0	(6, 14)	9.2	(2.0)	10.3	(1.7)
Theoretical Controls								
Offending Variety Score	1.56	(2.40)	1.0	(0, 12)	1.67	(2.57)	1.73	(2.32)
Unstructured Socializing	1.85	(2.41)	1.0	(0, 7)	2.00	(2.58)	1.68	(2.23)
Time with Family	3.00	(2.83)	3.0	(0, 7)	3.21	(2.87)	2.84	(2.92)
Conflicts Variety Score[4]	1.46	(1.67)	1.0	(0, 7)	1.80	(1.92)	1.37	(1.59)
Low Self-Control[1]	1.87	(0.95)	1.78	(0, 4)	1.91	(0.99)	1.97	(0.95)
Identity as Criminal	0.89	(0.92)	1.0	(0, 4)	1.09	(0.92)	0.84	(0.90)

[1]This scale was constructed using item response theory graded response model and standardized with a mean of 0 and std. dev. of 1 for analysis. Purely for purposes of showing the distribution, a mean scale was created and used here.
[2]Some individuals were surveyed once and others twice; these are all surveys pooled together.
[3]Total survey sample N is 181 instead of 184. Follow-up sample N for both wave completers is 69 instead of 70 for homophobia and 68 instead of 70 for avoidance of femininity.
[4] Baseline sample for both wave completers has an N of 69 instead of 70.

Items included how many friends/family members one has in a gang, the importance placed upon the gang, the influence one has in the gang, one's position in the gang, and more. (See Appendix A for full gang embeddedness scale.) For this study, the gang embeddedness scale items were constructed using item response theory with a graded response model and subsequently standardized using the *std* function in Stata, resulting in a scale with a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1. (For more information on why item response theory with a graded response model was used to construct this and all other scales, see the Scale Construction section below.)

Endorsement of Violence-Oriented Masculinity

Measuring violence-oriented masculinity captures one important dimension of gang masculinity; it does not encompass all of gang masculinity. In this study, most of the violence-oriented masculinity endorsement scale originates from a Likert-style scale traditionally used to measure street code endorsement (Stewart and Simons 2006), a scale has been tested and shown to be have "strong psychometric properties, which hold across groups and contexts," (Taylor et al., 2010, p. 199). The scale primarily measures whether one approves of using violence against someone who showed disrespect and whether showing toughness is important for one's reputation. The code of the street (Anderson 1999) can be seen as an expression of marginalized masculinity, which in this case is oriented towards aggression and violence. Several prior scholars have equated the street code with a marginalized, violence-oriented masculinity (King and Swain 2022; Stuart 2020; Wilkinson 2001). This street code measure has been used to study gang populations and gang dynamics in prior studies, with Matsuda et al. (2013) demonstrating that gang joining increases endorsement of the street code. While street code endorsement tends to be stable across time for most adolescents (Moule et al. 2015), it would nonetheless be

unsurprising to see endorsement of this measure change over time among individuals within this sample.

An additional Likert-style measure from the survey was added to complete the violence-oriented masculinity scale: "If you beat someone up, other people your age will respect you more." This item was originally from a scale measuring social rewards for committing various crimes (Nagin and Paternoster 1994). This item measures the belief that violence leads to respect, which is integral to masculinity among gang members (and consistent with the street code items). Leverso and Hess (2021) argued, "Central to the street code is the obtainment of masculinity via campaigning for respect by manifesting nerve—punching and pulling the trigger" (4)—by using violence. I tested the dimensionality of this new item's addition to the scale with an unrotated exploratory factor analysis using a polychoric correlation matrix to accommodate the ordinal categories. The first factor had an eigenvalue of 2.42, exceeding the threshold of 1 (Kaiser 1960), while the next highest factor had an eigenvalue of only 0.46; all scale items loaded strongly onto factor 1 with factor loadings of between 0.55 and 0.68, including the new item. These results indicate the violence-oriented masculinity scale is unidimensional with the new item.

The violence-oriented masculinity scale was constructed by using the item response theory graded response model. The scale maintained high reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.74. (See Appendix B for the full violence-oriented masculinity endorsement scale.) The scale was standardized, with a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1.

Endorsement of Traditional Masculinity

The 16-item scale for endorsement of traditional masculinity was taken primarily from the Male Role Norms Inventory Short Form (MRNI-SF) (Levant, Hall, and Rankin 2013), with

an addition of two items from other versions of that scale (Levant et al. 1992, 2007) and four items from Thompson and Pleck's (1986) Male Role Norms Scale. This composite scale contains 5 subscales which are all considered to make up aspects of traditional masculinity in the United States: stoicism, breadwinning (being an economic provider), self-reliance, homophobia, and avoidance of femininity. These scales were chosen primarily because their measures line up with leading theories of traditional masculinities (Carrigan et al. 1985; Connell 1995; Kimmel 1997; Schippers 2007) and because its subcategories matched with qualities of traditional masculinities found among reforming gang members (Deuchar et al. 2016; Flores 2014; Søgaard et al. 2016).

The additional items that were not in the MRNI-SF were added for several reasons. The 4 items from Thompson and Pleck (1986) make up the breadwinning subcategory, which the MRNI-SF did not include. Considering economic success is a major aspect of traditional masculinity in the U.S (Kimmel 1997), I opted to include it in the scale. One item from another version of the MRNI (Levant et al. 2007) was added to the self-reliance subcategory. The MRNI-SF version of self-reliance is based solely on mechanical skill such as fixing things around the home or repairing cars; however, I wanted the category to include self-reliance more broadly and so added the item "A man should never count on someone else to get the job done." Finally, I replaced one of the stoicism items in the MRNI-SF with an item from another version of the MRNI (Levant et al. 1992). The original stoicism item used vocabulary that I was concerned teenagers might not be familiar with, so I replaced it with the item "A man should never reveal worries to others." [20] After these changes, the composite traditional masculinity scale has theoretically important subcategories, broad enough categories, and understandable language for its target audience. (See Appendix C for full traditional masculinity endorsement scale.)

[20] The original item was "Men should be detached in emotionally charged situations." I was concerned young participants would not correctly interpret the word "detached" in this context.

I tested the dimensionality of this traditional masculinity scale using both exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis. The traditional masculinity scale is theoretically unidimensional while also measuring 5 distinct subfactors. The MRNI-SF was already tested in a bifactor confirmatory factor analysis and found to be unidimensional with distinct subfactors including stoicism, self-reliance, homophobia, and avoidance of femininity (Levant et al. 2013). I was not able to run a bifactor confirmatory factor analysis in Stata because the models would not converge, possibly due to sample size. I ran an unrotated exploratory factor analysis using a polychoric correlation matrix for a quick glance at whether it may be unidimensional, but multiple factors had eigenvalues above 1. With an oblique rotation, the items separated most clearly into either 3 factors or 5 factors, with the 3-factor model including homophobia and avoidance of femininity combined, self-reliance and breadwinning combined, and stoicism alone, while the 5-factor model divided items into their original subscales. I tested the 3-factor model and the 5-factor model using a confirmatory factor analysis to determine which would be better for scale construction.[21] Several goodness of fit measures appeared slightly better for the 5-factor model than the 3-factor model. For example, the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) for the 5-factor model was 0.062 versus 0.071, although the typical cutoff for a good fit is less than 0.05, meaning neither model is optimal (Browne and Cudeck 1993). However, the likelihood-ratio test after estimation suggested that the 5-factor model is a better fit than the 3-factor model.

[21] A generalized structural equation model with a family and link of ordinal logit would have been most appropriate for this confirmatory factor analysis test because my response categories were ordinal; however, goodness of fit statistics such as the RMSEA are not calculated in that case, and tests such as the likelihood-ratio test after estimation are not possible in Stata for these ordinal logit models. In order to obtain goodness of fit statistics and run the likelihood-ratio test, I had to use a structural equation model meant for continuous responses to test model fit.

This factor analysis suggests that traditional masculinity may not be unidimensional within these data and that separating traditional masculinity into its 5 subscales is a better measure; nevertheless, I used an overall traditional masculinity scale as well as the 5 distinct subscales. As discussed in the literature review, masculinities theories strongly suggest these 5 components (breadwinning, stoicism, self-reliance, avoidance of femininity, and homophobia) are all important parts composing traditional masculinity in the United States. Therefore, to satisfy both theoretical and empirical considerations, every type of quantitative analysis in this study used two separate models: one with traditional masculinity as an overall measure, and one with the 5 subscales as separate measures.

The full traditional masculinity scale was constructed from all traditional masculinity items by using the item response theory graded response model, just as with the other scales constructed in this study. The five subscales were constructed the same way from the items in each subscale. The scales were standardized with a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1.

The Cronbach's alphas are as follows: stoicism, 0.81; self-reliance, 0.60; breadwinner, 0.68; homophobia, 0.83; avoidance of femininity, 0.64. While self-reliance and avoidance of femininity have low Cronbach's alphas, these subcategories only consist of 3 items each. A low number of items directly correlates to a low Cronbach's alpha, so these low numbers are not overall a cause for concern. The overall traditional masculinity scale containing all items in the subcategories maintained high reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.82.

Control Variables

Demographic Controls

Race/ethnicity has long been used as a demographic control in gang research, considering differences in gang membership rates by race and the role that race may play in gang dynamics

(Esbensen and Winfree 1998; Freng and Esbensen 2007). Using self-reported race/ethnicity, the participants fell into five mutually exclusive single-race/ethnicity categories: *Black*, *Hispanic*, *White*, *Asian,* and *Multiracial*. All categories composed a categorical race variable (prefix *.i* in Stata), with Black being coded as 0 (and therefore the reference group in a regression with categorical data).

As with crime in general, gang membership has been shown to be strongly age-graded (Pyrooz 2014b). *Age* was measured in years at the date of the survey. Models with age contain both a linear and quadratic term (simply age squared) to account for a quadratic functional form, as is common with variables associated with age and better account for the wide age range in this study (O'Brien et al. 2013).

Whether the participant was a *parent* was also measured dichotomously. The participants were asked whether they had any children (no=0, yes=1). Theories of gang disengagement suggest that becoming a parent can be a turning point in the process of leaving a gang (Moloney et al. 2009). In addition, theories of traditional masculinity suggest that being a father is greatly important to traditional masculine identity (Hunter, Riggs, and Augoustinos 2017).

Socioeconomic Controls

Levels of *education* have been found to be associated with gang membership (Pyrooz 2014a). Years of education were measured on a 14-point scale by asking the participant the most recent degree or grade in school that they had completed. For less than a high school degree, if the participant had only completed up to a certain grade, their years of education was measured with the value of that grade (e.g., finished 9^{th} grade = 9 years). A high school degree or GED was measured at 12 years, "some college" at 13 years, and an associate's degree at 14 years. No participant had a higher degree than an associate's degree.

Employment was measured dichotomously. Participants were asked if they currently had a legal job for which they paid taxes (no=0, yes=1). Masculinity theories view employment and financial success as integral to traditional masculine identity, suggesting that employment is positively associated with endorsement of traditional masculinity (Kimmel 1997; Schippers 2007). One of the main components of the above traditional masculinity scale is a measure of the value placed on being an economic provider to family, known as being a breadwinner.

Theoretical Controls

O*ffending* has positive associations with gang embeddedness, and gang involvement has an amplifying effect upon criminal offending (Melde and Esbensen 2013; Pyrooz et al. 2016; Thornberry et al. 1993; Watkins and Melde 2018). Offending could in theory be associated with traditional masculinity endorsement, as willingness to be violent has been theorized to be a component of traditional masculinity (Schippers 2007). Offending too has been framed as part of avoiding femininity, because young men are accused of being feminine if they do not participate in fights (King and Swain 2022; Reid 2017; Wilkinson 2001). Participants were asked whether they had committed 14 different criminal offenses in the last 3 months (Moule, Pyrooz, and Decker 2013). The number of offenses that participants had committed were added up to make an offending variety score with a range of 0 to 14. Scores of criminal offending are considered to be the most reliable and valid measures of offending and avoid the pitfalls of frequency measures, which are sensitive to minor crime types (Sweeten 2012). The variety score was standardized to have a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1.

Unstructured socializing among groups of adolescents are directly associated with gang involvement and delinquency, while parental monitoring reduces deviant behavior (Matsuda et al. 2013; Osgood et al. 1996; Osgood and Anderson 2004). In theory, unstructured socializing

could be negatively related to endorsement of traditional masculinity, because valuing long hours in employment is oppositional to spending time doing "nothing" with friends. One item was used to measure unstructured socializing: How many times a week do you hang out with your friends at night in public places, not doing anything in particular? (Osgood and Anderson 2004). The range for the item was 0 to 7. This item was standardized to have a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1.

Gang members are known to frequently have *conflicts with others*, whether at school, online, or in their neighborhoods (Hughes and Short 2005; Stuart 2020). It is logical that increased gang activity could also strain relationships with the important people in a gang member's life, such as their family, friends, or romantic partner. Conflicts with others can also lead to increased gang activity (Stuart 2020). Endorsement of violence-oriented masculinity theoretically would be associated with more conflicts with others as well, considering the goal of gaining respect through violence, retaliation, and toughness. The current study created a scale to measure the variety of people in the participant's life whom they recently had a conflict with. Participants in the survey were asked the following: In the last 3 months, you have had a problem with... 1) Your parents or parental figures? 2) Siblings? 3) Other family members? 4) A significant other or ex? 5) Friends? 6) People at school or work? 7) People online? 8) Anyone else? For each item, the participant could answer no or yes. All the types of people the participants had recent conflicts with were summed into a variety score with a range of 0 to 8. The variety score was standardized to have a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1.

Low self control is positively associated with gang involvement (Pyrooz et al. 2021). (Søgaard et al. 2016). Nine items from the self control scale from Tangney et al. (2004) were used in the current study, with items such as "You have a hard time breaking bad habits" and

"You say inappropriate things." The response categories for all items were Likert-style, ranging from strongly disagree (0) to strongly agree (3). During scale construction using the item response theory graded response model, four items were removed from the initially 13-item scale due to negative correlations with other items, low discrimination scores, and heavily overlapping confidence intervals for the response categories' difficulty coefficients. The final scale maintained high reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.81 and was standardized to have a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1.

Paternoster and Bushway (2009) argued that people who desist from crime must first undergo a change in identity. As gang identities have been theorized to impact behavior (Lauger 2020; Garot 2010), gang members may also undergo identity changes during the disengagement process. I elected to use two items from the *criminal identity* scale (e.g., "You think of yourself as a delinquent or criminal") (Rocque, Posick, and Paternoster 2016). The response options were never (0), almost never, sometimes, almost always, and always (4). The scale was constructed by averaging the two item scores, each scale with a range of 0 to 4. Higher values indicate greater identity as a criminal. The scale was standardized to have a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1.

Time with family is negatively associated with gang involvement, with gang youth showing significantly lower family involvement when controlling for other gang-associated risk factors (Xiaoming et al. 2002). Gang disengagement is often linked to increased family ties, which can be a "pull" factor to leave (Berger et al. 2017; Decker and Lauritsen 2002). Time with family is theoretically associated with masculinities, especially in the context of gang disengagement, as a positive family-oriented masculinity has been embraced among some disengaging members (Deuchar 2018; Forkby et al. 2020). One item was used to measure time

with family: How many times a week do you eat dinner with your family? (Osgood and Anderson 2004). The range for the item was 0 to 7, with higher values indicating higher time with family. The item was standardized to have a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1.

Scale Construction

Item response theory was used to construct all scales with at least three items because latent traits are assumed to underlie the item responses observed in the data. The graded response model (GRM) was used to construct all scales as well, as it is appropriate for ordered categorical data and allows items to vary in their number of response categories (Samejima 1969). The GRM models were run first with all items in the scale, and any item's response categories with overlapping confidence intervals for their difficulty coefficients were collapsed together (e.g., strongly disagree and disagree responses collapsed together) to eliminate redundancy. The GRM models were then run again to confirm that minimal overlap existed between response categories' difficulty confidence intervals. All latent trait scales were tested for normality of distribution with a skewness test (D'Agostino, Belanger, and D'Agostino 1990), and results indicated none were skewed.

CHAPTER 4: Quantitative Analysis and Results

My dissertation explored and tested the importance of masculinities in the gang disengagement process using a mixed methods approach. The quantitative analysis was divided into three research questions.

Research Question 1: Are endorsements of violence-oriented masculinity and traditional masculinity associated with gang embeddedness?

Analytic Strategy

In this research question, I examined whether levels of endorsements of masculinities predict levels of gang embeddedness in cross-sectional data. Data from both waves of the survey were pooled together in long form for a sample of 184 surveys.

To more carefully determine whether endorsement of these masculinities was significantly associated with gang embeddedness, I ran a series of Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression models with gang embeddedness as the dependent variable, including 1) a model with only masculinities, no controls; 2) a model with demographic and socioeconomic controls; and 3) a fully specified model with theoretical, socioeconomic, and demographic controls. Two versions of all these models were run: one with the traditional masculinity scale, and one with the five subscales of traditional masculinity.[22] All models were run while clustering by the individual and adding the wave number as a control to account for two waves of survey data being present for some individuals. This ensured that OLS assumptions would still be met while reducing the threat of autocorrelation. Clustering also means using robust standard errors and correcting any heteroskedasticity.

[22] The models could not include both the traditional masculinity scale *and* the five subscales of traditional masculinity at the same time due to multicollinearity. The variance inflation factors for the five subscales together in one model ranged from 1.57 to 1.84, indicating low variance inflation.

The survey data contained many possible controls that according to theory could be related to gang embeddedness and masculinities. I built the multiple regression models starting with only the dependent variable and both masculinity scales as key independent variables[23], then added control variables, recording the Akaike information criterion (AIC) in each new model. The AIC between models can be directly compared to determine which model is a better fit for the data while maximizing efficiency in the number of controls. I also conducted a Wald test to determine whether the new control variables allowed the newer model to better fit the data than the previous model. The process yielded a model that maximized model fit while also maximizing efficiency and including the most important controls theoretically.

Any surveys which had only been partially completed were excluded from the sample, either because they were missing large amounts of data or because they were missing all traditional masculinity items, which were located at the very end of the survey.[24] Seven surveys were excluded from the study for these reasons, bringing the sample to 184 surveys in the models with the full traditional masculinity scale.

Six additional surveys were only missing on *one* of the subscales of traditional masculinity, meaning that they were not missing for the overall traditional masculinity scale, as overall traditional masculinity scale values were still constructed even if some individual items or a subscale were missing. (This was also true of the subscales still being constructed even if an item was missing within it.) These six surveys were only excluded from models including all five subscales of traditional masculinity, bringing the sample for these models to 178.

[23] The traditional masculinity scale and the violence-oriented masculinity scale are correlated at 0.30.

[24] Multiple imputation for dependent variables or key independent variables is not considered good practice (Young and Johnson 2010).

There was very little missingness on control variables that needed to be addressed. One survey was missing the *conflicts* variety score, and this value was mean imputed. Two other surveys were missing *employment* because their respondents had answered "don't know" to whether they had legally recognized employment. Values of 0 (no) were input in lieu of the two missing values for the final models; however, because the variable was dichotomous, I also ran the models with values of 1 (yes) for those two missing values instead, and no results changed except the employment coefficient. The employment coefficient is not the focus of this study and is merely a control variable. These three cases constitute the entirety of missingness on control variables and were easily addressed.

OLS was chosen for the models for multiple reasons. OLS is one of the most robust types of regression, known as the Best Linear Unbiased Estimator (BLUE) if its assumptions are met and is widely considered to provide the best possible estimates of coefficients. OLS often poses a problem in criminological studies due to its assumption that the dependent variable has a normal distribution; most types of criminal offending are not normally distributed across the general population. Gang embeddedness has a relatively normal distribution in the current study's sample, with skewness not significant ($p=0.191$). I was required to relax OLS's assumption that cases are not related to each other, since the surveys are nested within individuals. This was easily accounted for by clustering by individual and adjusting for wave as a control variable.

Results

I estimated a series of OLS regressions to test the association between cross-sectional levels of violence-oriented and traditional masculinities and levels of gang embeddedness. Tables 3 and 4 show the progression of increasingly conservative gang embeddedness models: masculinities only (model 1), additional demographic and socioeconomic controls (model 2), and

additional theoretical controls (model 3). Table 3 presents the models including the overall traditional masculinity endorsement scale, while Table 4 presents the models including the five

Table 3: OLS Regression Models Predicting Gang Embeddedness using Overall Traditional Masculinity

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Masculinities only		Masculinities and demographic and socioeconomic controls		Masculinities and all controls	
	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE
Violent masculinity endorsement[a]	0.400***	0.063	0.436***	0.074	0.222**	0.067
Traditional masculinity endorsement[a]	-0.084	0.077	-0.080	0.078	-0.043	0.066
Theoretical controls[a]						
Offending					0.210***	0.058
Low self control					0.112	0.083
Conflicts with others					0.310***	0.064
Unstructured socializing					0.099	0.075
Criminal identity					0.068	0.088
Time with family					-0.128	0.081
Demographic controls						
Age			0.120*	0.047	0.087	0.054
Age^2			-0.002*	0.001	-0.001	0.001
Race/ethnicity						
Black (reference)						
Hispanic			-0.061	0.217	-0.018	0.191
White			0.350	0.267	-0.194	0.236
Asian			0.219	0.475	0.291	0.505
Multiracial			0.439#	0.245	0.272	0.220
Parent			-0.048	0.307	-0.199	0.280
Socioeconomic controls						
Education			-0.113#	0.059	-0.007	0.052
Employment			0.140	0.185	0.052	0.157
Constant	0.082		-0.622		-1.107	
R^2	0.153		0.219		0.413	

Note: N = 184 with both survey waves pooled together. Clustered on the individual.
SE = robust standard error.
[a]Standardized.
#p<.10. *p < .05. **p<.01. ***p < .001.

Table 4: OLS Regression Models Predicting Gang Embeddedness using Traditional Masculinity Subscales

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Masculinities only		Masculinities and demographic and socioeconomic controls		Masculinities and all controls	
	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE
Violent masculinity endorsement[a]	0.398***	0.062	0.432***	0.072	0.216**	0.064
Traditional masculinity endorsement subscales[a]						
Breadwinning	-0.002	0.096	0.007	0.095	0.009	0.085
Self-reliance	-0.059	0.092	-0.085	0.090	-0.088	0.079
Stoicism	-0.093	0.088	-0.096	0.087	-0.092	0.073
Homophobia	-0.029	0.084	-0.021	0.092	-0.020	0.077
Avoidance of Femininity	0.034	0.083	0.050	0.084	0.100	0.067
Theoretical controls[a]						
Offending					0.196**	0.060
Low self control					0.116	0.087
Conflicts with others					0.349***	0.065
Unstructured socializing					0.113	0.079
Criminal identity					0.017	0.094
Time with family					-0.156[#]	0.082
Demographic controls						
Age			0.116*	0.047	0.070	0.050
Age^2			-0.002*	0.001	-0.001	0.001
Race/ethnicity						
Black (reference)						
Hispanic			-0.058	0.225	0.044	0.194
White			0.350	0.286	-0.161	0.234
Asian			0.281	0.470	0.434	0.495
Multiracial			0.434[#]	0.241	0.295	0.214
Parent			0.014	0.301	-0.102	0.264
Socioeconomic controls						
Education			-0.121*	0.060	-0.016	0.054
Employment			0.153	0.188	0.059	0.160
Constant	0.092		-0.483		-0.834	
R^2	0.159		0.224		0.437	

Note: N = 184 with both survey waves pooled together. Clustered on the individual.
SE = robust standard error. [a] Standardized. [#]p<.10. *p < .05. **p<.01. ***p < .001.

subscales of traditional masculinity endorsement. As all masculinities variables and theoretical control variables are standardized, their coefficients present the standard deviation difference in

levels of gang embeddedness for each one standard deviation difference in levels of the independent or control variable.

Both tables indicate similar relationships between cross-sectional levels of masculinities and gang embeddedness. There is a positive and statistically significant relationship between endorsement of violence-oriented masculinity and gang embeddedness across all models in both tables. Both fully specified models indicate a 0.22 standard deviation difference in gang embeddedness for each one standard deviation difference in endorsement of violence-oriented masculinity. The fact that the coefficient was reduced in magnitude by roughly 55% from Models 1 to 3 for both tables indicates that control variables accounted for a non-trivial amount of the association between endorsement of violent masculinity and gang embeddedness.

The fully specified models indicate there is no statistically significant cross-sectional relationship between endorsement of traditional masculinity and gang embeddedness, neither from the overall traditional masculinity scale nor from its five subscales. Of the five subscales, avoidance of femininity has the largest coefficient (0.10) and the lowest standard error; its p value is 0.13, which doesn't quite meet the $p<0.10$ threshold of marginal statistical significance, but earlier versions of this model with only slightly different control variables had a p value of less than 0.10 for avoidance of femininity. In sum, these cross-sectional models show that endorsement of violence-oriented masculinity is positively associated with gang embeddedness, while endorsement of traditional masculinity largely has no relationship to gang embeddedness.

Research Question 2: Are changes in individuals' endorsement of masculinities associated with changes in their gang embeddedness, with gang embeddedness change as the dependent variable?

Analytic Strategy

This research question treats gang embeddedness change as the dependent variable while

examining the relationship between it and masculinity change. The upcoming research question 3 examines the same relationship using the same methods but treats masculinity change as the dependent variable instead, in order to fully inspect the relationship and shed light on the temporal order of the association. I start here with gang embeddedness as the dependent variable, consistent with prior qualitative research and theory. Bivariate tests of statistical significance and a series of OLS first difference models were used to answer the question. Individuals must have completed both waves of the survey to be included in these analyses, meaning the sample size was smaller (n=70) and *not* pooled together with both waves, as the data was now in wide form.

New variables were created to measure the change in gang embeddedness, the change in endorsements of all masculinity types, and change in any control variables between the baseline survey and the follow up survey. All variables in these models were re-standardized among the 70 individuals before change across time was calculated to account for the possibility of non-random selection into both survey waves. As seen in the equation below, the change in each variable for each individual over time, or change score, was calculated by subtracting the variable's value at time 1 from its value at time 2.

$$\Delta Variable_i = Variable_{i\ time2} - Variable_{i\ time1}$$

This equation applies to the dependent variable, independent variables, and all time-varying controls. Scale values were standardized while all surveys were pooled together in long form, so the change between the two time points in these variables is also standardized, equal to the change in standard deviations for the variable over time (similar to a Cohen's d value). A positive value means the variable increased over time, while a negative value means the variable decreased over time. All change variables were evaluated for normality of distribution using a skewness test, and none were skewed. In addition, a new dichotomous variable was created for

each scale, indicating whether the value of the scale decreased over time (coded as 1) or increased over time (coded as 0) for each individual. If the change over time was negative, it was considered a decrease; likewise, if the change over time was positive, it was considered an increase.

I used a series of two sample t tests to examine how changes to masculinities endorsements and changes to gang embeddedness may be associated. The t tests were run comparing standardized changes to gang embeddedness between those whose endorsement of various types of masculinities *decreased* over time and *increased* over time. They measured differences between the point estimates of the effect size (determining whether the increasers and decreasers differed from each other in the dependent variable). These t tests are one way of measuring whether gang disengagement is occurring while endorsements of different masculinities are increasing/decreasing.

Individuals who did not change over time were excluded from that particular t test. This was most relevant for the traditional masculinity subscales. Grouping people with 0 change into either the decreasers or the increasers would be arbitrary and muddy the waters between the two distinct categories. I initially tried combining them with either group, but a clear pattern emerged that 0-change group was changing the results of whichever group it was assigned and pulling that group's gang embeddedness change mean toward 0, dampening the difference between the increasers and decreasers. This is what would be expected theoretically if masculinity change and gang embeddedness change were significantly associated. The option of running ANOVA tests instead was insufficient because several variables had too few 0-change individuals to constitute a large enough third group. Excluding the 0-change individuals from any particular t test appeared to be the best solution for maintaining integrity of the test between increasers and

decreasers over time, especially as they were not a large enough group to cause concern over sample size for any particular t test. The traditional masculinity scale had only one 0-change individual, and the violent masculinity scale had two. The subscales had greater numbers of 0-change individuals, ranging from 14 to 20, likely due to the scales having a lower number of items. Therefore, the sample size ranged from 50 to 56 (rather than 70) for those t tests in which any given traditional masculinity subscale was divided into increasers and decreasers.

A series of OLS first difference models were run to determine whether changes in endorsement of the various masculinity types were associated with changes in gang embeddedness. Change in gang embeddedness was the dependent variable. Including time-invariant controls such as race is not possible in first difference models. In addition, more time-stable controls of personality traits such as self-control did not seem appropriate for models based on change over time. Demographic controls were not included in the models either, as most demographic measures are time-stable. The fully specified models included time-varying controls that measure behavior theoretically linked to gang embeddedness: offending, unstructured socializing, criminal identity, time with family, and conflicts with others, which were also theoretical controls in the prior OLS models for research question one. Robust standard errors were employed for all models to ensure the error term from each time period was not correlated with regressors from both time periods. The first difference models included all 0-change individuals, unlike the t-tests. The t tests needed to divide individuals into two groups, while the first difference models accommodate a continuous range of values.

T Test Results

I estimated a series of two sample t tests and OLS first difference models to measure whether the change in individuals' masculinities endorsements were associated with their change

in gang embeddedness (GE) across two waves of data, collected about 9 months apart. Results from the t tests can be found in Table 5, while Figures 2 illustrates those results visually. Table 5 and the corresponding Figure 2 display the mean change in gang embeddedness as masculinities increased/decreased over time.

Table 5: Mean Change in Gang Embeddedness (GE) as Masculinities Increased or Decreased

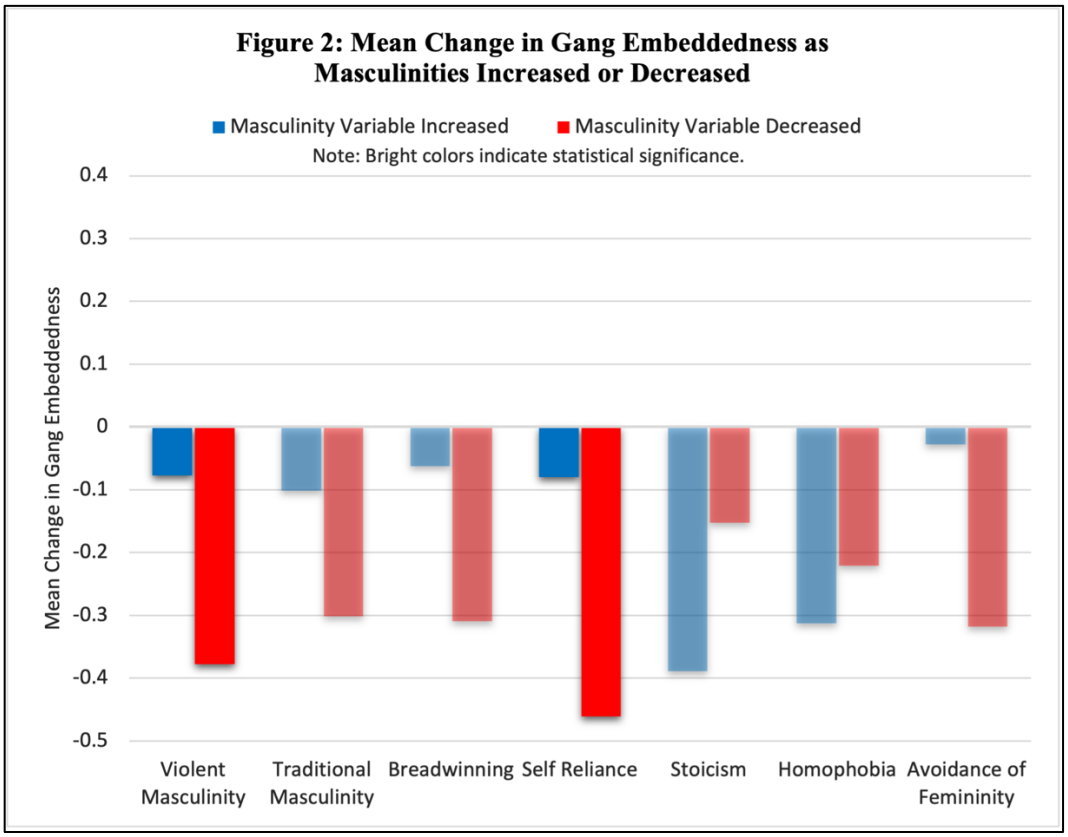
	Masculinity Variable Increased		Masculinity Variable Decreased		
	Mean GE Change	SE	Mean GE Change	SE	Sig.
Violent Masculinity	-0.077	0.127	-0.378	0.126	#
Traditional Masculinity	-0.101	0.124	-0.301	0.125	
Breadwinning	-0.062	0.104	-0.309	0.140	
Self-Reliance	-0.080	0.132	-0.461	0.153	#
Stoicism	-0.389	0.157	-0.152	0.150	
Homophobia	-0.313	0.122	-0.221	0.147	
Avoidance of Femininity	-0.028	0.131	-0.318	0.151	

Note: N=50 to 69. This only includes participants who completed both survey waves. Participants whose masculinity change was 0 for any particular masculinity were excluded from that t test. All change was calculated between standardized variables.
SE = standard error. Sig.= Statistical significance.
#p<.10.

The t test examining the association between change in endorsement of violence-oriented masculinity and change in gang embeddedness revealed a statistically significant association. When violent masculinity endorsement increased over time, gang embeddedness fell slightly by 0.08 standard deviations, but when violent masculinity endorsement decreased over time, gang embeddedness dropped by 0.38 standard deviations. This difference was marginally significant.

The t test examining the association between change in endorsement of overall traditional masculinity and change in gang embeddedness was not statistically significant. For those whose endorsement of traditional masculinity increased, gang embeddedness declined by a mean of 0.10 standard deviations; for those whose endorsement of traditional masculinity decreased, gang embeddedness declined by a mean of 0.30 standard deviations. While not statistically significant,

gang embeddedness decreased much more when traditional masculinity endorsement decreased than when it increased, making it appear that they tend to decline together.



Of the traditional masculinity subscales reported in Table 5 and Figure 2, change in endorsement of self-reliance had the clearest association with change in gang embeddedness, being marginally statistically significant at $p<0.10$. For those whose endorsement of self-reliance increased, GE decreased slightly by a mean of 0.08 standard deviations; for those whose endorsement of self-reliance decreased, GE dropped by a mean of 0.46 standard deviations. While gang embeddedness declined for both groups, it declined far more when self-reliance decreased. This t test indicates that decreasing endorsement of self-reliance is associated with decreasing gang embeddedness.

When looking at the results of the t tests all together, a pattern emerges. (See Figure 2 for visualization.) There were only two marginally significant results; nonetheless, a pattern for most

of the masculinity types is that an increase in that masculinity endorsement over time is associated with a small decrease in gang embeddedness, while a decrease in that masculinity endorsement over time corresponded with a much larger decrease in gang embeddedness. (The exceptions here are homophobia and stoicism.) The t test results as a whole suggest that gang embeddedness and most types of masculinity endorsement decline together over time.

OLS First Difference Model Results

I used OLS first difference models to test associations between change in masculinities and change in gang embeddedness over time, with an initial model testing masculinities change only and a fully specified model with theoretical time-varying controls. The results of the OLS first difference models can be found in Tables 6 and 7. Table 6 includes the overall traditional masculinity scale, while Table 7 includes the five masculinity subscales. These models include individuals with 0 change over time in masculinities, unlike the t tests.

Table 6: OLS First Difference Models Predicting Gang Embeddedness Change using Traditional Masculinity Scale

	Model 1		Model 2	
	Masculinities change only		Masculinities change and time-varying controls change	
	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE
Change in violent masculinity endorsement	0.215**	0.066	0.184*	0.076
Change in traditional masculinity endorsement	0.242*	0.094	0.264*	0.123
Theoretical time-varying controls				
Change in offending			0.087	0.073
Change in conflicts with others			0.150#	0.082
Change in unstructured socializing			0.096	0.085
Change in criminal identity			-0.045	0.089
Change in time with family			-0.093	0.067
Constant	-0.209		-0.183	
R^2	0.160		0.254	

Note: N = 70. SE = robust standard error. All change was calculated between standardized variables.
# p<.10. *p < .05. **p<.01.

Table 7: OLS First Difference Models Predicting Gang Embeddedness Change using Traditional Masculinity Subscales

	Model 1		Model 2	
	Masculinities change only		Masculinities change and time-varying controls change	
	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE
Change in violent masculinity endorsement	0.196**	0.071	0.165*	0.071
Change in traditional masculinity endorsement				
Change in breadwinning	0.144*	0.070	0.176**	0.064
Change in self-reliance	0.142#	0.083	0.030	0.100
Change in stoicism	0.044	0.065	0.060	0.068
Change in homophobia	0.033	0.099	0.048	0.103
Change in avoidance of femininity	0.169*	0.077	0.165#	0.085
Theoretical time-varying controls				
Change in offending			0.081	0.086
Change in conflicts with others			0.175#	0.091
Change in unstructured socializing			0.122	0.085
Change in criminal identity			-0.012	0.087
Change in time with family			-0.074	0.070
Constant	-0.236		-0.198	
R^2	0.230		0.328	

Note: N = 70. SE = robust standard error. All change was calculated between standardized variables.
# p<.10. *p < .05. **p<.01.

Both Table 6 and Table 7 show a statistically significant and positive association between change in endorsement of violence-oriented masculinity and change in gang embeddedness. According to the fully specified effect sizes, for a one standard deviation decrease over time in endorsement of violent masculinity, gang embeddedness decreases over time by between 0.17 and 0.18 standard deviations. This positive relationship between change in endorsement of violent masculinity and change in gang embeddedness is consistent with the t test results.

Change in endorsement of traditional masculinity was significantly and positively associated with change in gang embeddedness, as shown in Table 6. The fully specified model shows that for each one standard deviation decrease in traditional masculinity endorsement over time, gang embeddedness decreases by 0.26 standard deviations over time. Furthermore, two

traditional masculinity subscales were significantly and positively associated with gang embeddedness change: breadwinning and avoidance of femininity. For each one standard deviation decrease in breadwinning endorsement over time, gang embeddedness decreases by 0.18 standard deviations over time; for each one standard deviation decrease in endorsement of avoidance of femininity over time, gang embeddedness decreases by 0.17 standard deviations over time, albeit it is marginally significant. All other coefficients for other traditional masculinity subscales were positive as well, but not statistically significant.

Together, the t test results and the OLS first difference model results show generally that as endorsement of violence-oriented and traditional masculinities decrease over time, gang embeddedness decreases over time. The t tests showed a significant result for change in self-reliance endorsement, although this became non-significant when controlling for other variables in the fully specified OLS model. On the other hand, change in endorsement of overall traditional masculinity, breadwinning, and avoidance of femininity became statistically significant once controlling for other variables, showing that these variables are positively associated with gang embeddedness change and accordingly decline during gang disengagement. In addition, both analyses showed the same significant positive relationship between violent masculinity endorsement change and gang embeddedness change.

Research Question 3: Are changes in individuals' endorsement of gang embeddedness associated with changes in their endorsement of masculinities, with masculinities change as the dependent variables?

Analytic Strategy

In contrast to the prior research question, research question 3 treats masculinities change as the dependent variables while examining the relationship between gang embeddedness and masculinity change. The same analytic methods of a series of t tests and OLS first difference

models were used. The effect sizes when masculinities change and gang embeddedness change are dependent variables versus independent variables can be compared and can clarify the temporal order of the relationship between masculinity change and gang embeddedness change.

The same sample of 70 who completed both survey waves were used. The standardized change scores discussed in the prior section were employed, in addition to the same type of dichotomous variable dividing individuals who underwent gang embeddedness change into those who increased and those who decreased over time. Similarly to the process already described in the prior section, five individuals who did not change their gang embeddedness over time were excluded from the t tests. The t tests compared standardized changes to various types of masculinities endorsement between those gang embeddedness decreased and increased over time.

Seven OLS first difference models were run with these dependent variables (DV), with one for each model: Traditional masculinity endorsement change, violent masculinity endorsement change, breadwinning endorsement change, self-reliance endorsement change, stoicism endorsement change, homophobia endorsement change, and avoidance of femininity endorsement change. Change in gang embeddedness was the main independent variable for each. Control variables were based on theory and model fit. For violent masculinity change as DV, time-varying controls relating to crime and gang involvement were included (offending, unstructured socializing, conflicts with others, criminal identity, and time with family). Offending was also included as a control for traditional masculinity change as DV and avoidance of femininity change as DV, because traditional masculinity is theorized to include willingness to use violence (Schippers 2007), and young men who avoid fighting are often accused of being feminine (King and Swain 2022; Reid 2017; Wilkinson 2001). In models with masculinity

subscales as DV, change in all the other masculinity subscales were included as controls because they were in theory related to each other and related to gang embeddedness. Finally, unstructured socializing change was included as a control in all the models because it improved model fit. (See the section on research question one for an in-depth description of how I tested for model fit.) Robust standard errors were used, and the variance inflation factor was examined to ensure there was no multicollinearity among masculinities subscales. I also ran other versions of these models which included all of the crime related variables in all models, but they did not improve model fit, did not substantially change the effect sizes, and were theoretically dubious in being related to masculinity change.

T Test Results

Table 8 and the corresponding Figure 3 display the mean change in masculinities endorsement as gang embeddedness increased/decreased over time. For those whose gang embeddedness increased over time, violent masculinity endorsement increased by a mean of 0.31 standard deviations; for those whose gang embeddedness decreased over time, violent masculinity endorsement decreased by a mean of 0.19 standard deviations. This difference is statistically significant and indicates that changes in gang embeddedness over time are positively associated with changes in violent masculinity endorsement.

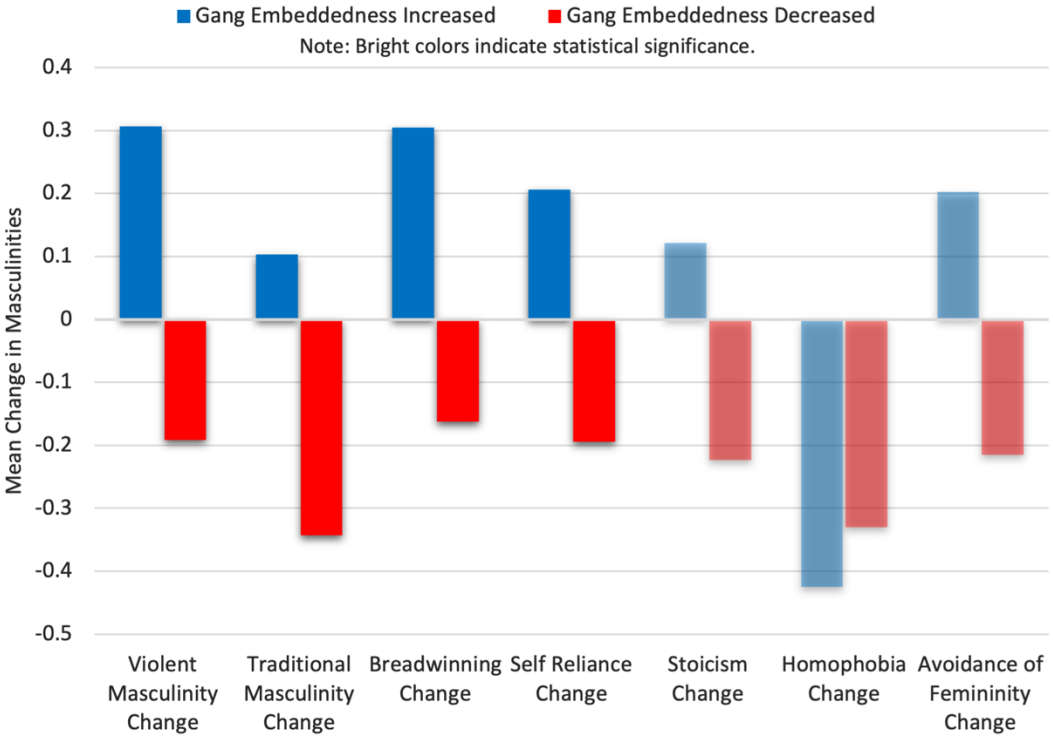
Gang embeddedness change largely had a positive relationship with traditional masculinity change, including for most of its subscales (the exception being homophobia). For those whose gang embeddedness increased, traditional masculinity endorsement increased by a mean of 0.10 standard deviations; for those whose gang embeddedness decreased, traditional masculinity endorsement decreased by a mean of 0.34 standard deviations. This was statistically

Table 8: Mean Change in Masculinities as Gang Embeddedness Increased or Decreased

	Gang Embeddedness Increased		Gang Embeddedness Decreased		
	Mean	SE	Mean	SE	Sig.
Violent Masculinity Change	0.307	0.184	-0.191	0.136	*
Traditional Masculinity Change	0.103	0.205	-0.343	0.113	*
Breadwinning Change	0.305	0.215	-0.162	0.156	#
Self-reliance Change	0.206	0.130	-0.194	0.144	#
Stoicism Change	0.122	0.249	-0.223	0.177	
Homophobia Change	-0.425	0.166	-0.330	0.157	
Avoidance of Femininity Change	0.203	0.266	-0.215	0.172	

Note: N=65. This only includes participants who completed both survey waves. Five were excluded because their gang embeddedness change was 0. All change was calculated between standardized variables.
SE = standard error.
#p<.10. *p < .05.

Figure 3: Mean Change in Masculinities as Gang Embeddedness Increased or Decreased



significant and suggests decreasing gang embeddedness corresponds to decreasing traditional masculinity endorsement. This pattern also held true for four of the five traditional masculinity

subscales and was marginally significant for breadwinning change and self-reliance change. For those whose GE increased, self-reliance endorsement increased by a mean of 0.10 standard deviations; for those whose GE decreased, self-reliance endorsement decreased by a mean of 0.34 standard deviations. For those whose GE increased, endorsement of breadwinning increased by a mean of 0.31 standard deviations; for those whose GE decreased, endorsement of breadwinning decreased by a mean of 0.16 standard deviations.

These t tests indicate that as gang embeddedness rises or falls over time, so does endorsement of violent and traditional masculinity. How does this pattern compare to the t test results from the prior research question, when gang embeddedness was the DV rather than the independent variable? Generally, there was a clearer relationship when gang embeddedness change was the independent variable and masculinities change the dependent variables, rather than the other way around. The t test results from the prior question usually showed (slightly) negative mean values for gang embeddedness change when masculinities endorsement increased, while the current question's results usually showed positive masculinities change when gang embeddedness increased, demonstrating a clearer positive relationship when masculinities change were the dependent variables. (See Appendix D for a side-by-side comparison of Figures 2 and 3 which visualize all t test results.) In addition, the t tests with masculinities change as DV had higher levels of statistical significance than the t tests with gang embeddedness change as DV. Overall, the t test results suggest a clearer positive relationship between gang embeddedness change and masculinities change when masculinities change is the dependent variable.

OLS First Difference Model Results

Table 9 shows the results of the seven OLS first difference models with masculinities change as dependent variables. Gang embeddedness change is significantly and positively

associated with traditional masculinity endorsement change, breadwinning endorsement change, avoidance of femininity endorsement change, and violent masculinity endorsement change. Gang embeddedness change is also positively related to change in the other masculinity subscales, although not statistically significant. Across the board, effect sizes were greater when gang embeddedness change was the independent variable and masculinities change the dependent variables. For a one standard deviation decrease in gang embeddedness over time:

- Traditional masculinity endorsement decreases by 0.34 standard deviations; in comparison, the effect size when gang embeddedness change was the DV was 0.26 (both statistically significant).
- Breadwinning endorsement decreases by 0.35 standard deviations; in comparison, the effect size when gang embeddedness change was the DV was 0.18 (both significant).
- Endorsement of avoidance of femininity decreases by 0.39 standard deviations; in comparison, the effect size when gang embeddedness change was the DV was 0.17. The former was significant, and the latter was marginally significant.
- Endorsement of violence-oriented masculinity decreases by 0.34 standard deviations; in comparison, the effect size when gang embeddedness change was the DV was 0.18 (both statistically significant).

Albeit non-significant in all fully specified models, the effect sizes for change in self-reliance, stoicism, and homophobia were also greater with masculinities change as the dependent variables and gang embeddedness as the independent variable. For self-reliance change, 0.14 versus 0.03; for stoicism change, 0.14 versus 0.06; for homophobia change, 0.08 versus 0.05.

Table 9: OLS First Difference Models Predicting Masculinities Change Using Gang Embeddedness Change

	Dependent Variables (each column a separate model) Coefficients (SEs) listed						
Independent Variables	Δ Traditional Masculinity	Δ Breadwinning	Δ Self-Reliance	Δ Stoicism	Δ Homophobia	Δ Avoidance of Femininity	Δ Violent Masculinity
Δ **Gang Embeddedness**	.336* (.129)	.349* (.147)	.144 (.115)	.144 (.167)	.078 (.153)	.388* (.177)	.338* (.139)
Δ Traditional Masculinity	--	--	--	--	--	--	.045 (.260)
Δ Breadwinning	--	--	.015 (.114)	-.202 (.159)	-.161 (.117)	.005 (.143)	--
Δ Self-Reliance	--	.023 (.173)	--	-.271# (.160)	-.133 (.134)	.097 (.157)	--
Δ Stoicism	--	-.159 (.110)	-.140# (.083)	--	.063 (.107)	.190 (.163)	--
Δ Homophobia	--	-.201 (.148)	-.109 (.110)	.100 (.164)	--	.282 (.181)	--
Δ Avoidance of Feminin.	--	-.017 (.116)	.081 (.084)	.160 (.173)	.191# (.114)	--	--
Δ Violent Masculinity	.050 (.191)	.141 (.156)	.089 (.113)	.333 (.210)	-.139 (.129)	-.166 (.169)	--
Δ Unstructured Socializing	-.181* (.082)	-.243# (.125)	.122 (.099)	-.122 (.112)	-.090 (.106)	-.175# (.104)	.073 (.114)
Δ Offending	.016 (.076)	--	--	--	--	.231# (.133)	.049 (.076)
Δ Conflicts with Others	--	--	--	--	--	--	-.020 (.093)
Δ Time with Family	--	--	--	--	--	--	.037 (.107)
Δ Criminal Identity	--	--	--	--	--	--	.110 (.100)
Constant	-.087	.014	-.047	-.009	-.305	.120	.143

Note: N = 67 to 70. SE = robust standard error. Δ refers to change in that variable over time. All change was calculated between standardized variables. Change in gang embeddedness is the key explanatory variable, while the other variables are time-varying controls. Not all controls were used for every model, as is shown with a – symbol when the variable was not used in the model as a control variable. The numerical values show the coefficient and SE for each independent variable in each specified model.

# p<.10. *p < .05.

These results shed light on the temporal order of the relationship between masculinities change and gang embeddedness change.[25] Universally, there are higher effect sizes when gang embeddedness change predicts masculinities change rather than the other way around. This evidence suggests that gang embeddedness change may affect endorsement of masculinities more than masculinity change affects gang embeddedness, at least on average. However, these results should not be overstated. This method of shedding light on the temporal order is not as definitive as, for example, a 3+ wave study which can establish more precisely the effect of one variable on another over time, which I discuss further in the limitations part of the discussion chapter.

In this chapter, I have discussed the three quantitative research questions, analytic strategies to address them, and the quantitative results regarding the relationship between gang embeddedness (change) and masculinities (change). Now, I turn to the qualitative methods to address this same topic.

[25] In addition, change in offending was positively associated with change in avoidance of femininity with marginal significance, which may be noteworthy in a sample of only 70. Criminologists in future may want to examine the connection between offending and avoidance of femininity further.

CHAPTER 5: Qualitative Methods

The qualitative data was collected from in-depth interviews with select participants of the GRID evaluation surveys. These participants were a good sample for exploring masculinities and gang disengagement processes because they were all referred to a gang disengagement program. Denver and its surrounding suburbs were the setting for data collection. Although Denver is not known for its gang activity to non-locals, it certainly has enough gang activity and gang violence to warrant the creation and continued funding of GRID (the Gang Reduction Initiative of Denver) and many other gang intervention programs. Gangs have been active in Denver for decades, including in an infamous incident wherein Denver Broncos player Darrent Williams was murdered in 2009.

I had access to gang membership statuses for all follow-up survey participants using the survey data. From there, I identified potential candidates for the in-depth interviews, looking for 1) current gang members 2) former members, and 3) people that seemed to be in the process of disengaging from their gang based on their survey responses. I aimed to interview people with varying membership statuses and at different stages of disengagement in order to understand the whole process of disengagement. In addition, I aimed to have age diversity and racial/ethnic diversity in the qualitative sample. For ease of data collection, good candidates for in-depth interviews had been easy to contact and willing to participate for the follow-up GRID survey, with my hope being that the pattern would repeat for the qualitative interviews. I aimed to collect at least 10 in-depth interviews, preferably in-person interviews, which I hoped would allow participants to be more open to sharing experiences.

I attempted to contact 15 potential participants by phone, and I was able to conduct interviews with 10 of them. Because I had targeted specific participants that I believed would be

easy to contact and willing to participate, I needed to call the participants only once or a handful of times before securing their interviews. Of the other five participants I attempted to contact but did not interview, I reached four of them by phone, and all expressed interest or agreed to participate in an interview. However, these four either did not show up for their scheduled interview or evaded contact with me after our initial conversation. No individuals verbally refused to participate. I chose to end interview collection after 10 interviews were complete for practical reasons. I did not have time to conduct more interviews at that point, as I needed to move on to other parts of the dissertation process.

Eight of the interviews were conducted during in-person meetings, while two were conducted by phone. Participants were given a $50 Amazon gift card incentive upon completion of the interview. (I received two small grants to fund gift card incentives and interview transcription.) For in-person interviews, I requested public meeting spaces such as coffee shops, casual restaurants, or libraries, for safety reasons. However, due to lack of easy transportation for some participants, sometimes our meeting spaces were not in public. Three interviews were conducted at casual restaurants, one in a public park, two in the participants' homes, one at the participant's school with permission from school staff, and one at the participant's halfway house with permission from staff. Additional safety precautions I took were purposefully not bringing my laptop to the interviews so as not to be carrying a valuable item, bringing hidden pepper spray, and providing the name of the participant and address of the interview to a colleague when traveling to interviews. Moreover, I used official judicial data that we had collected as part of the GRID evaluation to inspect participants' recent criminal charges in a few situations—one being conducting the interview at the person's home, which came with increased safety risk. I wanted to ensure that there were no charges that raised concerns of violence toward women if I was

going to be in their home. I also inspected the criminal record of another participant who was continually making somewhat inappropriate remarks when we spoke on the phone to schedule the interview. He had been charged with stalking, which concerned me, so I conducted a phone interview with him instead. Finally, I also conducted another interview via phone for safety reasons, as I had remembered that the participant had made many inappropriate comments during the GRID phone surveys, including repeatedly attempting to ask me on a date.

I attempted to interview current gang members, people in the midst of disengagement, and former members based on their prior survey responses, but reality was not so neat and tidy. Every single in-depth interview participant who had been a current gang member during their follow-up GRID survey—five in total—had actually begun disengaging or even fully left the gang in the interim before their in-depth interview, as I found out during the interviews. Nearly all qualitative interviews were conducted between 1 and 2.5 years after that participant's follow-up GRID survey. This pattern led to me repeatedly interviewing individuals I believed would be current members, only to discover they were not anymore. In the end, I was not able to interview any current members. I interviewed two people who were still in the disengagement process—one early in the process and one late—and eight people who had fully left the gang. However, this means that the strength of the data now lies in having disengagement narratives for all ten individuals.

The qualitative sample consisted of 10 individuals with substantial age diversity but not as much racial diversity as I had hoped for. One participant was a juvenile at 15 years old; five participants were between 18 and 21 years old; and four participants were between 31 and 43 years old. This age diversity is helpful because disengaging a gang as a younger adolescent, older adolescent, or mature adult may involve different issues. The mature adults interviewed

had all been recently released from jail or prison, so their disengagement journeys still occurred recently. Regarding racial and ethnic diversity, I interviewed six Latino participants, two White participants, one Black participant, and one half-Latino, half-White participant. I had attempted to interview three additional Black participants, who had all agreed to an interview. Unfortunately, none of these individuals followed through. They either did not show up to their scheduled interview or evaded my contact attempts thereafter.

At the beginning of each interview, I first made sure they understood the study and gave informed consent. I then asked for their permission to audio record, and all consented to the recording. Once the interview officially started, I attempted to briefly develop a rapport by asking them a little about themselves. I had met only one of these participants in person before, but it was possible that I had prior contact with them by phone during the quantitative data collection. The interviews were semi-structured. The questions consisted of four sections: joining their gang, leaving their gang (if applicable), their relationship with their GRID outreach worker (if applicable), and their ideas of masculinity and how it may relate to gangs/gang leaving. (See Appendix E for the list of in-depth interview questions.) Of course, the loose structure meant other questions were asked based on conversational flow. The interviews lasted between 20 minutes and 1.5 hours. Overall, the participants appeared very engaged in the interviews and happy to discuss their pasts and their views in depth. However, it seemed that the participants in the two phone interviews were less engaged—one was at his work site and was operating machinery while talking to me. All participants were thankfully willing to discuss difficult and sensitive topics such as motives for gang leaving, traumatic experiences associated with gang membership (being shot, friends' deaths, etc.), and the emotional burden of having hurt others in the past. Several participants told me after the interview that the conversation had been cathartic

for them. One participant, after I explained the reasoning behind my questions post-interview, became very excited and said that he believed masculinity change was absolutely necessary to leave a gang.

There was one unusual instance of data collection. I interviewed an adult participant, and months later I read his transcript and realized I needed some clarification on key points. I contacted his mother in an attempt to reach him; instead, she informed me that he had tragically died of an overdose. We spoke for some time on the phone, and eventually I asked her if she could clarify some things about his gang disengagement journey. She was eager to oblige. She said that she had been very close to him, and she did clarify the points where I had further questions. I note this when quoting that participant in the findings chapter.

I did my best to consider my positionality as a White, educated woman while conducting interviews. I framed my questions as being from an outsider's perspective, and I emphasized that I needed their help to understand certain things. It was clear to participants from my university background and general demeanor that I was a complete outsider to the gang world in Denver. My interpretation of how my outsider status affected the data shared with me was that it was beneficial. They may have felt more comfortable or felt able to speak more freely with an outsider unconnected to their own social circle, especially as many of the participants were quite angry at their former gangs or regretful of their past actions. There was no indication that anyone felt uncomfortable discussing topics relating to gangs or crime with me, and, in fact, they openly discussed many details about their gang past. They often also discussed details about crime in general, but I rarely asked for information about specific crimes that had been committed. There was no indication that any participants felt worried that I would judge them or disclose their information to criminal justice agencies. In addition, my gender did not appear to impede their

discussions of masculinity, and it may indeed have helped them share their opinions about what it meant to "be a man" without fear of homosocial rejection. Several participants also made statements in the interviews that were sexist, misogynistic, or indicated patriarchal attitudes, so my gender did not appear to impede that kind of discussion, either. I had been slightly worried that my age of 29 years would be viewed as untrustworthy for teenage participants, but that fear proved to be unfounded, as the teenage and mature participants appeared to be equally honest and vulnerable.

I also considered reflexivity to try to limit my own biases from impacting the qualitative data. Coming into this project, I had a bias in favor of masculinity change being important in gang disengagement, based on the prior qualitative studies arguing that masculinity change had been part of the disengagement process, and based on my own worldview of gender being a key social structure influencing behavior. I also was very interested in whether participants thought employment was important to masculinity (piqued by my quantitative results), but I did not want leading questions. I tried my best to construct interview questions without bias, and I checked the questions with multiple committee members. Nearly all the interview questions asked participants to come up with answers to broad, open-ended questions (for example, "What do you think it means to be a man?" rather than "Do you think employment is important to being a man?").

I made sure to order my questions in such a way that avoided priming participants to overly emphasize masculinity in their disengagement narrative. I first asked them to discuss their whole disengagement narrative and then their views toward masculinity before I asked whether masculinity played a part in the disengagement. The only two leading questions I asked were always at the very end of a line of questions or the end of the interview, allowing participants to

speak freely before being pointed in a specific direction. These questions were "Were your ideas about being a man connected to your decision to leave the gang?" and "Did your GRID outreach worker teach you anything about being a man?" These questions were still important to ask, but their presence did not bias any of the participants' prior words. Throughout each interview, I did not verbally agree with or make value statements regarding participants' opinions; I simply reflected their words back to them so that they understood I was listening ("It sounds like your father was a role model for you," etc.)

My reasoning strategy in the analysis was twofold. First, I used deductive reasoning in an unusual type of qualitative theory testing. I analyzed patterns in the data to determine whether they supported existing theories of gang disengagement relating to masculinities, such as the masculinity maturation theory (Leverso and Hess 2021). I particularly was interested in whether participants' narratives of disengagement supported the idea that masculinity change could *precipitate* disengagement, as argued by Deuchar and Weide (2018), for instance. I closely analyzed participants' narratives to determine whether masculinity change occurred and, if so, if it had appeared to influence the participants' disengagement processes. (Please note that I do not make claims of causal inference based on these narratives, only examining whether the narratives demonstrate a *potential* causal link, which would encourage future research on this topic using appropriate methods of causal inference.) In addition, prior work had established two potentially competing hypotheses of the type of masculinities that disengaging gang members gravitated toward: traditional or positive. I analyzed the data to explore whether participants' new masculinities were more consistent with traditional masculinity, positive masculinity, or something else entirely.

Secondly, I used an abductive reasoning strategy to find additional patterns regarding masculinities, gangs, and gang disengagement (Deterding and Waters 2018; Timmermans and Tavory 2012). Abductive reasoning includes the idea of being prepared to find any pattern in the data, even surprising ones, while having guiding questions. If the data patterns had supported prior theory, my contributions would serve to fine tune our understanding of masculinities among disengaging gang members. If the data patterns were surprising and not consistent with prior theory, I would construct my own theoretical framework of how masculinities may or may not be involved in the disengagement process. (In fact, data patterns largely did fit with prior theory, as is detailed in the findings chapter.) I particularly used abductive reasoning in finding some emergent themes in participants' constructions of masculinity while they had been active in the gang. I had not originally planned on highlighting masculinity within the gang, but interesting patterns emerged in the data that needed to be discussed.

The interviews were transcribed for data analysis by a professional transcription service and reviewed by me to fix any errors. I protected participants' identities by using pseudonyms and providing limited identifying information about them. Transcripts and audio recordings were stored on a protected server, and transcripts were analyzed on that server as well. I also used pseudonyms for GRID outreach workers or other intervention workers who were named and discussed in the interviews.

The qualitative data was analyzed using the software MAXQDA. I first read through each interview and coded large sections by overall topic, such as reasons for disengagement, broad types of masculinity (positive, traditional, violence-oriented, gang), discussions of whether the participant was still disengaging or had fully left, and considerations about what the participant had learned from his GRID outreach worker (if applicable). After reading and topic coding each

interview, I wrote a memo discussing my initial thoughts about that interview holistically, especially regarding in what ways the participant had changed their constructions of masculinity over time and the degree to which masculinity change had precipitated disengagement according to the participant's own narrative. I also noted the degree to which the participant had learned about masculinity from his outreach worker, if applicable. Often, I discussed other thoughts in the memo, such as connections with disengagement theories.

I then read through each interview with a more fine-tuned lens, applying analytic coding for specific attributes of masculinity (e.g., "good family relationships"), emergent themes (e.g., "masculine role models"), and clear examples of disengagement theories (e.g., "masculinity maturation"). I organized these codes upon a hierarchical tree of nodes. For example, there was an overall topic of reasons for disengagement. Within this topic was the theme of traditional masculinity, and within traditional masculinity were nine codes of various traditionally masculine attributes. After all this was done, I assessed which codes were most common. I also organized the participants into three groups: masculinity change appeared to precipitate disengagement, masculinity change did not precipitate disengagement, and little masculinity change occurred. For the former two, I categorized each participant into whether they were moving toward traditional masculinity, positive masculinity, or both. I wrote memos throughout this process whenever an overarching pattern occurred to me.

Because I ended interview collection after 10 interviews for practical reasons, I cannot confidently say that I reached code saturation or meaning saturation (see Hennink, Kaiser, and Marconi 2017). I may have come close to reaching code saturation, as new codes and emergent themes had slowed substantially toward the final interviews analyzed. Hennink et al. (2017) reached code saturation after only 9 interviews in their rigorous study of saturation. If I were to

analyze a new set of interviews on this same topic, I would re-use the codes generated from this set, and I believe they would encompass most (though not all) of the themes. Meaning saturation tends to require more interviews to accomplish (Hennink et al. 2017), and, unfortunately, I do not believe I came close to reaching it. I had wanted to conduct additional interviews beyond the 10; with each interview I continued to develop a richer understanding of the topic.

This chapter has covered the qualitative methods in this mixed-methods study, including discussion of setting and sample, data collection procedures, and analytic strategy. Next chapter, I move on to discuss the qualitative findings.

CHAPTER 6: Qualitative Findings

My dissertation explores and tests the importance of masculinities in the gang disengagement process using a mixed methods approach. In the following chapter, I detail the findings from in-depth interviews conducted with 10 participants who had all identified as gang members at one point and had all disengaged or were currently in the process of disengaging. These were the questions that guided my qualitative interviews:

1) How do active gang members construct masculinity?
2) How do disengaging and former gang members construct masculinity?
3) If masculinities are changing surrounding disengagement, what role does masculinity change play in gang disengagement?

The chapter is divided into two major sections: one examining how masculinity change may be part of the process of gang disengagement, and the other exploring the construction of masculinity among active gang members.

The Role of Masculinity Change in Gang Disengagement

The primary goal of the 10 interviews I conducted was to explore the role of individuals' changes in masculinity practices, masculine identities, and attitudes toward masculine qualities in the process of gang disengagement. All participants had identified as gang members previously and had then disengaged or were still in the disengagement process at the time of interview. As interviews were collected, it became clear that nearly all the participants *had* changed their masculinity accomplishment surrounding their disengagement from the gang. The major questions then became 1) whether this masculinity change had seemingly helped precipitate the disengagement or not and 2) how the new masculinity was constructed (traditional, positive, or some other version of masculinity). In the section, I detail the

disengagement narratives of most of the participants, with special attention to these major questions. I also examine connections between their narratives and existing theories of gang disengagement and criminal desistance, as well as discuss any masculinity influences from GRID outreach workers or other intervention workers. First, I explore participants' narratives which portrayed masculinity change as helping precipitate gang disengagement. Later, I explore the narratives of participants for whom masculinity change played no role in disengagement, although masculinity change still occurred for most of them. Finally, I discuss the one young participant who has not (yet) changed his masculinity accomplishment despite leaving his gang.

Masculinity Change Precipitating Gang Disengagement

Of the ten total participants, six discussed masculinity change as a factor precipitating gang disengagement. Four of these participants newly endorsed aspects of *both* traditional masculinity and positive masculinity before disengaging, while one newly endorsed only positive masculinity, and one, only traditional masculinity. I discuss in detail those four participants who moved toward both traditional and positive masculinities during their disengagement process, which was the modal category. As discussed in prior chapters, positive masculinity can include good relationships with family members, being a good father, caring and kindness toward others, empathy, spirituality, emotional openness, community service, and generativity[26]; traditional masculinity can include employment, financial success, and breadwinning, avoidance of femininity, homophobia, stoicism, self-reliance/independence, and heterosexual relationships.

One of those for whom masculinity change seemingly played a major role in gang disengagement was Christian, an 18-year-old Latino man.[27] Christian was still in the midst of the

[26] Generativity is aiding people who are in the same position the ex-offender used to inhabit (Maruna 2001).

[27] A pseudonym. All names here are pseudonyms.

disengagement process, where he was slowly fading away from gang activities without angering his gang. When I asked Christian about distancing himself from the gang, he brought up masculinity without prompting.

EW: At what point did you decide to start distancing yourself, start moving away from that lifestyle?

Christian: Well, when I had recently got in a relationship. And I'm not in a relationship anymore, but recently when I had got in a relationship, my ex had turned out to be pregnant. And so a part of that, inside of me, decided to change my life. And one time, like on my 17th birthday, my father called me [from prison] and started talking to me in a way my father had never talked to me before, about becoming a man. So, a part of me just started changing and started realizing that if I don't break a chain, I'm going to end up in jail. My son's going to end up in jail, his son's going to end up, it's just going to go on. So I got on my knees, I surrendered to God, I prayed to him. My grandma's boyfriend ended up helping me out into get in the construction business going on. And lately, I've just been trying to hold it down. So, I don't really look at getting into trouble anymore...When I was thinking in my mind I was having a child, that's when I started to stop doing all the bullshit.

Christian later elaborated on what his father told him about becoming a man:

> He just told me, "You need to step up. You need to be a man. You need to be there for your wife. You need to be there for your child. You're basically married to her because you guys are living with each other."... So, he just started telling me, "Get off your feet, start finding a job, start doing you. Try to find an apartment, try to take care of you and your child. And just keep your head up," basically.

In Christian's narrative, masculinity change was one of the major precipitating factors for his gang disengagement. His realization that he was going to be a father changed his view of the type of masculinity he needed to accomplish, alongside his own father's advice about the adult masculinity that he should be striving towards. His father served as a masculine role model for him. Then, finding employment as a construction worker seemed to solidify a new type of masculinity accomplishment for Christian.

The new masculinity practices and qualities that he embraced contained some aspects of both positive masculinity and traditional masculinity. Wanting to be a good father and prevent

the cycle of incarceration from father to son is an aspect of positive masculinity, as is the spiritual surrender[28] he experienced. However, finding employment in skilled, blue-collar construction work is thought to be traditionally masculine and important in successful disengagement (see Leverso and Hess 2021). Christian's father also encouraged other aspects of traditional masculinity; he encouraged breadwinning for Christian's girlfriend and their child when he discussed the need to "take care" of them by finding a job and an apartment. His father also emphasized the adult nature of their romantic heterosexual relationship by referring to Christian's girlfriend as his "wife" while Christian was only 17 years old. Christian took this advice seriously, and, according to him, it impacted his masculine practices and levels of gang involvement.

Christian's male cousin was an additional masculine role model for him aside from his father, who couldn't physically be present in Christian's life due to being incarcerated:

> I looked at my cousin, because my cousin doing better than me. And I was like, "If he can do it, then I can do it. There's no difference between us. He's a man. I'm a man. There's no difference between us." So I started seeing how my cousin was moving, and I just started realizing the things he was moving, how low-key he was about his stuff, the way he stepped. And I just started following his pace...My cousin had a talk with me one day and he was like, "I've escaped from jail. I fought too many times in jail...As long as you have faith in God...as long as you have faith in what you believe in, then your dreams will come towards you...But if you keep fucking up, and you keep going into the wrong, you're not going to see nothing but darkness in your path." So, I looked at that as some big words to me.

Christian's cousin, serving as a masculine role model, encouraged Christian's spirituality and directly connected it to a path of gang disengagement and criminal desistance. Christian himself characterized his cousin's spiritual behavior as that of "a man."

[28] Ross Deuchar's (2018) work details the positive masculinity centered on spirituality that many of his participants experienced in their gang disengagement processes.

Christian also discussed his conceptions of appropriate masculinity at the current time in his life, which had continued to develop more deeply toward aspects of both traditional and positive. In particular, he valued being a breadwinner to his mother and other family members and being financially successful:

EW: What do you think it means to be a man?

Christian: Taking care of your family. Making sure the people that taking care of you got everything right. Rather, if my mom don't have fifty bucks to feed everybody in the house, I got to be there and be like, "Here's fifty bucks, Mom, for you." Spending fifty bucks on me for back to school clothes, back to school shoes. Getting me a haircut. Sometimes I got to ask my mom to lend me some money, too. So, it's just taking care of your people, being responsible, always showing up on time...And I also feel like owning your own stuff, too, is becoming a man. Like I said, I've never had too much money in my pockets. But to the point now, I can say I do got money.

I asked Christian to clarify whether by "taking care" of his family, whether he meant also taking care of them in ways other than financial:

> Yeah. Spending time with them, too. Like my grandma sometimes need me to go over there and wash her clothes for her. Take her sheets off her bed sometimes for her because she has accidents. I sometimes buy her cat food. I buy her cat litter... Sometimes my mom's struggling, too, or buying my little brother Pampers. So I got to buy him Pampers. So, it's like just becoming a father figure to everyone.

These practices are more evocative of positive masculinity, wherein spending time with and having good relationships with family is emphasized, as are caring and acts of service toward others. This line of thought continued when I asked what respect currently meant to him.

> You can gain respect in different ways. But in the way I was gaining respect was just being in the streets, when there's other ways to gain respect. By either owning a business, being kind and politeful to people...Doing something for the community, showing your respect to the community. Taking care of, say, if you see a homeless family on the streets, some little babies or whatever, helping them out with whatever they need. That's showing them respect. Just basically, trying to make sure everyone in your community is okay.

This quote illustrates other key aspects of positive masculinity, serving the community and being polite and kind. These themes, along with having good relationships with family, were repeated in interviews with other participants as well.

Christian was assigned a GRID outreach worker and met with him for a couple months. However, Christian had a bad experience with his outreach worker. He explicitly said that he had not learned anything from his outreach worker, nor did he think that his outreach worker gave any good advice. Everything in Christian's disengagement journey occurred naturally, without help from an intervention program.

Another Latino young man, 19-year-old Kit, went through a gang disengagement journey influenced by masculinity change. Kit fully left the gang. He described his new views on masculinity as inspired by his father, which he later made clear had influenced his disengagement decision.

EW: What is your idea of what it means to be a man?

Kit: Well, from what I've seen from my dad, I feel like my dad's a good representation of a man. He takes care of his family, he provides for his family. He works every day for his family. He's respected, he's always looking for new opportunities in the future to set up your family for better positions. Right now we're going to go get a house for my big sister, and after that we're going to have three different houses. So that means if my parents were ever to pass away, which I hope that doesn't happen, my sister, me and my other sister would get a house. You know what I mean? So it's like he's always trying to make our lives better, which is what I'm trying to do. I feel like that's a good representation of a man being respectful and also brave and strong.

EW: Yeah...Are you thinking—obviously taking care of family financially—are you also thinking about emotionally as well?

Kit: Yeah, emotionally is very important as well, because back then, me and my dad didn't have that connection. And I feel like that's why I kind of joined the gang too, because I was looking for that kind of father figure. But after everything happened [discussed below], he really showed me that he's done so much for me. He's done so much for our family.

A little later, I asked Kit to clarify what he meant by being respectful in this context. He said:

> To be respectful is just be nice to everybody, treat everybody you want to be treated. I feel like, because everybody has bad days, everybody has their own life and their own problems that everybody's facing.

Kit's conception of adult masculinity, as inspired by his father, combines aspects of both traditional and positive masculinity. The discussion of breadwinning for family and daily employment are very much traditional masculinity, while having a strong emotional bond with family has been considered part of positive masculinity. His definition of being respectful included being kind and empathetic and is central to positive masculinity as well.

As an active gang member, Kit's conception of masculinity had been violence-oriented, overly concerned with revenge and retaliation. But around age 17, several events occurred that led to him considering disengagement (which he referenced in the above quote): being shot in the finger and subsequently being in the hospital, being arrested and incarcerated three times in juvenile facilities, and feeling emotionally unsupported by his gang during these events. While detained alone in an isolation cell with COVID for two straight weeks, he then had a realization about adult masculinity, influenced by his father's masculinity practices.

> Once I realized what a man really is, once I realized where you could actually be, it flipped a switch of me where it's like, you could always be better, and you could always grow. And being a man, it changed my view of the world because there are people here who aren't respectful and they don't have responsibilities, they're not stable and stuff like that. There's people that aren't grownups yet, but are older. And that helps me. The values of being a man helped me leave the gang because it just made me see that there are people out there who are really mature and grown up and respectful. And I just like a version of me being respectful, kind, and all of that, instead of a version where I was back then where it was disrespectful and stuff like that.

He then clarified when he had this realization, which occurred in the cell and was reinforced by his father upon release:

> It was during that isolation time and also when I got out of jail. Because then me and my father, we actually had a deep down talk about everything going on and it was like a

> civilized grown conversation...He was just like, "Why do you do it?". He's just so different for me because he came from [a Latin-American country] when he was like 20, 21 without my mom, with a kid in [that country]. And he brought them over here, created a whole family, and was on the way to get three houses....So he really shaped my view of being a man and how to carry myself from now on. He gave me that talk, and that talk was really something that I needed. I feel like I would always get that talk, but it was just a matter of me doing it.

In Kit's perceptions of adult masculinity, a new theme emerges that does not quite fit into traditional or positive masculinity: that of *maturity* and *responsibility*. Kit saw that active gang members didn't have responsibilities, were not stable, and "aren't grownups yet." He realized that he needed to leave his gang to become "really mature" and "grown up" in order to fit with age-appropriate adult masculinity. This theme is consistent with Leverso and Hess's (2021) theory of masculinity maturation, wherein aging gang members realize that gang behavior is contradictory to normative *adult* masculinity, and this theme of maturation appeared for seven of the participants.

It is also notable that Kit's father had tried to talk to him about becoming a man many times before, but he had not been cognitively open to internalizing the information. It seems that the isolation of the jail cell in addition to other push factors (being shot and feeling abandoned) finally opened his mind to the possibility of leaving the gang, and his "aha" moment regarding masculinity in concert with his father's talk perpetuated that idea.

Around this time, Kit was also being given GRID services from an outreach worker, Bill, who served as another masculine role model. Kit described how Bill further helped him realize the importance of family relationships and of being a respectful person, which Kit himself had already defined as part of masculinity:

> **Kit:** Bill, he helped me out a lot. Because he made me realize a lot and what your family could do for you and what gangs could do for you. A gang can do *half* the shit that your family could do for you, not even half...Bill helped me see that a lot because he was like, the first time I got arrested, he saw that nobody from my friends were there. And he was

telling me that your family is what's more important and you're focusing on the wrong things...Because he knew my mom as well. And when you see my mom, it makes me feel bad because she's so nice, and I put her through so much stuff that I didn't have to, and she had to go through that. The first time I got arrested, she was put in cuffs as well. And I would never, ever in a million years put my mom through that shit again, ever. Because it's just not worth it. And it traumatizes somebody and she was crying and you just have a lot of regrets when you grow up and you realize and you see, you have a lot of regrets.

EW: So...was there anything else that you learned from Bill?

Kit: Also how to be respectful. He seemed like a really respectable guy. He cared about his clients. He really cared. That's what's different. I feel like he really showed that he cared. He really wanted to see you do better and that's what helped me.

Bill influenced Kit's conceptions of masculinity toward a more positive version, although he had learned about similar positive practices from his father as well. As Kit was meeting with Bill at least from the time of his first arrest, Bill's influence appears to have been present throughout most if not all his disengagement process. The dual masculine role models of his father and his outreach worker changed his conception of masculinity, which Kit perceived as a precipitating factor in his disengagement.

Kevin, 35, is a half White, half Mexican man who was also successfully given GRID services. Kevin's narrative illustrates the importance of vulnerability, generativity, and service to the community as part of positive masculinity in gang disengagement. At the time that I talked to Kevin, he still identified as a gang member, but not an *active* gang member. Kevin was no longer involved with the gang, its activities, or its active members.

Kevin had been in prison for about 12 years, serving a sentence for a serious crime. While in prison, he began having doubts about his gang; he became displeased with perceived snitching, disloyalty within the gang, and his friends being killed. Once he was finally placed into a halfway house at age 31, he had an overwhelming feeling that he did not ever want to return to prison. Kevin primarily credited the treatment program at the halfway house with

giving him the tools to finally reduce gang involvement and desist from crime. The treatment consisted of individual therapy, group therapy, cognitive behavioral therapy, and substance abuse therapy. Kevin said his therapist, Nathan, became a masculine role model, teaching him the difference in meanings between a *man* and an *adult male* that resonated deeply with Kevin.

> At that time, I was a 30 something year old adult male, because at that time I wasn't a man. What being a man means to me is taking care of business the right way. Going and shooting someone is easy. Going and selling dope is easy. Going and robbing is easy. Getting up every day and going to work is hard...I'd say probably the person who taught me the most about being a man and not an adult male was Nathan, who was my therapist, and he was my one-on-one therapist and my group therapist at the halfway house...He was the one who gave me these ideas between an adult male and a man.

During therapy, Kevin embraced emotional openness and vulnerability, something he attributes his successful desistance to:

EW: I'm really interested in all this treatment because I know that you said it helped you.

Kevin: Yeah. It didn't just help me, it made me. And this is where I could differentiate myself from probably the other guys who were in there, and this is what I attribute my success to compared to other people who I was in there with who are not successful, they're all back in prison...When I was in this therapy and this treatment, even when it was the group therapy, I was just vulnerable, and I was honest. And it wasn't for anyone else, it was for me. I was scared because here I was, a 30 something year old adult male at that time who didn't have any work experience...So, I'm scared. And so, in those therapy sessions, I'd tell our therapist, his name was Nathan, I would just tell him, I'm scared bro. I'm a gang member. And I'm scared that when I'm out of here that that's what I'm going to do, because that's what I know, and I know I can't survive off this. And I'll just be vulnerable, because I was scared and I didn't know what I was going to do, and I didn't know how I was going to do it.

In therapy, Kevin experienced a paradigm shift in what constituted adult masculinity. He was taught that being a man meant "getting up every day and going to work" and doing things the "hard" but "right way" instead of taking the easy route of criminal activities. The emphasis on having employment is of course reminiscent of traditional masculinity. His embrace of vulnerability and emotional openness during therapy is an aspect of positive masculinity that proved to be very successful in precipitating gang disengagement, according to him.

Just after release from prison, Kevin was also assigned a GRID outreach worker, Eddy. Eddy helped Kevin move his stuff into the halfway house, apply for jobs, and remove gang tattoos. Eddy also served as a counselor and mentor about how to be successful in life. Meanwhile, Kevin got a job at a homeless shelter, which taught him how to professionally interact with people. Between the therapy treatment, Eddy's mentorship, and his job at the homeless shelter, where he served homeless men who had been in prison and were still involved with gangs, he experienced a cognitive shift wherein he saw that gang members were not accomplishing age-appropriate masculinity:

> I didn't respect them as men. I couldn't view them as men in my eyes no more. At least the ones who were of adult age in their mid to late twenties and thirties and above. I couldn't respect them as men no more. I didn't see them as men. I didn't see them as doing anything respectable. I saw them as losers who had given up on themselves. So, all they wanted to do was harm as many people as possible and drag as many people down to where they were as they could...I can't respect you as a man if you're my age or older and you're asking me for a handout. Now, if you ask for help, I can put you in positions to where it's on you to do the work and get out of where you've got yourself.

Here, Kevin reiterated the importance of employment for adult masculinity, and he emphasized self-reliance, another component of traditional masculinity. Kevin at this point was cognitively solidifying his disengagement, apparently in large part due to shifts in his views toward masculinity. However, he was still at the halfway house, still on parole, and earning low pay working at the homeless shelter for a year. He was still in a precarious position. Then, Eddy started his own outreach mentorship organization, and he hired Kevin to be an outreach worker:

> Eddy created this [program], which was doing gang outreach with juvenile gang members. And he called me up and he was like, "Listen, I got this thing going on. I think you'd be great at it."...So, they hired me as a case manager. No education, no degrees, no experience and all that, except just me being a gangster my whole life. And that position right there really helped me a lot...Working with these young men, it was basically like I had an opportunity if I could write a love letter to myself when I was a kid, that was what I was able to do with these young men. I was able to be what I needed, and I was able to show up how I needed someone that I never had. And that was it man. I would just show up. I'd be there for them. I'd listen to them.

Kevin's words echo Maruna's (2001) theory of criminal desistance, wherein generativity, or aiding people who are in the same position the ex-offender used to inhabit, is the first step. Deuchar and Weide (2018) argued that generativity can be part of a new, positive masculinity for disengaging gang members.

Kevin stayed in the outreach worker position for two years, finally successful in starting a new life, away from crime, away from gangs. He then decided to open his own business, a sober living recovery home for people who had just been released from prison. He wanted to address a specific need in the community:

> My desire for this group when I was in the halfway house, because I got sick of seeing everyone I know...people who I've been confined with in really small spaces for the majority of my life, they're all dead or in prison forever. And if they do get out, none of them last. And that shit hurts. It hurts me and it hurts my feelings. And I don't want that for myself or for other people at all. So, I want to be a person who could walk with people while they're trying to figure it out.

Once again, with his new business, Kevin is engaging in generativity, this time for men recently released from prison. Later, I asked Kevin what being a man meant to him. Helping others and service to the community was part of his current construction of adult masculinity:

> To me, being a man is doing what's right, even when it's not easy. Taking care of what you need to take care of. I never took care of business [as an active gang member]. I did a lot of shit and I made money and all that, but it wasn't sustainable. To me, nowadays, being a man is showing these other young men and these children [respect]...they've never had a respectful individual in their presence to show them just that. Respect, consistency and how to achieve things in the right way...Being a man is telling some hard truths and saying, your life is kind of shitty right now, and what are you going to do about it? What can you do?...Being a man is being able to stand on my square, whether it's popular or not, and give the best possible advice to help people overcome and escape their situations. So, I just want to leave the world a better place.

Kevin highlighted service to the community and generativity in his construction of masculinity, teaching youth about how to be respectful and helping other people to desist from crime. Kevin also discussed morality in his construction of masculinity, when he says that being a man means

"doing what's right." These aspects fit neatly into positive masculinity; nonetheless, Kevin likewise discussed an aspect of traditional masculinity when he mentions one's personal agency to take action to improve their own life, or self-reliance.

Kevin's experiences show the potential transformative effect of masculinity change, especially when precipitated by an intervention program such as halfway house therapy treatment or GRID outreach services. Kevin learned through therapy that his prior criminal actions were not consistent with adult masculinity, and his own intervention work with youth and then adults allowed him to solidify his new masculine identity as one that included generativity and community service, seemingly further cementing his gang disengagement.

The last detailed narrative, that of Tomas, illustrates how masculinity change potentially precipitated gang disengagement and criminal desistance even for a man still early in his disengagement process. Tomas, 34, is a Latino man living in a halfway house. He had been in the halfway house only 4 months after being in and out of jail for many years. Tomas was still a gang member and still strongly identified with his gang; however, he said he wanted to be "inactive" in the future rather than an active member. By this, he meant that he would still associate with the gang members but not be involved in criminal gang activities. In his halfway house, he had access to treatment including therapy and drug counseling, although he did not credit this treatment for helping him disengage.

Around the time that Tomas was being released from jail and transferred to a halfway house, he became motivated to disengage for several reasons, including not wanting to return to jail and wanting to become sober. However, his biggest motivator was that he had a realization that he needed to "grow up" and practice adult masculinity:

EW: Right now, do you do things that you think are consistent with your idea of being a man?

Tomas: Yeah, I work. I'm trying to get my life back together. I'm going to treatment. Yeah. I'm just trying to change for the better. I'm not trying to get in trouble anymore. I'm 34 years old. There comes a time in your life that you just got to grow up. And that time for me, it has come.

Later, I asked him more specifically if masculinity was connected to his motive for desistance:

EW: Is that decision to stop with crime connected to your idea about being a man?

Tomas: Yeah, because at some point, like I said, you got to grow up. You got to grow up, and this is not what I want my life to be though my whole life. Like I said, I got goals, I got things that I need to accomplish, and hopefully I already did all my dirt that I did for the gang and I could cruise on after this.

Tomas's idea that he needed to "grow up" and become a man is consistent with Leverso and Hess's theory of masculinity maturation. At the age of 34, Tomas recognized that his gang behavior was not consistent with adult masculinity. Tomas's realization also was not connected to any intervention or treatment program and therefore occurred naturally.

When I asked Tomas about his current construction of adult masculinity, he mentioned aspects involving traditional masculinity, positive masculinity, and responsibility, particularly focusing on being family-oriented:

Tomas: To be a man is to take care of your responsibilities, take care of your family, your words must match your actions, and stuff like that. And just basically to assume your responsibility.

EW: And when you say taking care of your family, do you mean financially wise, or do you mean more spending time with them emotionally?

Tomas: Emotional, physically, and financially.

EW: So...are you thinking in the future, you're hoping that you would be able to take care of some of them or no?

Tomas: Probably my mom...Yeah, because I'm Mexican. So in our culture, we don't believe in putting your parents in a nursing home. So we, the kids always take care of them. So yeah, me and my brothers and sisters we're going to eventually have to do that for my mom.

Tomas's emphasized both good family relationships and financial breadwinning, along with responsibility. He also mentioned that in the future he wants to start a business and employ

his gang associates in order to help them with criminal desistance, which would be generativity.

Tomas's narrative shows that masculinity maturation oriented toward primarily positive masculinity can occur without the help of an intervention program, and that this change can seemingly precipitate gang disengagement and criminal desistance. It is also helpful that Tomas's interview was held early in his disengagement process, so that the qualitative data accounts for multiple temporal stages within disengagement.

There were two other participants with narratives of disengagement in which masculinity change appeared to be a precipitating factor. I will briefly summarize their disengagement narratives, along with the most important themes.

Jamie, a White 21-year old, was released from county jail two years prior to the interview, and he had completely disengaged from his gang since that time. Jamie's reasons for disengagement included disloyalty from his gang friends, being shot, losing his father, and realizing that his gang friends' behaviors were immature and that he needed to grow up:

> They ain't my real friends. That's what really made me change my mind. This ain't no man shit. Yeah. This is shit I would've done at 13, 14 years old. I'm 21 now. It was really time to grow up, especially after me being shot. I got to stand on my own business now. I'm not standing it for nobody else. I stood for everybody else for damn near nine years of my motherfucking life.

Jamie's narrative evokes the theme of masculinity maturation. He was still trying to figure out exactly what constituted adult masculinity, but he expressed that being a man meant to "find peace" and to "find your damn self," which appeared to mean being genuinely himself and having authenticity, rather than doing what others wanted of him. This type of masculinity appears most similar to positive masculinity, albeit not an exact match. Jamie had a GRID outreach worker, but he said that the outreach worker did not teach him about masculinity, although he was helpful in solving problems.

Finally, Romano,[29] a Latino 43-year-old, had fully disengaged from his former gang at the time of his interview. His proximate cause for leaving the gang was that he had been required to testify as a witness to a murder, and his gang could not tolerate snitching. However, he had been wanting to leave his gang for some time prior to witnessing that event. The ultimate causes for his disengagement were that he wanted to live a normative life with his girlfriend and have children with her, and that he was dissatisfied with his gang for perceived disloyalty and deceiving young children to recruit them. Romano's new masculinity views were traditional:

> I look at my father, and my father was a real man. My dad. He worked every day of his life. He took care of all of us. He never missed a day of work because he was skipping off. The bills were always paid. We never went without. That's the role model I should have followed, but I didn't.

At some point prior to the event that forced him to testify, Romano was already changing his idea of adult masculinity, recognizing that he wanted to be more like his father and become a breadwinner to his girlfriend and their future children. He did not receive any gang intervention services.

Summary

Of the six participants who perceived masculinity change as a precipitating factor in their gang disengagement, I discussed four in great detail and two in less detail. The masculinity change occurred naturally for four of these participants and was in part precipitated by an intervention program for the other two participants. These participants' narratives portrayed masculinity change as a major factor in precipitating their gang disengagement. Four of these participants newly endorsed a combination of positive and traditional masculinity, of which

[29] Romano's experience was pieced together through his interview with me and through a conversation I had with his mother. After reading through Romano's transcript months after our interview, I decided that I needed clarification on some key points and wanted to interview Romano again. It turned out that Romano had tragically died of an overdose in the interim. I had a conversation with Romano's mother, who said that she had been very close to him, and she was able to clarify the points where I had further questions.

common themes were employment/breadwinning, good relationships with family, generativity/community service, and being "respectful" (kind and polite). Furthermore, masculinity maturation emerged as a theme, as participants realized that their gang lifestyle was inconsistent with adult masculinity, serving as a motivating factor for disengagement (see Leverso and Hess 2021). Many participants emphasized responsibility as an important component of adult masculinity. Finally, masculine role models surfaced as a key cause of masculinity change, as four of these six participants modeled their new masculinity practices after their fathers, outreach workers, male therapists, or other male family members.

Masculinity Change Unrelated to Gang Disengagement

Three participants changed their masculinity accomplishment surrounding their gang disengagement, but they said that the masculinity change was *not* a causal factor in their disengagement. However, for the first two of these participants, other parts of their narratives imply that masculinity change may *have* been a precipitating factor. I have chosen to categorize them based on their own perceptions that masculinity change did not cause disengagement; however, I point out inconsistencies in their narratives.

Dominic, a Latino 18-year old, had left his gang two or three years prior to the interview. His main reason for leaving was getting into a lot of legal trouble in juvenile court. When I asked if his ideas about being a man had anything to do with his disengagement, he said no:

EW: Were your ideas about being a man connected to your decision to leave the gang?

Dominic: No, not really. It was just mainly the part where I didn't like getting in trouble and stuff like that, because there's a lot of things I couldn't do when I was on probation. I'd just rather be a free man instead of a man of the government.

EW: Right, and you were only probably 16 at the time, so you probably-

Dominic: No. 15, 16. Yeah.

EW:15 or 16, so you probably weren't thinking as much about what it means to be a man.

Dominic: Right, exactly. I had that mindset of, "Who cares? I'm going to do what I want to do."

Dominic had apparently been too young to start thinking about adult masculinity. However, he did eventually change his conception of masculinity after leaving the gang:

EW: Right now, what do you think it means to be a man?

Dominic: I mean, do what you got to do. Work. Make your money. Live your life. If you got a kid, take care of your kid. You've got to worry about your responsibilities. You can't always go have fun. You can't always have your friends over, hang out with them, or nothing. You got responsibilities as an adult or as even a man in general. Guys have it kind of worse than females, in my opinion, because a female can get anything they want. A man has to work for it and put his sweat and tears into it, and a female doesn't have to do all that. I mean, just work your ass off pretty much.

EW: Okay. When you were part of the gang a few years ago, at that time, what did you think it meant to be a man?

Dominic: Stand your ground. Do what you got to do. If someone messes with you, you better hold your ground. It's take your life, or it's take their life. You'd rather take their life than take yours.

As a teenage gang member, Dominic had constructed masculinity as using violence to defend himself and retaliate against someone "messing" with him. But, as two or three years passed during late adolescence, his views toward masculinity evolved. Dominic's current construction of adult masculinity included mostly traditional aspects (financial success, employment, and the patriarchal view that women do not need to work). Dominic also discussed responsibility, a common theme that has emerged regarding adult masculinity.

Dominic later brought up a masculine role model, his uncle who had just died from a heart attack:

EW: Have you learned anything recently that you think is putting you on the path towards being a man?

Dominic: It's a person, actually. I went to the funeral yesterday. He was like a father figure to me. He's another main reason why I changed my life around. He was always

pointing me in the right way. I love to work on cars, and he's always letting me work on his car. He seen I have a talent for that, so he was like, "Bro, I'll pay to go to take you to school for it," like showing me the right way...just teaching me everything that I need to know in life. Taking me to insurance to do his insurance and his title changes, just the main things you need to know about life, to get my license and stuff that I need to know to live my life and do things.

Working on cars is typically seen as skilled blue-collar work, a traditionally masculine form of employment. Dominic's uncle served as a masculine role model, and his mentorship in car repair and other aspects of adulthood helped Dominic. This narrative actually implies that masculinity change did play a role in his disengagement. After all, Dominic explicitly identifies his uncle as teaching him about adult masculinity, and then says his uncle as a masculine role model helped "change his life around", which implies his uncle's masculine mentorship helped him disengage from the gang. Dominic had also worked with a GRID outreach worker, but he could not recall anything his outreach worker taught him about masculinity.

Trent, a Black 31-year old, left his gang after several people he was close to in the gang died. In the final years of his gang membership, he changed his conception of masculinity, from one where he had to "make a name" for himself by shooting others, burgling, and selling drugs, to one more focused on adult masculinity.

EW: So right now, what do you think it means to be a man?

Trent: Taking care of your responsibilities. That's the most part, and stand on your own two feet. Yeah, you're going to walk away, I don't know. It's a lot. Like one of my coworkers, he's about to lose his job. He's been here for two years. He's about to lose his job because he lost his cool somewhere else, and they took him to jail. So situations like that, avoiding the BS...It's morals. So, yeah, morals. You got to have morals...Taking care of my kids. A lot of guys don't take care of their kids. Parent-teacher conferences, an active parent, all that.

Although Trent did change his masculinity accomplishment to a more positive one focused on responsibility, keeping a level head, morality, and being a good father, he said that he began practicing adult masculinity before leaving the gang, and it was not related to his disengagement.

EW: So when you made that decision to leave the gang, at that time was your decision connected to wanting to be more of a man? And if not, it's okay. I just wanted to ask.

Trent: No. It didn't have nothing to do with it, because I was already a man. I was already a man. Just, everybody died. I was just like, "Yeah, I'm done." Everybody had died. I'm the last one standing. So I'm a just take that win and keep it going.

Trent's narrative shows that he had transitioned into practicing a more positive masculinity. While Trent himself says that masculinity did not play a part in his disengagement and that he "was already a man" prior to leaving, it's not clear how he had reconciled his lingering gang membership with his new conceptions of masculinity, which were decidedly antithetical to gang activities. If he already believed in morality, responsibility, keeping a level head, and being a good father, how could he have stayed in the gang? His disengagement narrative is contradictory. Perhaps his masculinity change opened his mind to the idea of disengagement (the "first doubts" stage), and his friends' deaths were the turning point to finally leave (see Decker et al. 2014).

Jack, a White 19-year-old, had fully left his gang starting at age 17. He had decided to leave after being released from a juvenile detention center, where he had been incarcerated for attempted murder. He was worried that a serious charge at age 17 could land him in adult court. In addition, his longtime girlfriend demanded he leave the gang. Jack stated that masculinity change was not connected to his decision to disengage:

EW: Was your decision to leave the gang connected at all to your ideas about what it meant to be a man?

Jack: No, because at the time I'm like, "I'm just going to go to jail and I'm going to lose my chick." It was pretty straightforward, you know what I mean? There's not much to that.

Just as with Dominic, however, Jack did change his masculinity accomplishment at some point after leaving his gang:

EW: What's your idea of what it means to be a man?

Jack: I'd say have a full-time job and have your own fucking house, because no one want to live at their mom or their brother's or some shit, you know? I say you can rent it though...Yeah, just having a job. Yeah, working that ass, not just being at home.

When I later asked Jack what he thought being a man meant when he was a gang member, he said it meant making money by selling drugs. Jack's masculinity accomplishment changed from selling drugs to making money via legitimate employment. His new masculinity views were rooted in traditional masculinity, which also includes self-reliance—something he alluded to when he mentioned living independently. It is not clear whether leaving the gang precipitated this masculinity change or whether it occurred later. Jack did work with a GRID outreach worker, but Jack said that he did not influence Jack's masculinity.[30]

Summary

Three participants perceived that masculinity change was not a precipitating factor in their disengagement, but they did all undergo a change in masculinity accomplishment surrounding disengagement. Two participants said they changed their masculinity practices within a few years of disengaging, both toward aspects of traditional masculinity, particularly employment and breadwinning; one participant changed his masculinity practices before disengaging, toward a more positive masculinity. Two of these participants' narratives of disengagement were contradictory, however, and implied at some points that masculinity change actually had been a precipitating factor.

Little Masculinity Change

Antonio, a 15-year old Latino youth, discussed how his masculinity accomplishment changed little, even though he had fully left his gang. He had decided to leave because his

[30] Jack and I talked at length about the activities he and his GRID outreach worker did together and the things he learned from his outreach worker; none were related to masculinity.

girlfriend asked him to, and he did not think he was benefiting from membership. However, he still endorsed the "hood lifestyle":

EW: For what reasons did you decide to stop involving yourself with them? What part of that lifestyle did you not like?

Antonio: It's not that I didn't like the lifestyle, but my girl didn't want me in that stuff. I don't associate with them, but I still have the lifestyle. I'm not a part of one anymore. I'm not in it anymore, but I still have that hood lifestyle. It's still like that, but I'm not in the gang...They weren't doing nothing for me. I didn't really talk to them. They weren't doing nothing for me. They weren't making me money. We were just doing nothing. We were just representing it for no reason. We were just a part of it. There wasn't no benefits to it...

EW: When you say you're still living the hood lifestyle, what does that mean to you?

Antonio: If I know I see opp, I'm going to have to press them, or if I see someone that don't fuck with me, I know something's going to happen or something like that, just stuff like that, just not letting people talk to me in some type of way. Even if I get bumped or something, I'll bring somebody.

Antonio's description of the "hood lifestyle" evokes the code of the street (Anderson 1999), centered on violence against rivals ("opps"), not letting people disrespect him, and retaliating violently if they do so. Moreover, Antonio equated masculinity with these practices:

EW: What do you think it means to be a man?

Antonio: What it means to be a man is don't let no one disrespect you or don't let—always make sure people respect you. If you disrespect them first for no reason, that's just being a bitch move. That's not being a man. You're just trying to show how tough you are, but also that's being a man too, just showing people how tough you are too.

EW: Okay...Do you feel like your idea of what it means to be a man, was that different when you were part of a gang?

Antonio: Yeah.

EW: Okay. When you were part of a gang at that time, what did you think it meant to be a man?

Antonio: The same stuff, but if someone told me, "Let's go do this," or something, and if I said, "No", I feel like I'm less of a man because I'm bitching out.

Antonio's construction of masculinity emphasized gaining respect, not letting anyone disrespect him, and showing toughness, similar to how he described the "hood lifestyle." These practices are consistent with the street code. Because he explicitly described these practices as that of masculinity, he is describing what I term violence-oriented masculinity, which in this case is synonymous with the street code. Antonio also directly contrasted gang practices with that of being a "bitch" (meaning feminine or gay), wherein refusing to participate in gang activities meant "bitching out."

Antonio, however, also discussed a slight change in his masculinity accomplishment since leaving the gang. Although he still endorsed violence-oriented masculinity, he no longer felt like he would be "less of a man" if he refused to involve himself in gang activity, as he had when he was a member. This may be an indication of future changes in masculinity to come.

Antonio was only 15 years old, an age at which nearly every other participant interviewed had been deeply gang embedded and had not yet begun changing their masculinity accomplishment. As Dominic had said, at age 15, he had not been thinking about adult masculinity. For Kit, Christian, Dominic, and Jack (the 18 to 19-year-old participants), all began changing their constructions of masculinity around age 17. Christian and Kit at that age had specifically questioned whether gang activities were compatible with adult masculinity and concluded that they were not. Masculinity maturation has emerged as an important theme for most participants, but Antonio appears to be too young to have undergone that process yet.

Antonio's narrative shines a spotlight upon the construction of masculinity among active gang members, of which violence-oriented masculinity surfaces as a frequent theme. The next section focuses on the construction of masculinity among active gang members. First, I discuss violence-oriented masculinity as described through the qualitative data.

The Construction of Masculinity among Active Gang Members

Violence-Oriented Masculinity

Antonio's construction of masculinity—of violence, retaliation, gaining respect, not tolerating disrespect, and toughness—are the same attributes that people adhering to the code of the street follow (Anderson 1999). These attributes were repeatedly brought up by the participants when asked about the masculinity that they had valued as active gang members and the masculinity that others in their gang had valued. In total, eight of the ten participants described practices and qualities consistent with the street code when describing aspects of masculinity within gangs.[31] I term this street-code-like construction of masculinity as violence-oriented masculinity, which the data show is heavily endorsed among active gang members.

In addition, the participants had nearly universally reduced their endorsement of violence-oriented masculinity since disengaging from their gang. Whether reduction in violence-oriented masculinity had occurred before, during, or after disengagement was murky, however. While the narratives often provided compelling evidence that shifts toward traditional or positive masculinities precipitated disengagement, the same could not be said of reductions in violence-oriented masculinity. In this section, I detail three participants' discussions of their violence-oriented masculinity while active in the gang and their recent lack of endorsement of it. (I do not discuss Antonio's description of violence-oriented masculinity again here because it was just detailed in the section immediately prior.)

Kit focused on violent retaliation when I asked him what constituted masculinity when he was a gang member:

EW: So now taking it back to when you were part of the gang, if I had asked you at that time what you think it means to be a man when you were part of the gang, what would you have said?

[31] The other two participants made it very clear that gangs promoted violence and street code norms. However, they never connected those things to masculinity.

Kit: If I was part of the gang? Probably to take care of the people that you love, that take care of you. So somebody is going to go shoot at your homie, you know, have to blow back as well, because that's your friend. And also being strong and respected as well.

Kit immediately brought up using violence in retaliation against rival gang members. In addition, gaining respect played a large part in masculinity.

Nevertheless, Kit had at some point reduced his endorsement of violence-oriented masculinity:

EW: It sounds like that's not what you think it means to be a man now (referring to his discussion above).

Kit: No, not now. I feel like violence doesn't really solve much. I feel like talking, growing conversations can actually lead to something better. It can lead to maybe a potential partnership or something that could help you in the future. But violence, violence, I feel like that's not the issue. And that's not in the right way to go right now.

Most participants discussed violence the way that Kit did—something that had previously been valued but was now seen as unhelpful.

Christian, too, brought up retaliation and gaining respect when talking about his construction of masculinity while in the gang:

> I was young. I didn't realize what being a man was. All I wanted was respect. All I wanted was revenge, and I wanted to be popular. I wanted to be talked about, basically. That's what I thought being a man was.

He elaborated on how to gain respect while in the gang:

EW: What would you have done to gain respect?

Christian: You had to kill somebody. There's that. Rob somebody. There's that. Steal from somebody. There's that. Beat somebody up. A lot of stuff to gain respect in the streets. Go to jail and do a couple of things in jail for somebody that they need you to do. That's gaining respect. There's just a lot of things about gaining respect. I can sit here and name a hundred of them, but those are mainly the focus ones.

EW: So overall, was it about being tough, like a badass?

Christian: Yeah, basically. Being a savage, a menace. That's what people wanted to see is you being a little menace to the society.

Later, Christian used the same language of "being a menace" to characterize other gang members' constructions of masculinity:

EW: So, back when you were part of the gang more actively, what did the other members of the gang think that it meant to be a man?

Christian: I wouldn't even honestly know, because I'm not them. But I'm assuming that they're on the same side as us. Killing, doing all that stuff. Robbing, just being a menace. That's what I feel like they're about.

While he was actively in the gang, Christian had seen accomplishing masculinity as equivalent to gaining respect with his peers via murder, robbery, theft, and other violence, and by successfully retaliating against others. Nonetheless, at some point—and it's not entirely clear when—he stopped endorsing violence-oriented masculinity. Christian now expressed disgust at this type of behavior:

> If you're still sitting on your ass, and you ain't doing shit, you're always plotting on the next person to go hurt, you ain't a man. Always sitting in your room doing drugs, making your mom cry, making your little sister cry. That ain't a man. Disrespecting people, that ain't a man. When somebody wants to fight you, walk away from the situation. People will look at you as a man for that. And to you, on your head, you've always been taught from other men, like, "Oh, if you walk away from a fight, you a bitch." But other people could look at it as, "That's a man. He's not too worried about fighting because he knows that he got bigger things in life that he has to go handle."

It should be noted that Christian had previously been taught that walking away from a fight meant he was a "bitch", meaning feminine, cowardly, or gay. This further shows that street code behaviors are constructed in direct opposition to femininity.

Dominic's construction of masculinity while in the gang was also related to violent retaliation in the face of disrespect:

EW: When you were part of the gang a few years ago, at that time, what did you think it meant to be a man?

Dominic: Stand your ground. Do what you got to do. If someone messes with you, you better hold your ground. It's take your life, or it's take their life. You'd rather take their life than take yours.

EW: So it's like sort of don't let anyone disrespect you, and if they do, you have to do something about it?

Dominic: Exactly. Put them in their place.

Dominic elaborated on this at another point in the interview, when I asked about what being a gang member had meant to him. He also discussed his current—and different—views toward violence:

EW: So thinking back to when you were a part of a gang, at that time, what did being a gang member mean to you?

Dominic: Showing out, being the biggest, toughest person you can be. You feel like you're untouchable. If someone tries to try something, you got your friends or you got something on you. That's pretty much it. It's something like that...Just no matter who it is, if they're in a gang or not, it could be just be a random person, civilian, and the same goes.

EW: Yeah. Now that you've been out for a few years, now what does being a gang member mean to you?

Dominic: Nothing really. It's a waste of time. You create enemies that you don't even know, just because they don't like a color you wear. That's it. They don't like what you throw up with your hands or any of that. They don't like you, and that's just pointless. They're killing each other for a color. That's for people that they already killed that you didn't even meet.

Dominic reiterated retaliating in the face of disrespect as part of his masculinity while in the gang, but he also mentioned toughness, another important component of the street code. At some point before or after leaving the gang, his perspective on violence-oriented masculinity shifted, leading to a realization that people are simply "killing each other for a color" rather than for any meaningful reason. His endorsement of violence-oriented masculinity certainly reduced, although it was unclear when that occurred.

Although participants' constructions of masculinity while in the gang were focused heavily on violence, respect, and retaliation, they did discuss some other masculinity practices

which were not the same as street-code-like behaviors, such as loyalty to the gang, making money, drug use, and heterosexual promiscuity. Evidently, violence-oriented masculinity does not encompass all masculinity endorsed by active gang members. In the next section, I will detail other masculinity practices which coincide with aspects of traditional masculinity.

Summary

While they had been active gang members, eight out of the ten participants constructed masculinity as being centered on toughness, gaining respect, retaliating violently against disrespect, and using violence to solve disputes. These attributes are synonymous with those of the code of the street (Anderson 1999). I term this version of masculinity as violence-oriented masculinity, which these data show is highly prevalent among gang members. Participants discussed some other practices and qualities constructed as masculinity among gang members, such as making money by selling drugs or being loyal to the gang, showing that violence-oriented masculinity does not encompass *all* masculinity practices among gang members. In addition, seven of those eight participants had vastly reduced their endorsement of violence-oriented masculinity since starting their disengagement process. These data could not provide qualitative evidence on the timing of this reduction in violence-oriented masculinity, as it was unclear from the narratives of whether the reduction in violence-oriented masculinity occurred before, during, or after disengagement.

Aspects of Traditional Masculinity among Gang Members

The participants' constructions of masculinity while actively in the gang were not only focused on violence. Another theme emerged—that of some aspects of traditional masculinity. In this brief section, I demonstrate that many gang members believe stoicism and financial success are part of what constitutes masculinity.

Kit was one of two participants that discussed stoicism. When asked about what other people in his gang thought it meant to be a man, Kit said “no emotions”:

> They want to see people that are hard and tough and strong, and they don't have no emotions and stuff like that.

Romano also included “no emotion” in his assessment of gang masculinity:

EW: So what kind of behavior did people in your gang value? How did they think that people—how did they think that a gang member should act?

Romano: Tough. Not weak. No emotion.

EW: Okay. And what did people in the gang think that it meant to be a man at that time?...What was their idea of a man?

Romano: Well, the same as what I said, it's just having cars, money, being a badass, just not caring about anything or anybody else's life. Just with your own and your brothers.

Romano first described “no emotion” as a behavior expected of gang members, and when I asked about the gang’s construction of masculinity, he said it included the same behaviors that he had just said. He also described masculinity among gang members as “having money,” a common theme. Five participants discussed financial success as a key part of masculinity within gangs.

Jack, for example, said that masculinity while in the gang meant making a lot of money by selling drugs:

EW: Back when you were in the gang, at that time, what did you think it meant to be a man?

Jack: Shit. For me then, it was pushing the most weight. But it's because I was producing the most drugs. I'd work commercial grow houses and crack house. And I'd have the most amount, which was really cool. Because I'm not a big guy and I'm a White guy. And I'll tell you, in that world, that doesn't get you very far. When you have the most product that gets you some distance, and that was cool. So I'd say product for sure. Plus, in weight, if you had the most amount getting out and money coming in, that was pretty good.

Jamie also discussed money when it came to masculinity as a gang member:

EW: So thinking back to when you were still hanging out with them, what did you think at that

time? What did you think it meant to be a man?

Jamie: This gang banging basically. Because I had money, I had power and I had respect. That's the three things that really come with that shit.

It is unsurprising that financial success and stoicism, which are aspects of traditional masculinity, are considered part of masculinity construction among gang members. The masculinities that gangs promote are often thought to be exaggerated versions of traditional masculinity, particularly with regard to the over-emphasis on aggression, but regarding other aspects as well (Baird 2019; Barker 2005). With traditional masculinity's focus on financial success and gang members' difficulty in gaining and maintaining legitimate employment, achieving financial success through selling drugs and other gang activities must be gratifying. This section demonstrates that gang members very much value aspects of traditional masculinity despite their non-traditional lifestyle.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I detailed the findings from in-depth interviews conducted with 10 participants who had all identified as gang members at one point and had all disengaged or were currently in the process of disengaging. The qualitative data uncovered several important findings regarding masculinity change during gang disengagement and masculinity construction among gang members.

Masculinity change appeared to be a precipitating factor in gang disengagement for six participants out of the ten interviewed. Four of these participants newly endorsed a combination of positive and traditional masculinity, of which common themes were employment/breadwinning, good relationships with family, generativity/community service, and being "respectful" (kind and polite). Furthermore, masculinity maturation emerged as a theme, as participants realized that the gang lifestyle was incompatible with adult masculinity, serving as a

motivating factor for disengagement when they got older (Leverso and Hess 2021). For these six participants, masculine role models were another important factor that helped them change their constructions of masculinity, which appeared to help them disengage from gangs.

Three participants out of the ten said that masculinity change was not a precipitating factor in their disengagement, but they did all undergo a change in masculinity accomplishment around the time of disengagement. One participant did not change his masculinity accomplishment despite leaving his gang. However, he was only 15 years old at the time of interview, while all other participants were at least 18 years old.

While they had been active gang members, eight out of the ten participants constructed masculinity as being centered on toughness, gaining respect, retaliation, and violence. I term this version of masculinity as violence-oriented masculinity, and it is synonymous with attributes of the code of the street (Anderson 1999). Seven of those eight participants vastly reduced their endorsement of violence-oriented masculinity, although it was unclear whether there was any potential causal relationship with disengagement. While they were in the gang, most participants had constructed masculinity to also include aspects of traditional masculinity, particularly financial success (five participants) and stoicism (two participants).

CHAPTER 7: Discussion

This dissertation examined masculinity change and gang disengagement using both quantitative and qualitative methods, ultimately seeking to understand the degree to which masculinity change occurs during the gang disengagement process and precedes or could precipitate disengagement. New scholarship has generated theories and brought qualitative evidence that masculinity change may cause gang disengagement or, at the very least, may occur during disengagement. Nevertheless, this literature has raised more questions than it has given answers, especially concerning: whether this association would be observed in quantitative data; what the temporal order of the association is; whether masculinity change could precipitate disengagement; and which constructions of masculinity might precipitate disengagement. To address these questions, 114 individuals referred to a gang disengagement program were surveyed, 70 of whom were surveyed across two waves. Ten were interviewed in-depth for qualitative analysis. In this chapter, I first discuss six major findings before turning my attention to theoretical considerations, policy implications, limitations of this study, and recommendations for future research.

Major Findings

The first major finding is that masculinity change occurs during the process of gang disengagement, as seen in both quantitative and qualitative findings. This is the first study to establish a significant statistical association between changes in masculinity and gang embeddedness (and in both directions). While qualitative research has either stated or implied that masculinity change co-occurs with disengaging from a gang, it had never been tested before with quantitative data. Quantitative methods can rule out alternative explanations for disengagement and isolate the relationship between masculinity change and disengagement. The

data clearly demonstrate that traditional masculinity endorsement and gang embeddedness decrease over time together and are significantly associated with one another. This finding advances the field of gang disengagement, bringing masculinity change squarely into focus as something which has been neglected in quantitative studies thus far and should be explored quantitatively much more in future research. Qualitative findings, too, firmly established masculinity change as occurring surrounding disengagement, as 9 of the 10 individuals changed their constructions of masculinity either just before, during, or within a couple of years after disengagement. These findings support prior qualitative studies where the authors argued that masculinity change occurred before or during disengagement. Nevertheless, many of these studies had focused on the actions of intervention programs promoting masculinity change rather than studying individuals' narratives in-depth and establishing the occurrence of masculinity change over time (e.g., Armstrong and Rosbrook-Thompson 2017; Deuchar and Weide 2018; Søgaard et al. 2016). Some of these studies had also left open the possibility that gang disengagement occurring among their participants could be attributed to other mechanisms in the intervention programs (e.g., employment, mental health, or prosocial activities) rather than masculinity change. This new quantitative evidence bolsters the connection between masculinity change and gang disengagement.

The second major finding is that qualitative evidence establishes masculinity change as a potential precipitating factor for gang disengagement, as most of the interviewed individuals attributed masculinity change as precipitating or aiding in disengagement. This study is one of the first to suggest a potential cause and effect of masculinity change on gang disengagement using in-depth disengagement narratives from individuals. Few prior studies demonstrated the importance of masculinity change on gang disengagement using participants' own words, and

those few that did (e.g., Leverso and Hess 2021) did not provide individuals' narratives in great detail. Furthermore, some prior studies on the topic did not take a stance on whether masculinity change was a cause or merely a consequence of gang disengagement (e.g., Flores 2014), while others did argue masculinity change *could* be a cause, but this interpretation required close reading (e.g., Leverso and Hess 2021) or was meant to apply only in cases of intervention programs (e.g., Deuchar and Weide 2018).

The third major finding is that (somewhat paradoxically) quantitative evidence suggests that gang embeddedness change predicts masculinities change more strongly than the reverse, hinting that the temporal order of this relationship may be such that one disengages *prior* to changing their masculinity accomplishment. Densley and Pyrooz (2019) reasoned that disengaging gang members likely undergo attitudinal shifts including changes in masculinity, and many other studies have established attitudinal, behavioral, and identity changes occurring after disengagement (e.g., Melde and Esbensen 2014). It is interesting that the qualitative findings and the quantitative findings in this dissertation appear to contradict one another in terms of the temporal order of the relationship between masculinity change and gang disengagement. Divergent qualitative and quantitative results are not uncommon in mixed methods research, and reconciliation of the findings is a common strategy when they can be interpreted together in a plausible manner (Pluye et al. 2009). One "reconciling" explanation could be that masculinity change is potentially a precipitating factor for many people to disengage from their gangs, as the qualitative data suggests; nonetheless, it may be *more* common in the population for gang disengagement to occur before masculinity change. The qualitative sample is only 10, whereas the quantitative sample is 70, so the quantitative sample is more likely to be representative of a general gang-involved population. On the other hand, the

quantitative methods for shedding light on the temporal order were not optimal (which I elaborate on in the limitations section). Either way, the association between changes in masculinity and gang embeddedness, in conjunction with the compelling qualitative narratives showing that masculinity change could potentially precipitate disengagement, warrants much more future research on whether masculinity change could be a causal factor in precipitating disengagement.

The fourth major finding is *how* masculinity changes as individuals disengage from gangs. Qualitative evidence suggests some aspects of both traditional[32] and positive masculinity[33] are being newly embraced by disengaging individuals. This evidence shows most of those men for whom masculinity change seemingly helped precipitate disengagement embraced new constructions of masculinity centered on both select traditional masculinity aspects (having employment and breadwinning for family) and on positive masculinity (good relationships with and support of family, generativity[34], community service, and being kind and polite). These qualitative findings advance the literature, which had appeared gently split in the characterization of reformed masculinity in this new field. Some authors had characterized this reformed masculinity as primarily traditional (e.g., Flores 2014) while others had much differently characterized it as positive (e.g., Deuchar and Weide 2018). The qualitative findings suggest that disengaging gang members newly embrace aspects of *both* traditional and positive

[32] Traditional masculinity in this dissertation is defined as practices, qualities, or identities that were theorized to be part of dominant and hegemonic masculinity during the 1980s through early 2000s in the United States, including financial success, acting as an economic breadwinner to family, homophobia, stoicism, self-reliance, and avoidance of femininity, among other things. See Chapter 2 for further details on both types of masculinity.

[33] Positive masculinity in this dissertation is defined as practices, qualities, or identities that emphasize spending time with family, being "good" fathers, husbands, brothers, and sons, caring for others, empathy, kindness, spirituality, emotional openness, and serving communities through mentorship, role modeling, and generativity.

[34] Generativity refers to aiding people who are in the same position the ex-offender used to inhabit (Maruna 2001).

masculinities. This supports the prior qualitative research and suggests that both types of masculinities can be important for disengaging young men.

However, quantitative evidence on the characterization of reformed masculinities shows people disengaging from gangs are *reducing* endorsement of traditional masculinity on average, specifically reducing their avoidance of femininity and endorsement of breadwinning. It may at first seem difficult to reconcile these quantitative versus qualitative findings, but I argue that a closer look at the data reveals the findings overall could be consistent with one another. Prior research shows gang members tend to display exaggerated versions of traditional masculinity (Baird 2019; Barker 2005), so an overall reduction in traditional masculinity endorsement as participants disengage from gangs is consistent with this prior research. I also found that active gang members' constructions of masculinity can be hyper-focused on some traditional masculinity aspects, especially making money (via illegal means). Two of the four questions in the "breadwinning" survey subsection were about high pay and may have struck an unpleasant chord with individuals wanting to move away from the money-focused gang mentality: "A man owes his family to work at the best paying job he can get" and "A man should generally work overtime to make more money whenever he has the chance." When disengaging gang members are changing their constructions of masculinity, often toward a more "positive" version focused on good relationships with family and community service, they may be also moving away from the hyper-focus on having a *lot* of money. They may have seen these survey questions as extreme—too focused on high pay at the expense of family time. Working overtime may not be worth it if it means spending less time with loved ones and having a reduced capacity to support them emotionally and physically (as multiple disengaging participants discussed wanting to do). The other two questions in the breadwinning subsection focused on the central importance of

employment in men's lives, which, again, may have been interpreted as reducing the value of family relationships.[35] Of course, the qualitative evidence does strongly show most disengaging members also newly value legitimate employment and being able to provide financially for family, which is consistent with prior research (Armstrong and Rosbrook-Thompson 2017; Deuchar and Weide 2018; Flores 2014; Leverso and Hess 2021; Panfil 2020; Søgaard et al. 2016), but it seems likely that participants saw the breadwinner survey items as extreme and reminiscent of the gang constructions of masculinity that they were moving away from.

The quantitative finding that change in avoidance of femininity was associated with change in gang embeddedness is novel. Avoidance of femininity is potentially an important variable to be considered in future gang and criminological research. Change in avoidance of femininity was not only significantly related to gang embeddedness change (in both directions) but also as the dependent variable was significantly associated with offending change; moreover, avoidance of femininity was marginally significantly related to gang embeddedness in earlier versions of the cross-sectional models and had the highest effect size and lowest p value of the traditional masculinity subscales in the fully specified gang embeddedness model. The latter finding is not substantively significant on its own, but, in concert with the findings regarding the change models, suggests a potentially meaningful pattern. The masculinity practiced by active gang members is often constructed in direct opposition to femininity, wherein declining to participate in violent practices is framed as being a "bitch," as seen in this dissertation and prior research (Wilkinson 2001). Gang members appear required to demonstrate at all opportunities that they are not feminine, and prior research shows this avoidance of femininity appears also among criminal offenders who may not necessarily be involved with gangs (King and Swain

[35] See all traditional masculinity survey questions in Appendix C.

2022; Reid 2017; Wilkinson 2001). The overall pattern of quantitative results, qualitative findings, and prior research together suggest avoidance of femininity is an important factor to consider in gang involvement and offending in future research.

The fifth major finding is that of the nature of violence-oriented masculinity and its reduction surrounding gang disengagement. Qualitative evidence in this dissertation plainly shows that active gang members construct a version of masculinity that prioritizes violence, aggression, toughness, gaining respect, and retaliation in the face of disrespect, which I term violence-oriented masculinity; I argued these practices of masculinity are synonymous with the norms within the code of the street (Anderson 1999). This study is not the first to link the street code with masculinity (e.g., King and Swain 2022), but it is the first to provide detailed evidence from gang members' own words to argue so. Future research would do well to consider the accomplishment of masculinity as a key motivation for following the street code and an integral benefit of doing so. The street code appears to not only be a set of subcultural norms but a version of masculinity in and of itself.

The reduction of violence-oriented masculinity surrounding gang disengagement was substantiated in both quantitative and qualitative findings, with quantitative results showing the largest effect size with violent masculinity change as a dependent variable. The qualitative participants brought up new masculinity practices as a factor in disengagement rather than a desire to reduce violence; the reduction of violent masculinity occurred, but it was generally unclear *when* it occurred in their narratives. Taken together, the findings overall suggest that reduction in violence-oriented masculinity is much more likely a consequence of disengagement rather than a cause. Such a finding is consistent with prior research showing violence-oriented masculinity endorsement increases after joining a gang (Matsuda et al. 2013). If gangs promote

violence-oriented masculinity, as also appears to be the case from the qualitative findings, then it is logical that endorsement would reduce after disengaging rather than prior to.

The sixth major finding is that masculinity change potentially precipitating or occurring alongside gang disengagement often can happen naturally, without the assistance of gang intervention programs. Four participants for whom masculinity change seemingly precipitated disengagement either did not participate in any intervention program or were not taught about masculinity in intervention programs they attended, while two credited intervention services in aiding in their masculinity change and ultimate disengagement. In addition, many of the survey participants were not given any gang intervention services. In prior research, most studies of masculinity change and gang disengagement were conducted within the confines of gang intervention programs and focused on how those programs promoted masculinity change (Armstrong and Rosbrook-Thompson 2017; Deuchar 2018; Deuchar et al. 2016; Deuchar and Weide 2018; Flores 2014; Søgaard et al. 2016), raising questions of whether masculinity change was relevant for disengagement outside of intervention programs. Evidence from this dissertation supports the natural ocurrence of masculinity change and of that change potentially precipitating disengagement, while also reinforcing the ability for gang intervention programs to aid in this process.

Theoretical Implications

I have thus far discussed which constructions of masculinities disengaging individuals are newly embracing. The qualitative findings in this dissertation also shed light on theoretical implications of why they are embracing new masculinities and how masculinity change could help promote gang disengagement.

The findings generally support the theory of masculinity maturation (Leverso and Hess 2021), while making new theoretical contributions as well. Leverso and Hess made the case for masculinity change as something which could cause gang disengagement in their theory of masculinity maturation. They argued that as young gang members age into adulthood, "A disconnect between perceptions of age-appropriate masculinity and gang masculinity creates a masculinity dilemma where individuals begin to question the value of the gang as a useful institution for one's masculinity" (2). They described this as a cognitive process in which the individual looks inward to consider what adult masculinity consists of, to what degree the gang still provides ways to accomplish masculinity, and how they might accomplish masculinity outside of the gang. Leverso and Hess argued that this process could be triggered by negative experiences in the gang—often known as "push factors" (Pyrooz and Decker 2011)—among other things. This process can occur at varying ages for different individuals based upon their own experiences. Masculinity maturation itself refers to individuals distancing themselves from masculinity promoted by gangs and moving instead toward masculinities perceived as normative for adult men. Leverso and Hess did not go into great detail as to what practices or qualities this specifically consists of, but they mentioned institutions of employment and family.

My findings are mostly consistent with the masculinity maturation theory. Seven of the ten participants brought up themes of adulthood and maturation regarding their masculinity change, using language of needing to "grow up", have "responsibility", and to be "mature"; they portrayed the actions of active gang members as those of younger boys rather than mature men. It was evident that most participants realized that gang activities were not compatible with adult masculinity, and, for some, this seemingly helped precipitate the disengagement process. This occurred at varying ages for individuals, as Leverso and Hess had theorized. Several of the

younger adult participants began maturing their masculinity constructions around age 17; for older participants, they tended to begin this process after being released from long-term incarceration in prison or after years of cycling in and out of jail. The findings suggest that masculinity maturation does not typically begin before age 16. Younger teenage boys who disengage from gangs are likely not thinking about adult masculinity as a motivation.

Masculinity change was never the *only* factor to apparently precipitate disengagement for an individual. Consistent with the masculinity maturation theory and with other theoretical arguments, masculinity change worked in concert with push factors such as incarceration, violence, and disagreements with the gang, and with pull factors such as family and employment to precipitate disengagement (see Deuchar 2018; Forkby et al. 2020 for additional theoretical arguments). In consideration of the stages of gang disengagement, masculinity change helped trigger first doubts and anticipatory socialization stages for some participants, and it was a turning point for others after they were already considering leaving the gang (Decker et al. 2014). There certainly was diversity in which stage of disengagement masculinity change factored into.

My dissertation makes additional theoretical contributions beyond supporting masculinity maturation theory. One key theoretical addition this dissertation provides is the importance of masculine role models in potentially precipitating masculinity change and then gang disengagement. Most of the participants for whom masculinity change appeared to play a role in disengagement were inspired by their fathers, male intervention workers, or other male family members, who either directly talked to them about adult masculinity or inspired them indirectly through their masculinity practices. Masculine role models appeared to provide a direct path to

masculinity maturation for many individuals, although, of course, masculinity maturation can still occur without a role model to follow.

In addition, the findings newly contribute the theoretical importance of positive masculinity as a major type of masculinity that disengaging young men move toward. Leverso and Hess did not theorize in detail about what reformed masculinity consisted of. While Deuchar and Weide (2018) introduced the idea that individuals' masculinity could become more positive during disengagement, they explicitly tied it to intervention programs' efforts. The findings here show that newly embracing positive masculinity aspects before or during disengagement can occur naturally, outside of interventions, and could be more widespread than initially thought.

Finally, the findings contradicted masculinity maturation theory in one way. Leverso and Hess argued that the value placed on stable masculine attributes such as honor and respect does not change during disengagement, but rather the *meanings* of these attributes change for an individual over time. Having honor and being respectful was interpreted and practiced differently at different life stages, according to their theory. I did not find evidence of this among my participants. Nearly all had very different constructions of masculinity when they were actively in the gang (including retaliation in the face of disrespect, toughness, gaining respect through violence, selling drugs, heterosexual promiscuity, and loyalty to the gang) versus after they had disengaged (including legitimate employment, breadwinning, good family relationships, stable romantic partners, kindness toward others, community service, and spirituality). No stable masculine values emerged among my participants.

While a few other studies made (or implied) arguments that masculinity change could cause gang disengagement, they were not as fully developed as Leverso and Hess with masculinity maturation theory (see Armstrong and Rosbrook-Thompson 2017; Deuchar 2018;

Deuchar and Weide 2018; Forkby et al. 2020). My findings were generally supportive of these prior studies, most of which attributed masculinity change to gang intervention programs promoting specific versions of masculinity. There were two participants who were inspired to change their masculinity constructions in part by male intervention workers, including GRID outreach workers and a halfway house therapist. My findings support these prior studies by providing additional evidence that intervention workers could potentially directly influence gang disengagement via promoting masculinity change.

Policy Implications, Limitations, and Future Research

Over the past decade, multiple studies have documented gang intervention programs promoting masculinity change with the aim of aiding in the gang disengagement and criminal desistance process (Armstrong and Rosbrook-Thompson 2017; Deuchar 2018; Deuchar et al. 2016; Deuchar and Weide 2018; Flores 2014; Søgaard et al. 2016). The findings from this dissertation suggest promoting masculinity change can be a valid and effective gang intervention strategy, particularly for boys and men in their later teenage years and older. Nevertheless, intervention programs should be thoughtful with the type of masculinities they promote and how they promote them.

My findings showed that generally individuals move away from traditional masculinity as they disengage, especially reducing their endorsement of employment practices that are overly focused on high pay and long hours. Intervention programs should be careful not to promote these types of employment practices and instead promote legitimate employment as a marker of "growing up" or being a mature adult–but importantly, *not* as something that would take time away from one's family, as building better relationships with family is a common pull toward disengagement. The types of employment most alluring to disengaging young men would be

skilled blue-collar work, such as construction, automobile repair, or HVAC installation, which are seen as a good resource for accomplishing masculinity. Intervention programs should also be careful not to promote other traditional masculinity attributes such as avoidance of femininity or stoicism, which gangs tend to promote; nor should they focus too much on self-reliance, which my findings show overall tends to decrease during disengagement. Intervention programs moving away from traditional masculinity, aside from having legitimate employment, is more likely to help individuals move away from the gang mindset.

On the other hand, findings suggest promoting positive masculinity practices of having high quality relationships with family (including emotional, physical, and some financial caretaking), being "respectful" toward others (kind and polite), and community service and generativity would be helpful for intervention.[36] Framing these practices in a narrative of adult masculinity and maturation would likely be attractive for disengaging individuals. Using language of "being a man" rather than an "adult male" could be an effective way for intervention workers to communicate positive masculinity (as discussed by one of the participants, Kevin). In addition, masculine role models appear to be very important for promoting masculinity change. Intervention programs for both youth and adults would do well to incorporate masculine role models such as male outreach workers, therapists, and mentors who embody the type of masculinity that the program wants to promote and can communicate those masculinity practices effectively. I also recommend that intervention programs provide (optional) ways for their participants to engage in generativity and care for the community and frame these actions as that of adult masculinity.

[36] Spirituality could also be beneficial for those already religiously inclined.

This dissertation is not without limitations. The qualitative sample size is small, and I did not reach saturation before ending data collection for practical reasons. The quantitative sample size is also relatively small, especially with the change score analysis of only 70 individuals who completed both survey waves, raising the risk of an underpowered analysis and type II error (Banerjee et al. 2009). However, there were multiple statistically significant and marginally significant findings, suggesting that the associations were strong despite the small sample size. An additional limitation is that this dataset of two waves was not optimal for determining temporal order. The ideal way to determine the temporal order would have been with three or more survey waves, wherein one could establish a baseline measure of masculinity and gang embeddedness, then determine whether new masculinity change occurred in the second wave, and, finally, examine whether gang disengagement occurred in the third wave following the masculinity change. (And vice versa to determine whether gang disengagement instead occurred prior to masculinity change.) I could not implement a similar analysis with only two waves, because it would be unclear whether the wave 1 masculinity endorsement was new or a long-held belief.[37] The methods used to shed light on the temporal order were helpful, but the findings regarding temporal order should be considered with reservations.

Moreover, gangs are not a uniquely male phenomenon, but this dissertation does not explore female disengagement nor the construction of femininity during the disengagement process. Young women certainly join and leave gangs (Eghigian and Kirby 2006). While girls' gang experiences are varied, they often attempt to accomplish masculinity while in a gang in order to be accepted as "one of the guys" (Miller 2001). I can only speculate as to how constructions of masculinity and femininity might influence gang disengagement for young

[37] Whether long-held masculinity beliefs affect likelihood of earlier gang disengagement is an interesting question but not the subject of this dissertation.

women, but it would not be surprising if their endorsement of traditional masculinity and violence-oriented masculinity declined during the disengagement process. Nor would it be surprising if one of the motivations for young women to leave was to "grow up", embracing adulthood and dominant constructions of adult femininity including motherhood and long-term romantic relationships.

This new, burgeoning field of gang disengagement and masculinity is ripe for future research. This dissertation has demonstrated significant, measurable changes in masculinities endorsement during gang disengagement and showed that masculinity change could potentially be a precipitating factor using disengagement narratives. Future studies should further examine this statistical association between masculinity change and gang disengagement, including determination of the temporal order of the relationship using three or more survey waves and greater sample sizes. This would necessitate including survey questions that measure endorsement of various types of masculinities, including traditional, positive, and/or violence-oriented masculinities, or even creating survey measures for masculinity maturation. Future research should also continue to assess both quantitatively and qualitatively whether masculinity change could be a factor in precipitating disengagement, inside and outside of gang intervention programs. Considering this dissertation generally supported masculinity maturation theory (Leverso and Hess 2021), future research would do well to test this theory further. Future qualitative research can also do more to explore the typical stage of gang disengagement at which masculinity change becomes relevant (see Decker et al. 2014) and how masculinity change fits into other theories of criminal desistance and gang disengagement. Finally, little to no research has yet explored how constructions of masculinity and femininity may factor into female gang disengagement, and this may be a fruitful avenue for future research.

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APPENDIX A: Gang Embeddedness Scale

- How many of your family members are members of a gang? (None, A few, Half, Most, All)
- How many of your friends are members of a gang? (None, A few, Half, Most, All)
- How often do you have contact with a/your gang? (Never, Less than monthly, Once or twice a month, Once a week, Two to six times per week, Daily)
- How often do you post gang-related pictures, videos, or comments on social media? (Never, Less than monthly, Once or twice a month, Once a week, Two to six times per week, Daily)
- How often do you wear gang colors or flash gang signs? (Never, Less than monthly, Once or twice a month, Once a week, Two to six times per week, Daily)
- How much influence do you have on gang activities, gang politics, and gang decisions? (No influence, Very little influence, Moderate influence, Quite a bit of influence, Total influence)
- Thinking about the last 3 months, how often have you attacked or threatened someone as part of a gang? (Never, Once, Two or three times, Four or five times, More than five times)
- How important is a/your gang to you? (Not important at all, A little bit important, Moderately important, Quite a bit important, Extremely important)
- What is your position in a gang? (No position, Affiliate but not member, Just a member, Not a leader but a top person, Leader)

APPENDIX B: Violence-Oriented Masculinity Endorsement Scale

Violence-Oriented Masculinity Endorsement Scale (Response options: Strongly disagree, Disagree, Agree, or Strongly agree)
When someone disrespects you, it is important that you use physical force or aggression to teach him or her not to disrespect you.
If someone uses violence against you, it is important that you use violence against him or her to get even.
People will take advantage of you if you don't let them know how tough you are.
Sometimes you need to threaten people in order to get them to treat you fairly.
It is important to show others that you cannot be intimidated.
People tend to respect a person who is tough and aggressive.
If you beat someone up, other people your age will respect you more.

APPENDIX C: Traditional Masculinity Endorsement Scale

Traditional Masculinity Endorsement Scale (Response options: Strongly disagree, Disagree, Agree, or Strongly agree)
Stoicism
A man should never admit when others hurt his feelings.
A man should never reveal worries to others.
Men should not be too quick to tell others that they care about them.
Breadwinning
Success in his work has to be a man's central goal in life.
The best way for a young man to get the respect of other people is to get a job, take it seriously, and do it well.
A man owes his family to work at the best paying job he can get.
A man should generally work overtime to make more money whenever he has the chance.
Self-reliance
A man should never count on someone else to get the job done.
Men should be able to fix most things around the house.
A man should know how to repair his car if it should break down.
Homophobia
Gay men should never marry.
All gay bars should be closed down.
Gay men should never kiss in public.
Avoidance of femininity
Men should watch football games instead of soap operas/novellas.
A man should prefer watching action movies to watching romantic movies.
Boys should prefer to play with trucks rather than dolls.

APPENDIX D: Figures Comparing All T Test Results

Figure 2: Mean Change in Gang Embeddedness as Masculinities Increased or Decreased

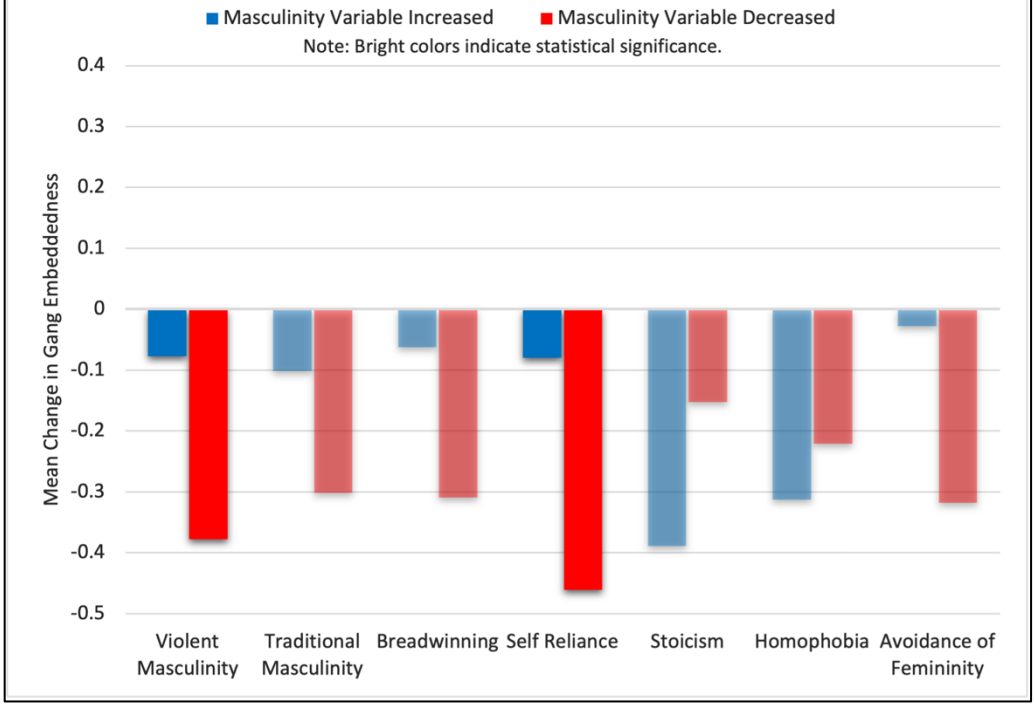
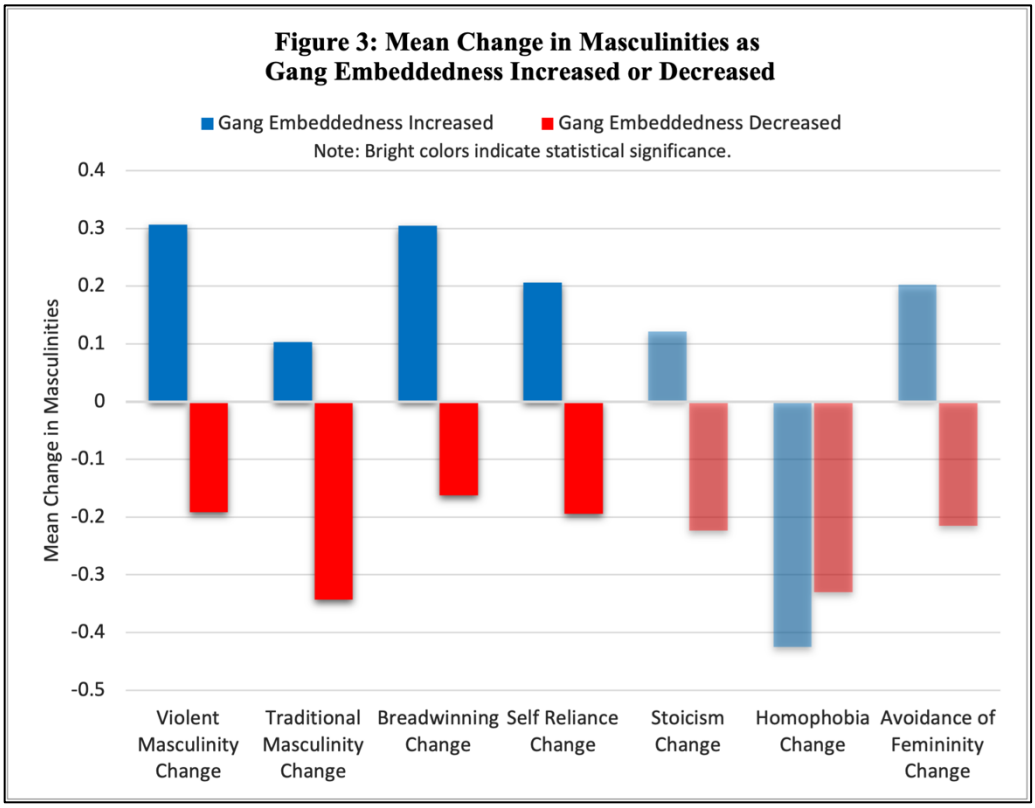


Figure 3: Mean Change in Masculinities as Gang Embeddedness Increased or Decreased



APPENDIX E: In-Depth Interview Questions

Note: Some participants were adolescents, and some were adults. Some had left their gangs, while some were still involved in gangs. Some worked with GRID, and some did not. Questions were tailored in each interview to each participant. Questions were not necessarily asked in this order.

Joining

- What was your life like around the time when you joined a gang? What drew you in to the gang?
- What is/was your reputation in the gang?

Leaving (if applicable)

- What was your life like around the time when you stopped hanging out with the gang/left the gang? For what reasons did you decide to leave/stop hanging out with the gang? What aspects of the gang lifestyle did you dislike?
- How did you picture your life changing after leaving the gang?
- How involved are you in the gang right now? Do you still feel close to them? Are you still technically a member? How much do you see people from the gang? Under what circumstances would you help them out if they needed you?

GRID outreach worker (if applicable)

- What kind of activities did your outreach worker do with you? What did you guys talk about?
- What were the main things you learned from your GRID outreach worker, if anything?

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Other people's opinions

- What kind of behavior did/do other members of your gang value? How did/do they think gang members "should" act? What values did/do they think gang members should have?
- How are boys in their teens (like yourself?) expected to act according to other teens?
- What did/do other members of your gang think "being a man" meant? Did/do they strive to be that?

Your opinions

- (Thinking back to when you were in the gang,) What did/does being a gang member mean, in your opinion?
    - What does it mean in your opinion **now**?
- (When you were in the gang,) What did/do you think it means to "be a man"? What did you think it means to be a "teenage boy"?
    - What do you think these things mean **now**?
- (When you were in the gang,) What things did/do you do that you thought were consistent with being a man? In what ways were these expectations similar or different with how **you** behaved? What **you** valued? What kind of a person **you** tried to be?
    - Same questions, but for being a teenage boy, if applicable
    - What about **now**?

- (When you were a gang member,) What did/does respect mean to you? Disrespect?
    - What do these things mean to you **now**?
- Did your GRID outreach worker teach you anything about being a man? Either on purpose or you learning things just by hanging out with him? If yes, what did he teach you or what did you learn? Did any services that your GRID outreach worker connected you with help you to "be a man"?
- Were your ideas about being a man connected to your decision to leave/stop hanging out with the gang? In what ways was it connected?