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# Situated Learning and Latino Male Gang Members at Homeboy Industries

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LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY

Situated Learning and Latino Male Gang Members at Homeboy Industries

by

Mauricio Arocha

A dissertation presented to the Faculty of the School of Education,

Loyola Marymount University,

in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education

2015

Situated Learning and Latino Male Gang Members at Homeboy Industries

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by

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This dissertation written by Mauricio Arocha, under the direction of the Dissertation Committee, is approved and accepted by all committee members, in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

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## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my father, Jaime Mario Arocha Barros, my mother, Alix Maria Lobo de Arocha, my sister, Maria Victoria Pasallar, and my brother, Henry Fernando Arocha. It was a long journey, and it was made possible by the loving care I received as a child from my family. I would like to recognize my sister-in-law, Diane Debra Arocha, my brother-in-law, Mahmoud Pasallar, and my four nieces, Nasim Ruth Pasallar, Risa Dorothea Arocha, Natalie Andrea Pasallar, and Jenna Brianne Arocha. They have always been there for me, including my dog, Dakota.

Part of my story is immigrating to the United States from Colombia, South America. I spoke, read, and wrote Spanish as a young boy. I remember living on Slauson and Braddock in West Los Angeles not speaking the language and not knowing how to read English in the seventh grade, I told myself right then and there that I would conquer this language, always trusting my parents. They always knew best and did the right thing. They worked hard and put three children through college. I knew I would finish college, and receiving a Doctorate in Education is fitting for me after all these years of struggle. Lastly, I thank my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He has carried me and has taught me the way.

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## Situated Learning and Latino Male Gang Members at Homeboy Industries

by

Mauricio Arocha

Gang intervention is crucial to improving the lives of Latino males in Los Angeles. The effectiveness of these programs is dependent on society's perspective of gang members, and its ability to support the work of gang intervention programs. As documented in this research, Latinos face unique obstacles and situations, in education and in life. This qualitative research study aimed to provide insight as to the perceived impact of a Gang Intervention Program, Homeboy Industries, on Latino males. This study also provided insight as to the methods, behaviors, strategies, and situated learning perceived to positively affect former gang members at Homeboy Industries. The protocol included open-ended, in-depth interviews with former gang members now affiliated with Homeboys that met specific criteria. The data from the interviews provided insight about the impact of the past, the struggles of the present, and the aspirations of the future for former gang members in the Homeboys intervention program. Homeboy Industries utilizes a holistic approach to define clear expectations, and enable a collaborative decision making process to develop a shared vision that cultivates trust among former gang members to improve their lives. This shared vision was rooted in the Ignatian paradigm, espoused by

Homeboys Industries founder, Father Greg Boyle, S.J. This study validated the need for gang intervention programs similar to the Homeboys Industries model, and a reconstruction of society's understanding of the former gang member, and his ability to contribute to society.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

As a student at Venice High School in Los Angeles in 1980, I was very aware of the existence of gangs at my school. I knew that the two major gangs, Venice and Culver City, were archenemies. I knew that Venice colors were blue, and Culver City colors were red. Yet, I did not find gang membership alluring. Nor would I have been allowed to be a member of a gang by my family. But my friend Carlos did. Carlos, a member of the Venice gang, grew up in the United States, and was born to Colombian immigrant parents as I was. Our fathers were boyhood friends. But his life path was very, very different.

Two decades after I graduated from high school, I met Carlos in my neighborhood as I stood on my front porch. On that day, he seemed different. He parked his car, walked up to me, and we shook hands. He said to me, “My son died three days ago.” My response was, “How?” He replied, “He got shot.” I did not have to ask any more questions. I knew what had happened. Carlos’s son was also a gang member. He had been shot by a rival gang.

It is very clear to me that many Latino men have not been as fortunate as me. Not Carlos, and certainly not his son, Carlos, Jr. And I question why that is so. I want to make a difference to young Latino men who may fall into the trap of a gang lifestyle. My dissertation research addressed these issues by exploring a community-based organization that is a gang intervention and society reentry program, Homeboy Industries, and how the gang members’ experience at Homeboy Industries affected the

Latino male's perspectives about—and affiliation with—gang life and their reintegration into society.

### **Background**

In the public housing projects of Pico Gardens and Eliso Village of East Los Angeles, Father Gregory Boyle, a Catholic Priest and a member of the Society of Jesus, the Jesuits, had an idea to keep young gang members out of gangs and jails and keep them alive (Boyle, 2010). Father G, as he is known today by the former gang members, believed that jobs would keep gangsters from going back into gangs, and would move them toward a productive life and fulfillment of ambitions far beyond those found in prison yards. But how could he bring jobs to a neighborhood that had nothing in the form of employment, safety, or futures? The answer was to build his own job employment agency on the grounds of Dolores Mission Church (Boyle, 2010).

Father Gregory Boyle's compassion for the gang members of East Los Angeles gave birth to Homeboy Industries, a company that employs formerly incarcerated gang members known as Homeboys and Homegirls, also referred to as *homies*, and gives them work (Boyle, 2010). Homeboy Industries' first attempts at rehabilitation were not always successful and homies would often leave and return after they were in trouble once again. The most painful thing for Father Boyle was when homies got killed. On a regular basis, Father Boyle has given eulogies for one of his homies. Father G buried his first youngster killed due to gang violence in 1988, and, as of December 17, 2014, had buried 195 young men and women due to gang violence (Boyle, 2010).

Father Greg wanted to provide more former gang members with jobs and rehabilitated lives. Gang members have criminal records and little schooling with no

formal training in a trade or work experience. Homeboy Industries' stated mission is to resolve this challenge; they do so by guiding individuals intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually, and providing services that help gang members move away from the gang and into productive lives—something they have never experienced or have a very little likelihood of experiencing, because of the way that society looks at gang members and their very limited opportunity to find gainful employment in the public sector, which is effectively closed to them (Boyle, 2010).

### **Statement of the Problem**

#### **The Plight of the Latino Student**

The failure of over more than three decades to make any progress in moving more Latino students successfully through college suggests that what we have been doing to close the achievement gap is not working (Klein & Maxson, 2006). This fact has enormous consequences for the United States, as the job market continues to demand more education, and Latinos continue to make up a larger portion of the workforce (Berliner, 2009). The Latino public school population nearly doubled between 1987 and 2007, increasing from 11% to 21% of all U.S. students (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2009). The U.S. Census Bureau predicts that by 2021, one in four U.S. students will be Latino. In key states in the U.S. Southwest, such as Texas and California, the Latino school-age population is already approaching one half of all students. Although a large gap exists between the college completion rates of Whites and Blacks, both groups have shown steady growth; yet, the growth in college degrees for Latinos has been almost flat (Klein & Maxson, 2006). Evidence has suggested that a continuing net of support for disadvantaged students is likely to significantly improve

their academic outcomes and reduce the wide gaps in achievement that now exist (Fernandez, 2009). It follows that under these conditions, students will be more likely to graduate from high school and successfully prepare for college.

### **Gang Membership**

Though the lack of high school and college degrees in the Latino population can prevent Latinos from employment opportunities, this lack of support for education among this population can result in even more serious consequences. Students who lack these supports are more likely to be lured into the gang lifestyle, as membership in the gang can replace membership in a family, and job prospects can become an overwhelming experience for the disadvantaged student (Fernandez, 2009).

Motivation for joining the gang is varied, but usually falls within one of the following categories. Research suggested that members join (a) for identity or recognition within the gang to achieve a level of status that is impossible outside the gang culture; (b) for protection from other gangs, because many members join the gang in the area they live in; (c) to simulate the fellowship and brotherhood that is missing in the family, because the gang functions as an extension of the family and may provide companionship lacking in the gang member's home environment; and lastly (d) to engage in narcotics activity and benefit from the group's profits and security (Riguez, 2005).

Without formal education and with few job skills, many Latinos fall prey to the gang influence and have no way to extricate themselves from this environment. However, some Latino gang members have been successful in modifying their behavior and reintegrating as productive members of society through their experience with Homeboy Industries, a community-based rehabilitation center. An exploration of the



situated learning experience at Homeboy Industries led to a better understanding of how to properly address the needs of this marginalized population, and what the true impact of Homeboy Industries has been on the gang member's perspective and affiliation with the gang experience.

### **Research Question**

This dissertation, in the form of a qualitative research study, addressed the following research question: How does the situated learning experience of Latino male gang members at Homeboy Industries affect their perspective about and affiliation with gang life?

### **Statement of Purpose**

This study investigated the experience of former gang members at Homeboy Industries. The exploration uncovered the impact of Homeboy Industries on gang members' perspectives about gang life and their reintegration into society. Other models, around the country and actually around the globe, approach the issue of gangs and the recovery of gang members. However, each one is unique and distinct to its milieu and host nation. This research explored the specific site of Homeboy Industries and analyzed the impact of the situated learning experience on gang members' perspectives about gang life and their affiliation with it.

### **Significance of the Study**

Homeboy Industries is the last stop for many of the clients that use its resources. If homies choose not to stay, they often return to the gang and gang life style (Boyle, 2010). The voices of those who stay and use Homeboy Industries as an avenue to

societal reintegration must be heard. The voices of these Latinos provide important information to improve the life outcomes of this marginalized population.

Also, this study sought to help Homeboy Industries and others evaluate programs and practices based on client feedback. If a better understanding of former gang members can be more widely disseminated, then society may revise its notions of Latino gang culture and provide more appropriate support for this disenfranchised population.

Policymakers may review this study and draw their own conclusions about the benefits and challenges of preventative rehabilitation and about the situated learning experience of community centers such as Homeboys. For example, one 2009 study indicated that the State of California saves more than twice the amount of money that it spends on nonviolent offenders who are sentenced to criminal rehabilitation rather than prison (Fernandez, 2009). Additional research about preventative crime programs might provide the needed aid to those most marginalized in our society: those entrapped in the gang lifestyle.

## **Theoretical Frameworks**

### **Situated Learning and Communities of Practice**

The primary theoretical framework used in this study was Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger's (1998) situated learning in communities of practice (Wegner, 1998). Lave and Wenger (1998) explained the theory thusly:

Communities of practice present a theory of learning that starts with this assumption: engagement in social practice is the fundamental process by which we learn and so become who we are. The primary unit of analysis is neither the individual nor social institutions but rather the informal communities of practice

that people form as they carry out shared enterprises over time. In order to give a social account of learning, the theory explores in a systematic way the intersection of issues of community, social practice, meaning, and identity. (p. 1)

Lave and Wenger (1998) stated that persons are the sum total of their experiences. They further argued that humans learn from any situation, thus the importance of situated learning. Wenger (1999) insisted, “We are always learning” (p. 30). Being in a group of people at any location allows participants to feel a sense of belonging to the community, and creates a learning experience. Learning takes place at many levels and is reciprocal in all situations. All agents in any transaction learn from the vicinity of the experience and the situation in which they find themselves. Thus gang members at Homeboy Industries are learning from every situation they find themselves in at the center. This research explored how this type of learning and this sense of belonging to community impacted them.

Lave and Wenger (1998) employed four premises—used as assumptions—regarding matters of learning and the nature of knowledge. They asserted:

1. We are social beings. Far from being trivially true, this fact is a central aspect of learning.
2. Knowledge is a matter of competence with respect to valued enterprises – such as singing in tune, discovering scientific facts, fixing machines, writing poetry, being convivial, growing up as a boy or a girl, and so forth.
3. Knowing is a matter of participating in the pursuit of such enterprises, that is, of active engagement in the world.

4. Meaning – our ability to experience the world and our engagement with it as meaningful – is ultimately what learning is. (p. 4)

These premises made Homeboy Industries an ideal candidate as a community of practice, where situated learning takes place and the legitimate peripheral participation leads to a learning experience that can impact the lives of the participants and thus be meaningful. A unique feature of the practice at Homeboys was that rival gang members coexisted and worked together in a community, which made this an unusual model and provided for impactful interviews and an opportunity for rich data analysis.

### **Method**

The study used a qualitative approach, collecting data in the form of interviews, document review, and observations. The methods were chosen because they were the best suited for the site and the clients of Homeboy Industries. Particularly the qualitative method, en lieu of a quantitative method, allowed for in-depth conversation and exposure of the gang members' funds of knowledge as they informed their Homeboy experiences.

### **Limitations**

Two limitations prevented this study from being generalized to other community-based gang rehabilitation programs. First, the sample size was very small. Though I deeply explored the experiences of the participants, I only interacted with three homies for the purpose of the in-depth interview. However, my observations allowed me to casually interact with other participants, and I also interviewed the head of Homeboys, Father Greg Boyle, S.J. Nonetheless, I was able to establish a rapport with three clients at Homeboy Industries and conduct rich, in-depth, and lengthy interviews during my visits. Qualitative researchers believe that it is the depth of the data collection, and not

the breadth that is most compelling. I concurred with this assertion (Clandinin & Connelley, 2000).

Second, my positionality as a Latino male with friends who have experienced the gang lifestyle and friends who have lost sons to gang violence influenced my position in this research. I was and remain passionate about helping this marginalized population, and the work that I have seen at Homeboys makes me believe that this place is successful in its endeavors. This will be addressed as I move forward with the analysis and synthesis of the study.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Latinos in America have had a mixed experience in the Land of Opportunity, where they have been told that if they study hard, they will be rewarded with a white-collar, middle-class lifestyle (Suarez-Orozco & Páez, 2009). However, Latinos have been struggling to achieve in America since their early immigration, and the gang experience is a part of this history.

#### **Historical Background: Latino Origins in America**

When Mexico started its rebellion for independence from Spain in 1810, there was little contact between the American and Mexican people, although the Spanish had been in the Americas for a longer period of time and had many more settlements (Morrow & Torres, 2002). The first encounters were over property rights between the former Spanish landlords and the Anglos and their expansion west (Morrow & Torres, 2002). These conflicts and others set in motion an institutionalized set of norms of mistreatment by Anglos against the Mexican people in what was once former Mexican land (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). Some still argue that those lands were taken illegally from the Mexican people (Rodriguez, 2005).

Later, the Second World War actually brought many immigrants to the United States for work, and many Mexican Americans fought gallantly in the United States Armed Forces. However, once the war was over, Mexicans were shipped off back to Mexico (Valenzuela, 1999). By the 1960s, Mexican Americans were well established in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010) and began to look at the Black Civil Rights Movement as an avenue toward equal rights (Noguera, 2009). The use of the term

*Mexican Americans* here is not to be confused with the rest of Latin America or Latin Americans. The term *Latino* is used here to identify a larger group consisting of many nationalities from Mexico to Argentina and the Caribbean. This rocky start for Latinos in the Americas has had many negative consequences, one of which is the disenfranchisement of Latinos in the American school system.

Table 1 shows how the educational dropout rates are higher for Latinos.

Table 1

*Status Dropout Rates of 16- through 24 Year Olds in the Civilian, Noninstitutionalized Population, by Race/Ethnicity (1990–2010)*

Year	Race/Ethnicity					
	Total	White	Black	Latino	Asian/ Pacific Islander	American Indian/ Alaska Native
1990	12.1	9.0	13.2	32.4	4.9	16.4
1995	12.0	8.6	12.1	30.0	3.9	13.4
1998	11.8	7.7	13.8	29.5	4.1	11.8
1999	11.2	7.3	12.6	28.6	4.3	12.8
2000	10.9	6.9	13.1	27.8	3.8	14.0
2001	10.7	7.3	10.9	27.0	3.6	13.1
2002	10.5	6.5	11.3	25.7	3.9	16.8
2003	90.9	6.3	10.9	23.5	3.9	15.0
2004	10.3	6.8	11.8	23.8	3.6	17.0
2005	90.4	6.0	10.4	22.4	2.9	14.0
2006	90.3	5.8	10.7	22.1	3.6	14.7
2007	80.7	5.3	8.4	21.4	6.1	19.3
2008	8.0	4.8	9.9	18.3	4.4	14.6
2009	80.1	5.2	9.3	17.6	3.4	13.2
2010	77.4	5.1	8.0	15.1	4.2	12.4

*Note.* Adapted from U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2012). *The Condition of Education 2012* (NCES 2012-045), [Table A-33-1](#).

### **High School Graduation Rates for Latinos**

Although Latinos are the largest growing minority in the United States, their high school graduation rate is far below that of other minorities, especially in urban areas (Gándara & Contreras, 2010). Minorities have traditionally fared better than their parents, but this has not been the case for Latinos (Gándara & Contreras, 2010). According to Payne and Slocumb (2011), Latinos have lower income, higher poverty,

and less health insurance on a per capita basis compared to all other groups. In education, the percentage of Latinos 25 years and older that had at least a high school education in 2011 was 63.2%, and the percentage of the Latino population 25 and older with a bachelor's degree or higher in 2011 was 13.2%. The percentage of Latino students (both undergraduate and graduate students) enrolled in college in 2011 was 14.5%, but, of those Latinos enrolled, only 11% completed college (Gándara & Contreras, 2010). In terms of individuals, the number of Latinos aged 25 and older who had at least a bachelor's degree in 2011 was 3.7 million, and the number of Latinos 25 and older with advanced degrees in 2011, master's, or doctorate level, was 1.2 million (Gándara & Contreras, 2010).

### **Economic Issues Associated with Dropping Out of High School**

There are significant negative consequences for dropping out of high school. The Alliance for Excellent Education (2009) reported that high school dropouts have significantly diminished opportunities to acquire good employment and a promising future. Collins (2008) reported that high school dropouts earn on average 1.5 times less than high school graduates and 2.7 times less than college graduates. Klein and Maxson (2006) have argued that high school dropouts earn approximately \$1 million dollars less than college graduates over a lifetime and \$9,200 less per year than high school graduates. Morrison (2006) suggested that high school dropouts were more likely to be unemployed, living in poverty, receiving public assistance, in prison, on death row, unhealthy, and divorced. Recent estimates calculated high school dropouts cost communities, states, and the United States approximately \$243,000 to \$388,000 over a lifetime (Klein & Maxson, 2006).



Because a large proportion of gang members are high school dropouts, there is correlation between gang membership and dropping out of high school (Morrison, 2006). The choice of dropping out of high school not only affects the individual, but also negatively impacts society by imposing a social cost to local communities, California, and nation (Logan, 2009). According to Noguera (2008), the cost to cities, counties, and states of gang intervention was less than incarceration.

One of the consequences for families with low resources, including Latino families, is that they lack fundamental access to goods and services that most middle-class Americans take for granted, such as health care, child care, parks, and after-school activities where children can create social networks that will offer access to people with power and capital (Gándara & Contreras, 2010)

### **Latinos and Parental Education Attainment**

Latino students are many more times as likely as students from other ethnic groups to come from homes where parents do not speak English well, or at all, and where parental education is low. More than 40% of Latina mothers lack a high school diploma, compared with only 6% of White mothers; and only about 10% of Latina mothers have a college degree or higher, compared with almost one-third of White mothers (See Table 2.). Although Latino students may come from loving homes, limited education and resources do affect their education outcomes. There is no better predictor of how well children will fare in school than parents' education attainment (Murnane, Maynard, & Ohls, 1981, as cited in Gándara & Contreras, 2010).

Table 2.

*Mother's Education Level by Ethnicity*

Ethnicity	Less than High School %	High School %	Bachelor's Degree or Higher %
Latino	41.3	28.6	9.9
White	5.9	29.0	31.7
Black	18.2	34.4	15.3
Asian	16	22.2	44.7

*Note:* Information adapted from *Current Population Survey (CPS), Annual Social and Economic Study Supplement, 1971–2005*, previously unpublished tabulation, by U.S. Census Bureau, 2005, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce.

**Conditions for Poor Educational Achievement of Latinos**

It would be simplistic to suggest that one factor or combination of factors explain the low achievement of many Latino students (Gándara & Contreras, 2010). There are many conditions that contribute to poor achievement for the Latino population (Gándara & Contreras, 2010). However, trends can be identified. These trends are varied: The student's experience within the family and community, the amount of parent education, the income of the parents, which is based largely on their education, and the economic and social capital that Latinos lack places them at a disadvantage (Gándara & Contreras, 2010).

**Inequitable Education for Latinos**

Education for Latinos continues to be a challenge and a source of injustice. There are not enough role models in families or in communities to positively impact the educational aspirations of young Latinos (Rodriguez, 2005). Doing well in school is looked down upon by Latino peers and good Latino students are taunted as acting White or being school boys, which is a derogatory use of the term and pejorative in the gang cultural context (Rodriguez, 2005). Further, Latino males are subjected to gangs, and

gang violence perpetrated against them or their family at higher rates than it is against other minorities (Payne & Slocumb, 2011).

Two thirds of Latinos in the United States have foreign-born parents. Most Latinos live in a mix of families with legal status and undocumented individuals that compose the fabric of the extended family. This instability impacts student's ability to stay in one school for a period of time, which is known to cause educational challenges (Payne & Slocumb, 2011). Evidence has indicated that staying in one school system with the same group of classmates for an extended period of time through an educational career, K–12, positively impacts the child, with graduation rates going higher (Suarez-Orozco & Pérez, 2009). The neighborhood experience can also have an impact on this phenomenon.

### **Neighborhood Models**

Two theoretical models explain how neighborhoods can affect the development of Latino youth in ways that in turn help determine their schooling outcomes. The Neighborhood Resources Theory (University of California Latino Eligibility Study, 1997) argued that the quality of local resources available to families, such as parks, libraries, and child care facilities affects child developmental outcomes. Because poor children's neighborhoods have fewer of these supportive resources than neighborhoods in which middle class children grow up, researchers infer that low-income children receive less exposure to developmentally supportive and enriching activities (Gándara & Contreras, 2010). Neighborhoods also provide another important resource to children: the availability of role models.

The second theory, collective socialization theory (Coleman, 1988, as cited in Neckerman, 2004), argues that more affluent neighborhoods generally provide more successful role models, as well as stronger support for behaviors associated with school success. Middle-income students are more likely to encounter both adults and peers in their communities who are supportive of high educational goals and can even assist young people in achieving those objectives (Gándara & Contreras, 2010).

A third aspect of neighborhoods is safety, which almost certainly affects children's development and therefore their academic performance (Rodriguez, 2005). Children's educational opportunities are limited when simply coming from and going to school is risky for children because gangs in their neighborhoods may assault them, or when staying after school for extracurricular activities is out of the question because traveling through the neighborhood after dark is not safe, (Rodriguez, 2005). This is basically the Achilles heel for the plight of Latinos: Where are they to go and what should they do after school? The most vulnerable time for young Latinos is from 3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. Introduction into the gang, teenage pregnancy, and drug and alcohol use happen during this afterschool time period. This is, of course, when the parents of young Latinos males are still working (Rodriguez, 2005).

Additionally, where children live influences their access to good schools. Schools draw from their surrounding communities. Nonminority home buyers will not buy homes in poorer areas because these areas are perceived as having lower-performing schools. Subsequently, property values stay low and owning a home is not as much of an asset (Noguera, 2008). Low-income families have less money for future generations (e.g., funds for college tuition). For Latinos, in particular, lack of economic mobility and

jobs without any mobility potential make it more challenging to move out of an ethnic community into the mainstream (Gándara & Contreras, 2010).

Powerful negative social and economic forces limit both institutional and individual agency for Latinos in America (Suarez-Orozco & Pérez, 2009). All children require substantial investment in order to grow and develop normally, to avoid problems with the law, and to become productive members of society, regardless of race. They need good nutrition, health care, a safe and decent place to live, and nurturing families and communities, in order to develop healthy self-concepts and a desire to do well in school (Gándara & Contreras, 2010). Many poor Latino children have had little investment in their development aside from the basic care that their families are able to provide for them with limited resources. Children return home and are not allowed to leave again for the sake of safety and, subsequently, are robbed of the integral need to explore their neighborhoods and surroundings outside as part of their daily routines (Gándara & Contreras, 2010). Unsafe neighborhoods populated by gangs are a blight on the Latino community and have a long and complicated history that resonates in the Latino community today.

### **Historical Perspective and the Gang Member**

The history of gangs in the United States dates back to the early 1940s. The Latin Kings is the largest and most organized Latino street gang in the United States (U.S. Department of Justice, 2010). This group has roots dating back to the 1940s in Chicago. The Latin Kings first emerged in Chicago after several young Puerto Rican men on the North Side and, later, Mexican men on the South Side, organized into a self-defense group to protect their communities (Valenzuela, 1999). The intention was to unite all

Latinos in a collective struggle against oppression and to help each other overcome the problems of racism and prejudice that newly arriving Latino immigrants were experiencing (Valenzuela, 1999).

The name Latin Kings and Queens, as it denotes, is a reference to members of all Latino heritages (Klein & Maxson, 2006). They organized themselves as a vanguard for their communities. Like the Black Panthers, the Young Lords, and many other groups perceiving social injustices directed at their people, the Latin Kings were eventually broken as a social movement. They lost touch with their roots and grew into one of the largest and most infamous criminal gangs in America (Klein & Maxson, 2006). The group's members became involved in crimes, including murder, drug trafficking, robberies, and other organized criminal activities (Klein & Maxson, 2006). Other subcultures of gangs grew out of this initial gang organization in the United States.

Several subcultures of gangs in the United States have their own identities (Logan, 2009). Ethnic, historic, and geographic characteristics make each gang different. For example, Black gangs have a history of subjugation as their backdrop; the new Vietnamese and Cambodian gangs have the trauma of war and of refugee status after the conflicts in Southeast Asia of the late 1970s. The Central American gangs of Los Angeles have their lineage in the bloody civil wars in the 1980s of El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Honduras (Fremon, 1995).

### **Los Angeles–Based Gangs**

Gangs have existed in Los Angeles since the 1940s, but the 1980s brought refugees from Central America, and the recent immigrants moved into what was formerly known as South Central Los Angeles (Logan, 2009). The recent arrivals patterned

themselves after the Black gangs in South Central Los Angeles, today known as South L.A. The Black gangs, The Bloods and The Cripps, were replaced by Salvadorian gangs know as *Mala Salvatrucha* (MS 13), and the 18th Street Gang, among many other gangs or cliques (Logan, 2009). The Mexican Mafia and the introduction of crack cocaine in the mid-1980s increased the number of gangs to what (as of 1995) were over 1,800 gangs in the County of Los Angeles (Fremon, 1995).

*Mara Salvatrucha*, commonly abbreviated as "MS," "Mara," or "MS-13," is a Latino street gang operating in the United States (Logan, 2009). It originated in Los Angeles and has spread around the United States and Canada as well as to Central America, specifically El Salvador. *Mara Salvatrucha* is one of the most dangerous gangs in the United States; its activities include drug and weapons trafficking, auto theft, burglary, assault, and murder, including contract killings (Logan, 2009). The gang also publicly declared that it targets the Minutemen, an anti-illegal immigration group that takes it upon itself to control the border, possibly because the group interferes with their smuggling of drugs and weapons across the border. *Mara Salvatrucha* has been investigated by the FBI and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (U.S. Department of Justice, 2009). Since the 1980s, gangs have been an issue in Los Angeles and community-based gang intervention organizations and programs have tried to stem gang involvement and work on integration into society (Boyle, 2010).

### **Profile of a Gang Member**

**Early recruitment.** The typical gang member starts very early in life (Logan, 2009). Gang leaders recruit early because they have more success at having recruits be loyal “homies” if they begin with the young boys. The training for gang members is not

necessarily a conscious practice by the older member, but older gang members do recruit and convert disciples on an ongoing basis. The chances of creating a “true believer” are increased when gang members are engaged at a very young age (Rodriguez, 2005), as young as four years old. Young boys are pictured in gang attire with plastic or real guns used in mock fights and battles (Logan, 2009). There is a kind of status in this—though not one appreciated by society. Gang families know that one of their family members is in a gang, but they may deny it as a coping mechanism.

Many Latinos join gangs because their own families are dysfunctional or broken. One of the most important support systems when growing up is the family (Logan, 2009). If that support system is missing or lacking, it is an open door for gang’s influence. A dysfunctional family is an open wound waiting to be infected by the gang (Logan, 2009). Joining the gang provides status in the absence of any other purpose for the future. The dysfunctional family also creates fertile ground for other social ills. Education is not seen as an important asset that can be built upon, and the penal system becomes just another part of life (Logan, 2009). The gang, to some extent, depends on these dysfunctional families, because if they were functional families, children would not be susceptible to the gang’s influence (Logan, 2009). Gang members believe that they are not going to be anything else in life, and so are attracted to the benefits and the community of the gang lifestyle as the only option (Boyle, 2010).

**The cycle of gang life.** Gangs are part of a cycle of drugs, prostitution, and mental illness—a low-intensity warfare that is a constant burden on the mind and emotions, a bombardment and assault on the senses and the spirit. For the gang member, there seems to be no escape from the never-ending cycle of violence, death, drugs, jails,



prisons, broken spirits, and broken lives (Logan, 2009). To quote Father Gregory Boyle (2015), “Everyone, to a man, is running away from something.” The gang member feels that there are very few options for him and it’s generational—father to son, family member to family member, all one large homogenous clan (Logan, 2009). The perception that the gang is trap from which there is no escape comes early, and gang members believe the options are few, if any, outside the gang. Even gang members that work daily jobs and support families owe allegiance to the gang and have to perform gang activities. Gang activities are harmful or illegal acts that support the gang financially or in turf wars, providing territory for illegal activities to take place (Rodriguez, 2005). The life cycle of a gang member begins and repeats itself, a direct line from cradle to gang to prison and an early death (Boyle, 2010). This is the story and life trajectory of a gang member (Rodriguez, 2005).

**A life of hopelessness and failure.** Experiences with failure in education result in limited job prospects or employment opportunities, which then become a natural pipeline for gang membership. Though not a glamorous life, it is one that offers the necessary stability in neighborhoods where any kind of predictability is better than nothing. Gang members think of each other as brothers (or soldiers) and will give their lives for each other. However, whether living in the projects of East Los Angeles, South Central L.A., or the Pico Union District, the gang life style leads to a life of incarceration and hopelessness (Rodriguez, 2005).

**Marking in the gang.** In addition to the dangers of the lifestyle, gang members mark themselves to show allegiance to their clan. The tattoos start early and, for many, are a debilitating consequence of gang life. Some gang members have tattooed not only

arms and chests, but also faces and heads. These, in particular, present a formidable obstacle when attempting to exit the gang and rejoin society. Tattoos are part of gang culture and are required in order to have the “tough guy” demeanor, which often results in further engagement in a life of crime and future incarceration (Rodriguez, 2005).

### **Increasing Gang Activity**

Some have argued that increasing gang activity is directly related to decreases in adult mentors, school failures, decreases in after-school programs, and similar failures by the adults in the lives of children (Valenzuela, 1999). While children from more affluent neighborhoods may turn to other less dangerous alternatives, children from poorer neighborhoods often turn to gangs both as protection and places to find love, understanding, and a sense of belonging and purpose (Klein & Maxson, 2006).

Others have argued that the increase of gang-related activity in minority populations—specifically that of the Latino population in the United States—is largely due to a mass ideological shift within urban communities from more conservative family values to more liberalized and antisocial establishment values, a shift that began largely during the 1960s social movements (Valenzuela, 1999).

### **Impact of Gangs on Society**

There is no question that gangs have a negative effect on the community (Boyle, 2010). Members of the community view gangs with fear, resentment, and anger. When darkness falls, they feel imprisoned within their own homes. During daylight hours, they are fearful to walk the street in case they get mugged, or even murdered, or get caught in the crossfire between warring gangs (Rodriguez, 2005).

Furthermore, the effect that gangs have upon the community is a draining force that stops people from living their lives (Boyle, 2010). This not only does great damage to the psychology of the community, but also affects their mental health and well being, and their financial viability (Klein & Maxson, 2006). Stores that once served the local community close early or do not open at all. Within areas where gangs exist, the financial impact of these responses is profound (Thornberry, 2003). According to Rodriguez (2005), some gangs are not actively involved in criminal acts, particularly not violent crimes. However, as one moves from small towns and rural areas to large cities, and particularly to the largest cities, more gang crime is seen. The economic impact of gangs is also far greater in these areas, and has a significantly increased harmful influence on communities in cities with populations of 100,000 plus (Howell & Egley, 2005). The largest cities, with populations of 250,000 and above, report on average more than 30 gangs, more gang members, and far more gang-related homicides than less populated cities (Howell & Egley, 2005).

The economic cost of gangs to society is enormous. Each assault-related gunshot injury costs the public approximately \$8 million per year (Howell & Egley, 2005). A single adolescent criminal career of about 10 years can cost taxpayers between \$1.7 and \$2.3 million (Howell & Egley, 2005). Regardless of population size, any community that senses that it is experiencing a gang problem must undertake a thorough, objective, and comprehensive assessment (National Youth Gang Center, 2002). This is the important first step before considering a response.

According to Howell and Egley (2005), it costs \$33,000 to educate a child for one year and \$170,000 to incarcerate an individual for one year. If we could reverse the monies

spent on jails to the money that is spent on education, society would see an enormous return on its investment. This finding is noteworthy because it is a question of fairness and justice. Latinos are disproportionately jailed in relation to other groups, requiring money that could be spent on schooling and educational intervention programs.

### **Gangs and Incarceration**

Los Angeles, the largest city in California, has spent billions of dollars on incarceration and policing, while the number of alleged gangs and gang members continues to increase at an alarming rate (Klein & Maxson, 2006). Law enforcement agencies report that there are now six times as many gangs and at least twice the number of gang members in the region than there were 20 years ago (Cos, 2005).

As a result, Los Angeles has the largest number of alleged gangs and gang members in the world, with an estimated 700 gangs and 40,000 gang members in the City of Los Angeles and allegedly over 1,076 gangs and more than 80,000 gang members throughout the County of Los Angeles (Klein & Maxson, 2006). California taxpayers now spend roughly \$46,000 a year to incarcerate one adult and \$252,000 a year to incarcerate one youth. According to the authors of the Juvenile Justice Crime Prevention Bill, it only costs \$1,200–\$1,300 a year to keep that same youth or adult in a gang intervention or prevention program (Klein & Maxson, 2006). As the pool of public dollars available for education, housing, and social services decreases in direct proportion to the increases in incarceration spending, lawmakers and communities are looking for—and developing—smart, innovative, and cost-effective strategies to increase public safety and reduce America’s over reliance on costly incarceration (Klein & Maxson, 2006). However, before proceeding in developing comprehensive violence-reduction strategies,

society must acknowledge the social conditions and issues such as poverty, homelessness, and an inadequate education system that limit economic opportunities thereby giving rise to gangs and gang violence (Logan, 2009).

### **Reduction of Gang Violence**

More than enough research and evidence exists that demonstrates that violence substantially decreases when governments address the root causes of gang violence while adequately funding community-based programs and practices (Klein & Maxson, 2006). One integral aspect of these new strategies is community-based gang intervention. Community-based gang intervention is one of the most cost efficient and proven ways to stop crime and create healthy and safe communities (Logan, 2009). Investing in the front end by funding gang intervention programs not only provides long lasting results, but also allows governments to invest more in education, health care, transportation, and other vital services.

A recent study by the Justice Policy Institute revealed that the average daily cost per person in jail custody was \$68.58 for the largest jail systems, with an average cost of \$58.64 per person per day for all jails (Logan, 2009). Based on these figures, if a person is incarcerated for one year, it would cost the county a minimum of \$21,403 as compared to \$2,198 per year for a community-based substance abuse treatment program (Logan, 2009). Research-backed and community-based alternatives increase public safety while saving taxpayers billions of dollars. As lawmakers and communities explore and learn about new ways to reduce incarceration rates, there are fiscally sound and proven options available to reduce crime and create healthy communities (Cos, 2005).

## **The Need for Juvenile Delinquency Prevention**

For the first time in the history of America, more than one in every 100 adults is now incarcerated in prison or jail (Cos, 2005). Even more surprising is the fact that the United States incarcerates more people than any other country in the world, with more than 2.2 million people behind bars and another five million people on probation or parole (Klein & Maxson, 2006).

The growing prison system is impacting every state in America, with total state spending on incarceration topping \$44 billion in 2007—up from \$10 billion dollars in 1987. Given this reality, prisons are now the fourth largest state budget item, behind health, education, and transportation (Klein & Maxson, 2006). As a result, vital social programs and services, such as education, jobs, housing, and health care, are being drastically cut or eliminated to maintain the booming prison industry (Logan, 2009).

Direct expenditure for each of the major criminal justice functions—police, corrections, and judicial—has increased substantially since 1982 with hundreds of billions of dollars spent. From 1982 to 2005, expenditures have increased 474% for the judicial system, 619% for corrections, and 396% for police (Cos, 2005). This spike is partly because of the three strikes law, which led to a dramatic rise in local spending as local governments were forced to spend more of their general fund expenditures on corrections and incarceration, spending more on criminal justice than the state and federal governments will reimburse them (Cos, 2005).

However, as America spends more money on corrections and incarceration, less money is being spent on juvenile delinquency prevention and intervention resources and programming (Logan, 2009). The most recent data for national spending on juvenile

justice comes from 1994 and revealed that, together, states spent approximately \$2.6 billion on juvenile justice expenditures. State-funded residential settings, such as detention centers, accounted for about 65% or \$1.69 billion of the total expenditures (Logan, 2009). As a direct result, delinquency prevention accounted for only 8% of juvenile justice expenditures in 1994, or \$208 million. Taking inflation into account and the fact that states now spend billions of dollars annually on corrections and incarceration, these numbers do not adequately reflect the huge gap that currently exists between incarceration costs and prevention and intervention spending (Cos, 2005).

### **Introduction to Community-Based Intervention**

The Community-Based Gang Intervention Model places gang intervention specialists within communities to promote public safety with the specific objective of reducing and stopping gang-related and gang-motivated violence and crime (Logan, 2009). Community-based gang intervention increases the safety of the overall community by addressing violence in a holistic manner (Logan, 2009). The Community-Based Gang Intervention Model is an integrated approach of service delivery that addresses the various systemic and institutional barriers that gang-involved youth and their families encounter in their daily lives. This model considers the interplay between individuals, families, gangs, the community, and the societal factors that promote gang violence (Klein & Maxson, 2006).

Effective gang intervention does this by providing specialized crisis intervention as well as ongoing attention and maintenance by skilled intervention specialists. These specialists have personal knowledge, understanding, and experience in gang life, and

therefore offer the greatest likelihood for gaining, building, and maintaining trust and confidence among active and former gang members (Boyle, 2010).

According to the Community-Based Gang Intervention Model (City of Los Angeles City Council, 2008), gangs are groups organized by geography, culture, or activity that have a group name and may or may not have other identifying characteristics such as colors and nicknames, whose members may engage in the use of violence to defend other members or territory; however, research has indicated that an estimated 90 to 95% of gang members are not committing violent crimes (Cos, 2005). The intervention must still take place to prevent gang recruitment.

### **Early Intervention**

Gang youth tend to become involved with a gang in early adolescence from 10 to 13 years of age (Cos, 2005). But targeting this age group with prevention services is difficult. One of the unique characteristics of this population is that the risk factors that promote violent behaviors are already present, creating a need for intervention services even earlier (Klein & Maxson, 2006).

Reducing the number of youth entering gangs will not necessarily reduce gang violence overall, because gang violence is not determined by the number of individuals within the group. Economic factors tend to drive increases in gang violence nationwide and the Community-Based Gang Intervention Model directly addresses these factors (Cos, 2005).

### **Community-Based Gang Intervention Programs**

According to Boyle (2010), Community-Based Gang Intervention reaches out to, connects with, and serves youth and adults who claim gang membership, have close



friendships and associations with current or former gang members, and have family members, especially parents or siblings who are current or former gang members. People who have been suspended or expelled from school, and arrested for gang-related activity, can be referred to community-based gang intervention agencies that will assess their needs and provide referrals to needed services and resources for purposes of redirecting individuals toward positive and healthy lifestyle choices (Cos, 2005). Therefore, gang intervention workers and service providers must work directly with gang-involved youth, young adults, and families in order to effectively reduce gang violence (Cos, 2005).

One successful program at the national level is the U.S. Department of Justice program called the Comprehensive Anti-Gang Initiative. The proliferation of gang problems in large and small cities, suburbs, and even rural areas over the last two decades led to the development of a comprehensive, coordinated response to America's gang problem by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), under the Department of Justice's Comprehensive Anti-Gang Initiative. The OJJDP has long supported a combination of activities, including research, evaluation, training and technical assistance, and demonstration programs aimed at combating youth gangs. Since the 1980s, OJJDP has developed, funded, and evaluated community based antigang programs that coordinate prevention, intervention, enforcement, and reentry strategies.

Recognizing that street gang activities transcend ages of members, in October 2009, the Office of Justice Programs (OJP) merged its existing resources to create a new National Gang Center (NGC), developing a comprehensive approach to reducing gang involvement and gang crime. The reinvigorated NGC is a single, more efficient entity, responsive to the needs of researchers, practitioners, and the public. The NGC website

features the latest research about gangs; descriptions of evidence-based, antigang programs; and links to tools, databases, and other resources to assist in developing and implementing effective community-based gang prevention, intervention, and suppression strategies. There is also data analysis of the findings from nearly 15 years of data collected by the annual National Youth Gang Survey (NYGS) of 2,500 U.S. law enforcement agencies. The public has Internet access to downloadable publications related to street gangs, and request training and technical assistance, as they plan and implement antigang strategies, and register for a variety of antigang training courses (US Department of Justice, 2013).

In addition, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), through its Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) program, provides funding to 12 jurisdictions to develop and implement a comprehensive antigang initiative (CAGI) intended to prevent and reduce gang crime (McGarrell et al., 2012). The comprehensive approach to the anti-gang initiative was based on the Comprehensive Community-Wide Approach to Gang Prevention, Intervention, and Suppression developed by Irving Spergel and colleagues (McGarrell et al., 2012), and reflected in the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's Gang Reduction Program (McGarrell et al., 2012). The elements of the comprehensive model were incorporated into a series of programs that included Safe Futures, Comprehensive Communities, the Anti-Gang Initiative, and the Gang-Free Communities and Schools programs (McGarrell et al, 2012).

### **Homeboy Industries**

Homeboy Industries, a community-based intervention program, and the subject of this study, is a youth program founded in 1992 by Father Greg Boyle, S.J., following the

work of the Christian-based communities at Dolores Mission Church. The parish is directly adjacent to the public housing projects of Pico Gardens and Eliso Village of East Los Angeles (Boyle, 2009). The program sought to assist high risk youth, former gang members, and recently incarcerated youth with a variety of free programs, such as mental health counseling, legal services, tattoo removal, curriculum and education classes, work readiness training, and employment services. The clients may receive a high school diploma or equivalent general education development certificate through the Pasadena Unified School District (Boyle, 2009).

The most distinctive feature of Homeboy Industries is its small businesses, which give hard-to-place individuals an opportunity for employment in transitional jobs in a safe, supportive environment where they can learn both concrete and social job skills (Boyle, 2009). Among the businesses are the Homeboy Bakery, Homegirl Café & Catering, Homeboy Merchandise, Homeboy Farmers Markets, The Homeboy Diner at City Hall, Homeboy Silkscreen and Embroidery, Homeboy Grocery and Homeboy Cafe and Bakery in the American Airlines terminal at Los Angeles International Airport (Boyle, 2009).

Homeboy Industries traces its roots to Dolores Mission's Jobs for a Future Campaign, a campaign developed by Father Boyle in 1988 with the Church-Based Communities of Dolores Mission (Fremon, 1995). The campaign later became the Jobs for a Future program. In an effort to address the escalating problems and unmet needs of gang-involved youth, Father Boyle and the community developed positive alternatives, including establishing an elementary school, a day care program, a community organizing project, Comité Pro Paz en el Barrio, and finding legitimate employment for

young people (Fremon, 1995). Jobs for a Future success demonstrated that many gang members are eager to leave the dangerous and destructive life on the streets. In 1992, as a response to the civil unrest in Los Angeles, Father Boyle launched the first business: Homeboy Bakery, with a mission to create an environment that provided training, work experience, and, above all, the opportunity for rival gang members to work side by side (Fremon, 1995).

The success of the bakery created the groundwork for additional businesses, thus prompting Jobs for a Future to become an independent nonprofit organization, Homeboy Industries, in 2001. Homeboy Industries is now the largest gang intervention, rehabilitation, and reintegration program in the United States (Homeboy Industries, 2012).

Entering their home at Homeboy Industries and documenting the existing knowledge of the gang members as they negotiate their reintegration can be a valuable experience for understanding the deep experience of the participants. Additionally, in the funds of knowledge model, teachers who have visited working-class minority households while engaging in collaborative ethnographic reflection have found that pivotal and transformative shifts take place in teachers and in relations between households and schools and parents and teachers (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2009). This qualitative study engaged in this type of deep reflection with the participants.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Introduction**

Chapter 3 explains the methods used in my research at Homeboy Industries. I chose Homeboy Industries as my focus for this dissertation because of its unique place in Los Angeles, and my desire to explore how this particular community, through the learning that occurs in its practices and programs, has impacted the lives of current and former gang members.

#### **The Research Question**

My research question was: How does the situated learning experience of Latino male gang members at Homeboy Industries affect their perspective about and affiliation with gang life? Community agencies can be the key to the rehabilitation of gang members. My research explored how the situated learning experience of Latino males at Homeboys impacted their views of their own life and their future.

#### **Rationale for the Qualitative Approach**

The rationale for a qualitative approach in this study was that to understand the experience of gang members at Homeboys, I needed to talk to gang members individually and at great length to get to know them. As explained by Merriam (2009), an ethnographic approach impacts a study, the researcher, and society. Qualitative researchers seek to know how people interpret their experiences and how they view their world and the meaning of their experiences (Merriam, 2009). At Homeboy Industries, I wanted to see and hear how the clients interpreted their experiences and saw their world. I wanted others to see their world through their eyes instead of accepting the image

created by others and society as a whole. More importantly, I wanted to hear their voices. Gang members generally do not have a voice in society.

### **Site Description**

Homeboy Industries, Homegirl Café, and Homeboy Bakery were located at 130 Bruno Street, Los Angeles, CA 90012 (Boyle, 2010). The building opened in 2007 as Homeboy Industries' new headquarters and bakery in downtown Los Angeles. The site for the Community Intervention program was chosen because of its neutrality to gang turf (Boyle, 2010). This could have been a problem, but its location across the street from L.A.'s Chinatown had other challenges. There are Chinese gangs in Los Angeles's Chinatown, and Homeboy caters primarily to Latin gang members. However, no gang member or nationality was ever turned away or excluded. The concerns of the gangs of Chinatown are vastly different from those of the Latinos studied here and will not be discussed in this study; it is important, however, to mention the Chinatown gangs because of their proximity to the site.

The site was a two-story orange building under the Metro on Alameda Street. The main lobby faced Alameda Street and the Café faced the intersection of Bruno and Alameda Streets, down the street from Los Angeles Union Station. Across the street from the train station is Olvera Street, the oldest Mexican Pueblo in Los Angeles. Facing the glass doors, one could see other glass doors with many small offices in them. The one to the left was Father Boyle's office. In the main lobby sat new clients. While requesting access to the site for this study, I sat there, uneasy and nervous, waiting to ask Father Boyle to for permission to do my research at the site.

Upstairs was where the work got done. There were classrooms and mental health offices. There was a computer lab and other administrative offices. Counselors with clients and new clients cleaning the bathrooms and water fountains comingled and worked together. A window looked down into the bakery.

The bakery formed the lifeline of Homeboy Industries. It was the first business that took off and really put Homeboy on the front page. The bakers and pastry makers were in the back of the warehouse, but their goods were sold up front at the café and bakery. Customers might sit at the café or sit down for breakfast or lunch, waiting to be served by waitresses with attitude (Boyle, 2009) or to take pastries and breads to go. Homeboy Industries contained two sections: the restaurant with its bakery and the programs section. The restaurant stood immediately adjacent to the programs, all in the same building. The program's entrance faced Alameda Avenue and had large windows. The glass doors swung out as people walked in and there were many chairs in a waiting area. Behind the chairs were small offices that also faced out toward Alameda, and they too had windows with glass doors. There were four offices, and the second one from the left was Father Gregory Boyle's. Father Boyle was always working, and on Sundays, he presided over Catholic Mass. He knew the homies personally and gave them his attention. I saw him pray and give blessing to homies in his office. I also prayed with him in his office for guidance.

### **Site Access**

I visited the site of Homeboy Industries many times before receiving official access. After he got to know me, Father Boyle gave me official access through a letter to the site that stated that I might perform my study at Homeboy Industries. My general

access to the site, however, was limited to its hours of operation. They were open from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The café was open Monday through Saturday with varying hours of operation. There was plenty of parking and access; once I had checked in with a California Identification at the front desk, access was basically unrestricted. I could walk around, take pictures, ask questions, and get a guided tour of the facility by one of the clients. The homies were eager to share their experiences.

### **Participant Selection**

The participants were chosen purposefully with some basic guidelines and assistance from Homeboy personnel. The basic participant guidelines included (a) 18 years of age or older, (b) a desire to participate in the study, (c) Latino males who were former gang members of a gang from the Los Angeles area, and (d) have been at Homeboy and engaged in changing his life for at least 30 days, which allowed for participants to have some point of reference and distance from the gang lifestyle. The Homeboy personnel who assisted me in choosing the participants were the case managers with whom I had previously met informally and had discussed the general objectives of my study.

### **Confidentiality**

In this study, participants were given pseudonyms and are not identified by name or gang affiliation. No physical description of tattooing or other markings has been made. In my transcriptions only, pseudonyms were used to avoid identification of participants. All original data was kept digitally on a computer that was password locked, known only to me, or was kept in a locked file cabinet, with a combination known only to me. Only my chair had access to the raw data.



The vulnerability of the participants at Homeboy Industries was also an element of confidentiality. If the participants felt uncomfortable at any time, they could discontinue the interviews or observation. If something disturbed them or triggered bad feelings, and they expressed discomfort, I had a plan to refer them to counseling services at Homeboy. No participants chose this option in my study.

### **Data Collection**

I used several methods to collect my data: interviews, observations, and document review. See Table 3 for interview and observation length and frequency, as well as document review, transcription, and analysis data.

Table 3

#### *Data Collection Summary*

Interviews	Length	Observations	Length	Thought of the Day Review	Number
Twin	3 hours	Intake	10 hours	Brief Review	76
Richard	3 hours	Classes	10 hours	Careful Review	30
Angel	3 hours	AA Classes	7 hours	Analysis	10
Joey	.5 hour	General	10 hours		
Total	9.5 hours	Total	37 hours		
Total Interviews	11	Total Observations	24	Transcribed 10 documents	
Transcription	9.5 hours	Transcription	10 hours		

### **Interview**

The proposed study design called for five participants, but I was only able to initially gather four participants who met the guidelines. After the first round of interviews, one participant opted out, and I was left with a pool of three participants for the remainder of the study. Participants joined in an in-depth interviewing process with

each meeting lasting up to one hour. I had a minimum of three meetings with each client. These sessions provided time to establish rapport with the participants. A typical session began with a statement of purpose. I informed participants of my intent to write a dissertation and that doing so required data collection. I also told them about myself: who I am, why I was doing the study, why it was important to me, and how I intended to use results to improve conditions for former gang members. I established trust with them. I also related that I had not ever been a gang member. I did not want to mislead any of the participants or unfairly burden them with preconceived notions that I might have about gang members.

The interviews were informal; participants claimed to feel comfortable, and interviews took the shape of conversations rather than formal interviews. I directed the conversation based on the information that I received from the participants. In this way, the interviewing process was more of an ethnographic experience.

Qualitative research employs the technique of participant observation and in-depth interview (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Through this model, I entered the world of the participant, establishing rapport, trust, and confidence, while keeping detailed written records of what I heard and observed. I was solely concerned about understanding, in great detail, how the participants thought and how they developed their life perspectives (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). This aim required me to spend substantial time with the participants and ask open-ended questions such as, “What is a typical day like for you?” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) and record their responses. The open-ended nature of the questioning allowed participants to answer from their own points of view and from their own experiences.

I conducted my interviews from September through December 2014, at Homeboy Industries exclusively. No off-site fieldwork was conducted.

### **Participant Journals**

Though my initial research design was to include a journal component for the gang members, a representative from Homeboy Industries asked me not to engage in this data collection method. She indicated that many of the homies are not comfortable writing because their literacy skills are low, and thus it might embarrass and distance them from the process. Thus, I did not use the journaling process at all. I respected their wishes and immediately informed my dissertation chair. We continued with the study and removed the journal component from the process. I replaced the journal data with the acquisition of the online “Thought of the Day” found on the Homeboys website. These data will be discussed further on in this section.

### **Observation**

I observed the clients at Homeboy Industries as they went about their daily lives and work experiences, watching how they interacted and reacted in their situated learning experience. I spent many hours at Homeboy Industries “hanging out,” by either dining at the cafe, stopping by after my work hours, or sitting in the lobby listening and being available for conversations with available Homeboys. All of the observations took place sometime between 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday to Friday.

I was also allowed to sit in on the intake experience of several of the homies. I sat in on many of the classes offered at Homeboy Industries, including math, English, and Life Skills classes. I attended Alcoholics Anonymous sessions, observed tattoo removal sessions, and watched the homies at work in the bakery. One of my participants was a

worker in the merchandising section of Homeboys. I spent several hours observing him selling Homeboys' items branded with the Homeboys logo. I was not allowed into a parenting class because the supervisor indicated that the issues discussed were personal. In all, I spent approximately 37 hours observing participants at Homeboy Industries. I recorded my observations in writing on 10 separate occasions, which I subsequently transcribed.

### **Online “Thought of the Day” Review**

To compensate for the data I would not collect from the journals, I looked for another way to collect personal reflections about Homeboys from either the homies or others affiliated with Homeboys. When I explored the Homeboys website, I found a section called “Thought of the Day.” “Thought of the Day” was a practice at Homeboy Industries where members of the community shared inspirational stories, sometimes spiritual, each morning before work begins. These “Thoughts of the Day” were online videos delivered by former gang members and Father Greg Boyle, S.J. I initially reviewed 76 “Thoughts of the Day.” I narrowed these 76 to 30, which I carefully reviewed for appropriate and interesting content that I thought would meet the requirement of gathering personal reflections by and about former gang members. I then further narrowed that pool to 10 “Thought of Day” segments that I transcribed and analyzed for use in the dissertation.

### **Data Management**

First I transcribed all interviews (four), all observation notes (10), and all “Thought of Day” segments (10). I then reviewed these materials several times to discern repeated patterns that were emerging. I determined that there were 10 patterns.

After identifying them, I reviewed the data again, placing coding stickers on each pattern aligned to each of the pattern categories in the appropriate sections, as Merriam (2009) suggested. After finding specific patterns, and marking them in the document, I went back through the document one more time to determine overarching categories or comprehensive classes (Merriam, 2009). These findings form the outline for Chapter 4 of this document.

### **Triangulation**

I used triangulation to facilitate the validation of data across two or more sources. In particular, it referred to the combination of several research methodologies in a study of the same subject (Hatch, 2002). The data were collected by the three methods: interviews, observation, and online “Thought of the Day” analysis.

### **Clarification of Researcher Bias**

While I was transparent about my bias, I used qualitative techniques and the mentorship of my professors regarding these biases to minimize impact and to account for bias in the study. Transparency and identification of bias added validity to the study.

### **Personal Biography**

Several years ago, I heard Father Gregory Boyle speak at Loyola Marymount University at a conference on gangs. I was working on my master’s degree and I thought to myself that one day I would conduct research at Homeboy Industries.

My perspectives have changed over the years of conducting this study. Much has happened to me. I have changed job titles at work, changed schools, learned a new curricula, and my father has passed away.

I thought that by receiving my bachelor's degree, I was finished, and then came the master's degree. Once again, I thought I was finished. My undergraduate degrees were in anthropology and political science from UCLA. My specialization in anthropology was in archaeology, and my concentration in political science was in international relations. I worked in the field of archaeology for many years and went on archeological digs and found ancient artifacts dating from the Bronze Age in Denmark. I worked on the Channel Islands off of Santa Barbara for four summers discovering the prehistoric remains of the Chumash Indians before European contact.

I double majored, and many times would see the anthropology and political science arenas mix and collide in the countries I visited for projects. As part of my training in anthropology, I was assigned and performed many ethnographic studies. I went to Tijuana, Mexico, where I crossed the border into the United States with a group of undocumented immigrants as part of a study for a Chicano Studies class.

After working in the field, I wanted to pursue a PhD in anthropology, so I returned to the mainland and was looking for a park ranger position. I had worked on the Channel Islands for the National Park Service as a survey archeologist. I intended to study in the graduate program at UCLA and work at night and weekends. That, thankfully, did not happen.

A few months later, my sister said to me, "Why don't you try teaching?" I said, "No, I can't teach children," but I did pick up an application for the Los Angeles Unified School District and an application for the first test. Two months to the day after picking up those applications, I was in classroom teaching children—Latino children—and I was

in my profession. I found what I was looking for. I loved teaching. I started teaching fourth- and fifth-grade bilingual English and Spanish.

I went to my first funeral that year and have been to one every year since. I have lost more children to gang violence than friends I have lost in the army. I am a reserve officer in the California State Military Reserve, under the auspices of the California Army National Guard. I was recently promoted to Major, and I am very happy to have accomplished this while in the working on this study. Many of my fellow soldiers have been deployed overseas in the last 12 years. There have been losses due to war, accidents, and illness—but nothing like the senseless death I have witnessed as a Los Angeles Unified School teacher in downtown Los Angeles.

My interests lay in studying gang members. I wanted to bring to the school district what I learned from Homeboy Industries that would help stop this senseless violence of children gunning down children. In my case, the focus remained on Latino children, though no ethnic minority group stands immune from violence. Latino Americans have as much potential as anyone to be successful and productive members of society and should not have to worry whether their children are going to be killed going and coming to school (Boyle, 2010).

The methods that I employed in gathering data were successful in providing me an insider's look into the former gang members' experience at Homeboy Industries.

Chapter 4 will explore that data that were collected.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **RESEARCH EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS**

#### **Introduction**

Through the triangulation of extended interviews, observations, and a comprehensive review of online videos referred to as “Thought of the Day” at Homeboy Industries, I collected data that revealed the nature of Homeboy Industries’ impact on client’s perspectives about and affiliation with gang life. Using triangulated data, this chapter answers the research question: How does the situated learning experience of Latino male gang members at Homeboy Industries affect their perspective about and affiliation with gang life?

This chapter details the encounters, observations, and “Thought of the Day” reflections from Homeboy Industries through a two-level process. First, I identify the “Key Categories” or, as Merriam (2009) has called them, “comprehensive classes,” which are overarching categories developed from the coding process of the data. Key Category 1 was entitled “Past,” Key Category 2 was entitled “Present,” and Key Category 3 was entitled “Future.” The three Key Categories were labeled Past, Present, and Future because the participants spoke of their lives in terms of where they had been, where they were now, and where they saw themselves in the future. Under each of these Key Categories were three themes, which further explained the participants’ perspectives. Some of these sections are titled with actual quotations from the interviews; others are titled with concepts that appeared repeatedly from the data that I gathered. Key to the data collection was the triangulation of the data set, which brought to the surface key categories that were crucial to the findings.



## **The Teaching of Ignatius Loyola and the Spiritual Exercises**

As I reviewed the qualitative data collected at Homeboys, a primary overall theme emerged from the experience. It became clear that culture of Homeboys played a significant part in the lives of its members. And, as I mentioned in the site description, the culture of Homeboys was very much influenced by the leadership of Father Greg Boyle, S.J. Father Greg, or “G” as the homies called him, was a member of the Catholic religious order of the Society of Jesus. This order follows the 500-year tradition of St. Ignatius (1491–1556) and the practices of this order are part of the unique practices that are evident at Homeboy Industries, specifically, the practice of “Ignatian Spirituality.”

Ignatian spirituality is rooted in the experiences of Ignatius Loyola, a Basque aristocrat whose conversion to a fervent Christian faith began while he was recovering from war wounds (Ignatian Spirituality). According to Ivens (2004):

Ignatian contemplation is focused, not on losing oneself in God, but on finding oneself in God. Contemplating is ordinarily understood as “gazing upon” the divine. In this gazing, the emphasis is not on the relationship between oneself and God, but rather is on being absorbed in God, lost in God, and taken up into God.

An example of this kind of contemplation is centering prayer. For Ignatius, however, the focus is always on relationship. (p. 19)

The Ignatian mindset is strongly inclined to reflection and self-scrutiny. The distinctive Ignatian prayer is the Daily Examen, a review of the day’s activities with an eye toward detecting and responding to the presence of God. Ignatius developed this method of examining our lives in prayer, which takes about 15 minutes to complete (Ivens, 2004). Three challenging, reflective questions lie at the heart of the *Spiritual Exercises*, the book

Ignatius wrote, to help others deepen their spiritual lives: “What have I done for Christ? What am I doing for Christ? What ought I to do for Christ?” (Ignatian Spirituality)

These questions spring from the belief that God is at work all the time and everywhere. Jesuits practice the Examen daily, and many laypersons find it an ideal way to incorporate contemplation into each day. First, participants are asked to focus on the Spirit ever at work, and consciously embrace a state of reverence. Second, one must offer thanks for God’s many gifts (Ivens, 2004). Ignatius believed that the Holy was present in our successes and failures, in both the light and the darkness. He asked that all should open their hearts to the moments that are able to reveal God (Ivens, 2004). So, next, one must ask, how has God been at work in my life? The habit of asking this question can influence the whole day and how one goes about it. Then one must contemplate how one has responded to God’s presence. If we are attentive to the ways we’re being invited and the quality of our response, the grace or opportunity will be revealed to us (Ivens, 2004). Following this, participants are to ask for forgiveness. One may feel shame or sorrow for the lapses that have occurred in life. Anthony de Mello, S.J., has suggested another way to sit with the moments you regret: “Be grateful for your sins. They are carriers of grace” (Ivens, 2004). And, finally, one should ask, how am I being called to respond now? Individuals are invited to look at the next 24 hours and begin to reinforce the goodness that begins to emerge in one’s life (Ivens, 2004).

Ignatius’s first advice to spiritual directors was to adapt the *Spiritual Exercises* to the needs of the person entering the retreat. At the heart of Ignatian spirituality is a profound humanism. Ignatian spirituality respects people’s lived experience, much like the funds of knowledge approach to education, and honors the vast diversity of God’s

work in the world. The Latin phrase *cura personalis* is often used when discussing Ignatian spirituality. It means “care of the person” and focuses attention on people’s individual needs and respect for their unique circumstances and concerns. Although not explicit at Homeboy Industries, the Ignatian spirituality and specifically the Daily Examen are implicit and infused into the daily practices, which will become clear as the data are reported (Ignatian Spirituality).

### **Participant Description**

Before describing the data collected through interview, observation, and document review, it is important to briefly describe each of the three main participants. They will become better known as the data are revealed but this is an introduction to the voices and the men that made this dissertation possible. This will help to situate the reader and contextualize the participant experiences as they unfold in this chapter.

#### **Participant #1: Twin**

Twin was a soft spoken, relatively short man in his 30s. He had tattoos on his arms and head, but not as extensive compared to other of the homies. He walked with a limp from a gang-related gunshot wound in his leg. He was Father Boyle’s right hand man, and that said a lot about who he was. His story was tragic like everyone else’s, but he did not dwell on it. He was a very positive person who completely believed in Homeboy and his exuberance was evident from the first meeting.

#### **Participant #2: Angel**

Angel was the toughest looking of the three homies interviewed. He was in his mid-20s. He was covered from head to toe in tattoos. They were prison tattoos, which are different from the ones on the street—they are not as refined. It appeared that the

themes of Angel's tattoos were focused on doom and destruction, with skulls and skeletons. He spent 10 years in prison and but was doing considerably better at Homeboys. I found out that Angel was actually very shy, and it took time and a much more developed rapport to get him to open up. Once I got to see the real Angel, I believed that he was a gentle man looking for a normal life.

### **Participant #3: Richard**

Richard was the most introspective of the three. He enjoyed our conversations and dug deep to find the meaning of what I was asking. Richard was tall, and his stature actually hid a man who wanted to fit in. He was in his early thirties. He was so tall that I had to sit to be able to have a conversation with him. Once we were at eye level, he opened up and told me about his dreams and aspirations. He wanted a house with a white picket fence, and he wanted to push his children in the swing at the park.

### **Key Category 1: Past**

A recurring theme that appeared in the interviews, observations, and "Thoughts of the Day" included participants not wishing to shut the door on their past. Numerous encounters led me to understand that the past was not something that the homies wanted to forget, but something upon which they wanted to build a new foundation. The emphasis of my research, however, was not on their past. I did not directly ask about their pasts because I did not want to be perceived as a "voyeur" into the gang lifestyle, or into the traumatic events that they had experienced. I was told by the Homeboy Representative, Eileen, that other researchers who had been to Homeboys had seemed "voyeuristic." The participants had mentioned to Eileen that they felt comfortable talking with me, unlike how they had felt with previous researchers who had seemed intrusive

and opportunistic. This knowledge confirmed my interview style, which was open-ended, nonvoyeuristic, and casual. Nonetheless, persons are a sum of our total experiences, and therefore, the past remained a compelling theme that came up naturally in normal conversation. Thus, I did not avoid or discourage references to the participants' past life. If participants spoke of what had happened to them in the recent or distant past, I listened. This Key Category detailed the findings about this important part of their lives. The themes were not set into discrete categories, but they mutated and mixed, as one folded into the next. I did my best to compartmentalize them, but they blended and mixed to support one another.

### **Family**

Family was a very important aspect of each of the participants' past lives and was brought up several times, particularly when it came to their children. Homies talked about wanting to have a "perfect" family. Perhaps one reason that they longed for an ideal family was that their family life had not been what they wanted as they were growing up. I had one homie tell me that he had "raised himself," and that he had always wanted a father. Another homie simply said, "I never had a father. I never had a mother. I never had anybody to love me." Richard, another homie without a family, talked about his childhood: "Growing up I was never taken to the park. I never was pushed on a swing. I was never told I love you . . . [it was] something I never had."

Thus, the family as a unit of support for the homies was not evident in their past; however, it was a topic that was spoken about with great longing. They wanted a family, perhaps the family that they did not have when they were young, and they wanted to

work toward that ideal in their lives. I asked Twin how he saw his life in 10 years, and he answered:

I want to own my own house, my own business, having my own business, having my own family. My kids are going to college. I'm living a better life as far as having the things that I never got the chance to have. As far as, giving it to my children and sharing it with them as far as a beautiful life.

The connection to family was also seen in their relationship to their neighborhood, and the family that continued to reside there. For example, Twin told me about his family and what he wanted for them:

It's just the love—as far as the love, as far as loving my children, loving myself, and loving my whole family and showing my whole family as far as what I went through and not live the life that I went—the lifestyle I went through—by me changing that—my past lifestyle—I could change it into a better lifestyle so when my kids grow up they'll really know what love is because I never had that love shared to me.

Another homie, in his “Thought of the Day,” talked about wanting to go home and how afraid he was of going to his neighborhood and getting pulled over by the police. Nonetheless, it seemed that the desire to go home, and be rooted by this past, was much stronger than the fear of getting pulled over by police:

Just about a week ago, before I was officially taken off parole, I went to visit my mom, [because] she still stays in the neighborhood. I pulled up to visit her and spend time with her. On the way back home, I got pulled over, [and] that was one of my biggest fears.

Though he was let go by the police, his desire to visit his mother, to be in the neighborhood where he grew up, was more powerful than the risk that he knew he was taking. There was the danger of being picked up by police, or being seen by rival gang members. And though, his greatest fear did occur, luckily, it did not have any long-term consequence for him.

Within this family, I saw what I recognized as the Latino ego. Gender was not one of my topics; however, the Latino males that I interviewed shared with me their desire to be the head of the family, to be the *jefe* or the boss of the family. It was not a passing thing. I saw it many times in subconscious manners and in ways that they expressed themselves in Spanish. The word *jefe* means boss, and it also means chief or head of the community. It was a term of self-expression about who they wanted to become.

### **Foster Care**

There were instances of homies growing up as foster children or homies who had children of their own in foster care. The foster care system is something that the homies expressed they did not like; they wished that they had been with their families instead. Angel said to me once, “I never had a father. I never had a mother. I never had anybody to love. Only Foster parents and they do it for the money.”

Foster care was looked down upon by the homies, which is why they fought to regain custody of their children and take them out of foster care. Joey had also been brought up in the foster care system. He told me, “I never had anybody to love me. I was raised in a foster home. I was raised by myself.” Joey continued by explaining how his foster care experience impacted his own parenting:

I was in foster care at eight years old. So basically, that's why I want to show the love to my son to let him know that it's all right to love you and to take you places, and enjoy yourself in the park. That's why I'm here, because I never had that love. I never got taught that love. I just – all this I learned from Father G and Homeboy Industries. That love is to share. That's the love I have grown to know since I've been at Homeboy Industries.

Clearly, foster care had a devastating effect on their lives. Their perspective about gang life and their future fathering abilities were shaped by their experiences in foster care.

### **Gang Influence**

The third element of their past that often emerged was their affiliation with gangs and the gang lifestyle. As I spoke with the three homies about their lives, they mentioned that they had started participating in gangs early. Many people think that the gang influence results primarily in drug use and violent behavior, and while the homies referenced this issue, something much deeper emerged as a negative consequence of the gang lifestyle. As Richard told me:

Because growing up and being in a gang and under the influence of drugs, all your feelings are gone. You don't have that. So for me being clean and sober today and not in a gang lifestyle and having life and feelings, I cherish my feelings a lot. I grab onto the ones that I love, which is love, compassion, and kinship—all of that—and it's a new feeling. I get new feelings every day, whether it be continuously love or compassion, every day it's the same feeling but it's a different experience. That's something I didn't feel or have in the gang.



Also, in stark contrast to what most people believe, Father Greg Boyle argued, “Boys join gangs not only to belong, but because they are running away from something” (Boyle, 2010). Father Boyle talked about gang membership and belonging in his “Thought of the Day”:

A lot of times when I give talks or I visit with different cities or talk to reporters or people afterwards, they always say the same thing. Well, of course, kids join gangs because they just want to belong. Yeah, belonging is sort of an issue, but part of the idea is people insist that there has to be something positive in a gang that lures, draws, attracts—that pulls you into it. Of course, anybody who has ever heard me yak on this knows that I don’t agree with that. I think no kid is ever seeking anything when he joins a gang. Always fleeing from something, no exceptions, I never met an exception in 30 years. But sometimes people will say, “Well, I’m the exception,” and I’ll say, “Well, no. Actually, probably you’re a stranger to yourself. So if you do the work on yourself, you go oh, okay. Now I see it.” No hopeful kid is going to join a gang, and this raises the issues about belonging.

Violence is also associated with the gang lifestyle. The homies indicated that they were tired of the violence and wanted a new way of life, a new way to see their enemy. Angel indicated how he looked at the world differently after his gang experience:

It affects me in a way where I don’t see the person as an enemy anymore at Homeboy Industries, because I never got the chance to know this person because now I’m at Homeboy Industries. Now I get the chance to face to face—talk to him, find out who he really is, and him find out who I really am and we share that

bond as far as that's how we grow together. And it's not an enemy thing anymore. The enemy thing was just my manipulation out there in the real world. That's where the enemy came from. I just got manipulated by the wrong surroundings because I never got the chance to meet this person. I'm just going by what other people are saying.

Angel also talked about Latinos and the violence in gangs:

We grew up seeing gang violence, and we figured it was the right thing to do. We saw people gang banging, wearing big clothes and we figure it's the right thing. But in all reality we were taught the wrong thing. But it was already embedded in our head at a young age. So now that we get older it's like you mean the big clothes come off, the whole attitude you mean—before it was like I kind of wouldn't talk to them. If I was just—if something was going on, then I would start punching. Now I kind of don't do that.

As a result of the violence, many gang members have been in prison. In prison, decisions happen that can affect life outside of prison. For example, Angel had his whole head tattooed in prison. The tattoos on his body represented different levels or leadership echelons within the gang or mafia hierarchy. Richard said, "Its upside in there, [in prison] the Latinos rule and it's all run by the Mexican Mafia. If you want anything you have to go through them. You can get anything, drugs, cigarettes, phones, anything, but it has to go through them."

## **Key Category 2: Present**

When it came to speaking about the present, the homies' dispositions lightened. Because of their experiences at Homeboy Industries, they felt free from the negative influences and feelings that were part of their life in the past when they were in the grip of gang life. During one interview, Twin said:

Well, tomorrow I'm going places, as far as being free, living the way I want to live, and as far as enjoying my life, enjoying myself and becoming my own man instead of another person trying to use me as far as letting someone else make me their own person into trying to control me and tell me what to do and how to live my life. But now I'm breaking free from all of that thanks to Homeboy Industries.

I also noticed a sense of freedom not only in what they said but also in how they said it, when they began to tell me their stories of the present. Angel related his story:

Oh, today I got a chance to see my son for the first time. He's in foster care right now and I'm trying to—right now I'm fighting to get my custody rights back for him, but they granted me visitation rights as far as monitored visits. So today was my first visit with my son, and it brought joy to my life I was happy today because he was happy. Even though he's in a place where he's not supposed to be at this time—in foster care—but just today just made my day and made his day as well.

I could see the joy in their eyes and hear it in their voices. This kind of description and the hopeful tone was a constant throughout my observations at Homeboy Industries.

When I spoke with Richard about what today meant for him, he talked about his son too.

Richard said:

For me it's to show my son that I never had a father. I never had a mother. I never had anybody to love me; I will show what love is for me. Today I can show that love, you know.

I also asked the homies how today they might use their stories to help others. Angel said:

Yeah, we can change because by using my story and what I've learned and been through—the pains that I suffered—maybe I could share it with one, two, or three of them in a crowd and maybe one, two, three of them will change their mind.

Would you have been able to do that before I asked? He responded, “No, no not at all before. Today I am a new man!” Homies also spoke of the freedom they felt “today.” I asked Angel what freedom meant to him today. He answered:

Freedom [means] I can smell the air. I can taste whatever food I want to eat. I can live my life, go to places like the beach, to Hollywood, enjoy a movie, and watch whatever movie I want to watch or jump in the water when I want to jump in the water at the beach. That's what freedom means to me today, and freedom means to be here at Homeboy Industries as far as redirecting my life into a better path.

Freedom was a recurring theme when the participants spoke of the present, and it significantly impacted their situated experience at Homeboy Industries and their perspective about gang life. Without freedom, none of the following activities or learning experiences would have been possible.

## **Self-Help Programs at Homeboy Industries**

All interviews and observations took place at Homeboy Industries, and it was apparent to me that the homies were happy to be at Homeboy Industries, feeling free, and moving toward creating a profitable life for themselves. The Homeboys were learning in every experience that they encountered at Homeboy Industries. They were grateful for what Homeboy Industries offered them.

Homeboy Industries offered employment with job training at one of the many businesses they operate. There were Homeboy Bakery, Homegirl Café and Catering, Homeboy/Homegirl Merchandise, and Homeboy Farmers Market. Homeboy Industries also operated the Homeboy Diner at Los Angeles City Hall, Homeboy Silkscreen and Embroidery, Homeboy Grocery, and the Homeboy Café in the American Airlines terminal at Los Angeles International Airport. There was a solar installation business along with the classes to install the solar units. A homie might be placed at any of these different work locations. Different skills sets were required for each place, and homies were placed in the best fit for them. Most started out at Homeboy Industries on Bruno Street, the main headquarters.

Homeboy Industries offered a means to gain a high school diploma or equivalent in the form of a GED from Pasadena School District, Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, tattoo removal services, social and emotional support classes, and the Jesuit-influenced spiritual practices, which most notably consist of a daily morning meeting to set the tone for the day.

Another programmatic practice at Homeboy Industries was initiated by Father Boyle. Father Boyle indicated to me that the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius formed

the underlying principles around which Homeboy Industries operated. Ignatian Spirituality, as described in the theoretical framework, is a way of understanding and living the human relationship with God in the world as practiced by members of the Society of Jesus. Father Boyle, who was a member of the Society of Jesus, used what might be called modified Ignatian spiritual practices at Homeboy Industries. He led with the disposition and philosophy of Saint Ignatius, who modeled his life after Christ. Christ-like practices such as unconditional love and forgiveness formed the foundations of Homeboy Industries, and were heard over and over again from the homies. The morning meeting, which included the Thought of the Day, was an embedded daily practice that used Christ-like messages and the practice of daily reflection, very much like the Daily Examen. It included a five-minute talk that set the tone for the day and was often spiritual in nature. This introduction to starting the day with prayer and a moment of reflection later allowed for God to come into their lives. The “Thought of the Day” was an opening of the door for the homies to become men of God. It was a Jesuit practice woven into the daily activities of Homeboy Industries.

**Impact of Homeboy programs.** There were a multitude of examples of what Homeboy Industries had done for the homies and the ways they had taken advantage of the learning experiences offered them. Twin discussed his ideas on what Homeboy Industries had done for him:

Homeboy Industries gave me a new path in my life to go forward to have a better future for myself as far as having better things in life than having to deal with whatever the past caused, but now it’s the future, and I’m living in the present today at Homeboy Industries.

He continued to tell me later on:

This day would have never come true because it would have never even existed.

If it wasn't for Homeboy Industries, I would probably be on the streets gang banging or doing drugs, in prison, or in jail. As far as—this day would have never even existed if it weren't for Homeboy Industries.

Angel talked about the anger management classes and how those had helped him to begin a new life:

They told me—they let me know—Father Greg Boyle and the Homeboy Industries—as far as them, they let me know this is the beginning for a better life for me as far as taking anger management [classes], dealing with my issues myself, finding who I am, who the real person is, which is me. I never got the chance. I'm thirty-four years old, and since I was a kid I didn't know who I was.

I heard the homies say and talk about things that adult Latino males rarely discuss and how they felt about related feelings. They talked about discovering who they were and who they wanted to become. The ability to speak their feelings was made possible by the culture that existed at Homeboy Industries. The homeboys felt that part of the learning that goes on at Homeboy Industries is more than learning job skills; it is about learning about yourself. Angel put it this way;

So this place—Homeboy Industries is helping me find myself, finding out who really I am by going to anger management [classes], substance abuse [classes], getting rid of all the bad addictions that I have and the sufferings that I've had in the past. Now it's the future as far as making it better for me thanks to Homeboy Industries.

The anger management classes offered at Homeboy Industries were mentioned several times because many homies suffered from emotional illnesses and other maladies brought on from years of abuse. Dealing with these issues through formal and informal learning experiences helped them move forward and leave the violent gang-influenced past behind. Richard said:

These classes I've been taking have helped me calm my anger down. So that right there was a big change that Homeboy Industries helped me because it stopped a lot of violence as far as me being a violent person.

He continued:

It helped me be calm around my son. Like today, for example, when I saw him I knew already how to make the situation calm and through the whole visit—through our whole visit everything was fine. He was happy and I was happy. Everybody was happy around the whole visiting process today.

Joey told me that Homeboy Industries gave him a job at one of their sites and then found him a job outside of the program. This was another significant service that Homeboys provided. Joey said:

Today in my life—here at Homeboys I've been here six months, and my life has changed. I've been in merchandise for going on a month, and just the other day I got news that I'm going to leave from here and they found me a permanent job somewhere else. So I'm just waiting for them to come back—one of the guys that's gone—and I'm going to start a permanent job elsewhere. This would've not happened without Homeboy's.



The homies were also taught at Homeboy Industries explicitly how to be fathers. In classes and in direct observation from other gang members and from Father Boyle, they learned how to parent. Joey talked about this experience.

In Fatherhood [a class offered at Homeboy Industries], it brings a group of men together and we sit down and we break bread together. We eat and we talk about—and we feel comfortable talking amongst fellows. Growing up they had a lot of things [opportunities] for women—always women, women. Well, what Homeboy Industries came up with was a class called Fatherhood—Project Fatherhood. There's phase one and there's phase two. I'm already into phase two, and what it does is—you speak up on what's going on with your kids. They tell you how to deal with different things with your kids. It's a great class.

Richard also talked about how the Homeboy community and classes helped him:

Because of Homeboy and the tools that they have given me in the workshops and stuff like that it's made me I've had my thought processes redirected to the way like I have meaning today. So hope is Homeboy and hope is I do have a future. I see myself living and being a productive member of society. Like we say every morning at our morning meeting being a productive member of society. So hope for me is Homeboy. I love it.

I started to get a sense of what Homeboy Industries was to the homies: a place where they saw change and progress. Change was tangible for them. Richard said this to me one day:

Well, every day I come to Homeboys and I see people that have worked here before, accomplishments that they've seen, and all the workshops that they give

us. And every day I come here it gives me hope that the more I'm doing good, the better it will be.

Richard was one of the homies to whom I got closest and he explained that, when we met to talk, it helped him work through some things with which he was struggling.

He said:

If I do wrong things, wrong things will happen to me. I've learned that the more I do wrong the worst the consequences will be. I actually realize that now, and it's changing the way I think. I know that if I do good, good things will happen to me. I didn't used to be like that.

I asked Richard, "What's going on here that is not happening in other places?" He responded:

They wouldn't understand it because coming through these doors (Homeboy Industries) are different services that we have, whether it be Narcotics Anonymous, Alcoholics Anonymous, there's always a higher power. Every time I hear someone speak about something positive, there's always a reason behind it. And to me, everyone that I talk to has been—the reason was God. So it's not promoted. Homeboy's is not promoted as a spiritual place only because some people are not spiritual.

The services provided, the learning that homies experienced, all of these things were enhanced by the "spiritual" culture that exists at Homeboy Industries. Their self-respect was increased and their sense of who they were was allowed to flourish in this unique community. They were allowed to be themselves without fear of ridicule.

## Community Experience

The homies defined community as a sense of belonging and family that they had not experienced. Homeboy Industries' literature described its program as the off-ramp from the gang lifestyle through its community. The community extended, from what I heard, to other activities and other places where the homies gathered and interacted. Community in the words of one homie had been "God given."

Father Gregory Boyle, in his "Thought of the Day," asked: "Does your belonging end in becoming? That's the whole measure. If it ends in becoming, then you're part of something that's real, genuine, and authentic."

Homeboy Industries is an authentic community because peoples' belonging ends in becoming, becoming the truth of who they are. Homies talked about inhabiting that truth that they are, which is exactly what God had in mind when God made them. That becoming was the discovery of the real self in love, not just being loved and accepted but in loving and in accepting. Richard mentioned this same feeling when he was talking about his children and how he felt that that was the same love that God had for him.

That was what happened in a real community, but in a fake community, people got stuck in a disguise. So a homie said to others, "I was the downest *vato* from my neighborhood" (Boyle, 2010). Then, he revealed to Father Boyle, "I was disguised as that guy." Father Greg responded, "If you're stuck in that disguise, then you're belonging to a community that's fake." For there to be a positive transfer of ideas and morals in a community of practice, it has to be genuine.

In that “becoming of who they really are,” the homies became a part of a community that never turned someone away, a community that was unconditionally welcoming. Here is an example from a conversation I had with a homie:

I would walk into Homeboy Industries—before when I was in the streets, I would walk in as like a madman. I didn’t care. I was disrespecting everybody. I didn’t care—fighting, causing chaos like a tornado. It was just everybody—they already knew who I was as soon as I walked in the door. But it was my anger issue that I had to deal with, and as soon as I walked in Father G. would get up out of the meeting, and he would just walk me back out and calm me down and he’d redirect me back to the streets and tell me he loves me.

This idea of love, being loved unconditionally, and belonging to a community that was unconditionally welcoming was a foreign feeling for the homies. They had never experienced anything like this before and stepping into Homeboy Industries allowed them to express love as well. Joey never got turned away from this community:

And I know that was it (love). But every time I walked in Homeboy Industries it was a—I had an anger issue as far as what I was going through in my life. But this is where the change came in. Now that I’ve been—since I’ve been in Homeboy Industries I was working here before but this time—these thirty days—it’s helped me a lot. I’ve been taking therapy, anger management—all these classes.

The classes were only a part of the learning experience. The learning also came from listening and being with the other homies. While I was waiting and observing one day, I had a conversation with a Homegirl. She was pregnant at the time, and she knew I

was interviewing homies. I asked her about her day, and she started to tell me how she had changed and that she felt a part of the Homeboys (community) and that the other homies were like her brothers. She also related a story about how she always questioned the motives of men who talked to her before she came to Homeboy Industries. She did not trust them. Now her trust has been re-established because she felt she had brothers that would take care of her.

So with deliberate instruction, paths of quality teaching of parenting, and other life skills classes, the homies moved out of the gang experience and into becoming productive members of society. It was an ongoing theme at Homeboy Industries to talk about becoming a productive member of society. Joey believed in the Homeboy community, and saw it as a place of regeneration and unconditional welcome, but only for those who were ready:

I just want anyone that's thinking of coming to Homeboys—I encourage them to come and check it out. It's a great program, but you've got to be ready for it. If you're not ready for it—I mean it's always here. The door's open when you're ready for it. Like I said, I would like to encourage anybody that wants to come to Homeboy Industries to come down, check it out, give it a try. If you're having messed up times in your life and stuff like that, this is the place to come.

After a Homeboy had been integrated into the community through classes or through job referrals, the next step for him proved to be a spiritual awaking in a loving, caring community of homies just like himself, looking for a way out of the gang lifestyle.

I wanted to know more about how Homeboy Industries changed Joey's perspective. I asked him, "How are you getting along with other homies that were at one time considered to be your enemy?" Joey responded:

There are people in Homeboy Industries that—we don't get along at all. But like I said, you've got to be ready for the transformation. If you come in here ready for the change then something like that shouldn't bother you. I'm grown. They're grown. Hey, man. Let's put the differences aside and let's keep it going. They have kids, too. And they have families that they're trying to support just as well as I have. So it doesn't make them any different than me.

It reminded me of the saying that when the student is ready, the teacher will appear. The homies had to be ready for a change. "So what is different today?" I asked Joey; he responded:

Well, the thing that works for me now is that I've always done the same things over and over and expected different results. And to me, I didn't know that was like—that's what they call insanity. Doing the same things over and expecting different results—and I always did it all my life. And now that I've come to Homeboy I do things a little bit different, and my results are a lot better.

In one of the "Thoughts of the Day," Father Boyle referenced this idea:

In January, as always, we have the Loyola High students who come here and give a month of service, and we've been doing this for 15 years. Usually, there are two to three, and they always ask me the same question every year—what are we going to do here? I always say, "No. What's going to happen to you here?" and I think that's true for all of us. It's a good inclination because you want to serve.

That's where you begin, but that's not where you want to end because you want to end in kinship, not in service. People say, "I want to give back. I just want to give back," and I always think, "No, just receive from people. Just allow yourself to be reached by people." I think that's the whole deal right there.

### **Spiritual Awakening**

Many of the Homeboys talked about a spiritual awakening that occurred as part of their stay with Homeboy Industries. Father Gregory Boyle was a Catholic priest. God was openly talked about during conversations and in Father Boyle's talks. When Father Boyle spoke during the "Thought of the Day," it often sounded like a mini sermon. God was mentioned throughout his talks and the talks given by others. The homies repeated how God had become part of their lives. The 12-step programs and their spiritually based philosophy also played a part in the understanding of God, or a Higher Power. Something I heard at the Alcoholic Anonymous meetings was that they were all miracles. They each mentioned how they felt that they were miracles. I heard this reinforced several times throughout our interviews.

It does not matter that the homies were looked on by society as broken; just as Christ welcomed the outcasts in society, homies were welcomed in their brokenness to Homeboy Industries. Father Boyle spoke about how all humans are broken in his "Thought of the Day." He said:

I think it's better to receive than to give. When we stand with the other person in their brokenness, what it reveals to us is not our superiority to that person but indeed our own brokenness. So it's a privilege to walk with each other. It's a

privilege to receive from each other. It's a privilege to allow ourselves to let something happen. So let's do that today.

There were many things going on as I was trying to absorb everything around me, but I understood there was something at work here that might be greater than human experience could explain. Father Boyle explained it in a "Thought of the Day," with the story of the Good Samaritan. He said:

Yesterday morning, I was introducing you again to the Good Samaritan. The priest walks past the guy who's in the ditch because he's nearly dead. He needs help, but he walks past him, and the Levite walks past him, but the Samaritan stops and takes care of him. In fact, we call him the Good Samaritan. But what do we call the priest and the Levite? Do we call them bad? No, the interesting thing is that they knew the difference between right and wrong. In fact, the purity code says you cannot touch a dead body, and the gospel says he's nearly dead. So that's a violation of the purity code. You can't touch a dead body. So they didn't look at the Samaritan and say—wow, I feel scandalous because I didn't help this guy. No, they felt, actually, morally superior to the Good Samaritan because he touched the dead body. We don't—we follow the road. We don't touch dead bodies. Well, what did the Samaritan actually do? He connected to the guy. He looked at this guy in all his mess and brokenness, and he recognized his own mess and brokenness in himself.

The notion of connecting with those who are perceived by society to be broken is a tenet of Homeboy Industries. Father Boyle led by example what it meant to be a Good Samaritan and to relate to and to touch the untouchable gang member. This was one of



the beliefs that allowed former gang rivals to coexist peacefully in this community of practice. In this kinship, homies found the real person within, not the enemy they once knew. Father Greg continued to explain:

There is this obstacle to kinship. If you cannot welcome the mess and brokenness right here, you're going to hate it over there. If you are not hospitable to the truth of who you are, which is everybody in this room and outside of it that has mess and brokenness and need of healing and there's a cry for help.

Many children cry for help because they do not have the words to explain their pain and hurt. At Homeboy Industries, former gang members learned about healing and a new path to living their lives by asking for help. Father Boyle told them that they must meet themselves before they could meet anyone else. He continued:

That's what joins us together. If you're not comfortable with that (us), then you will have zero tolerance for it in the world. It's not about good people or bad people. It's not about moral superiority. It's not a high moral distance that separates us and those people. The more we can connect to our own mess and brokenness and need for healing, the more we can remind ourselves that we're all a cry for help. Then, when you see it in another person, you won't recoil, but you will reach out because you see yourself there, and that's what the Samaritan did. He just saw his insides. So I invite all of us today to connect to our own mess and brokenness so that we can find our kinship with each other.

I found this to be a better story than the one I had read in Sunday school about the Good Samaritan, or when I read it in the Bible at home that evening. Homeboy Industries talked about God and His life in the lives of the homies. This was a Christian

Community at Homeboy Industries; the same community that changed the homies' perspective about and affiliation with gang life.

Another example of spiritual awakening arose from Richard, who told me:

It's real simple, it's to be a better person and to be a person period. Like I don't – the meaning of spiritual awakening to me is to, learn to live, to be happy, and to be a better father. That's what it means to me.

### **Key Category 3: Future**

#### **I Have Meaning Today**

The homies could not wait to see what awaited them in their newfound futures. In one of my meetings with Richard, he mentioned how he was wandering before he had meaning in his life. He talked about how his life had meaning “today.” We started by talking about his job at Homeboy Industries. As we talked, we discovered that in the same manner that Father Boyle was like a father to them all at Homeboy Industries, Richard was a father to his children. That in the same way that Father Boyle cared for the homies, God cared for all of His children. Father Boyle modeled this father-like behavior in everything he did. When Richard realized that he was the father to his children, he understood that he had meaning today.

One day I had a very interesting talk with Richard. It was late in the day at Homeboy Industries; Richard and I sat in our usual corner at the café. Richard felt a little anxious, and I could sense it. I knew he needed to talk to me less about Homeboy Industries and more about how he was feeling that day, so I listened.

Richard told me that there were days when he didn't feel useful. I asked him to tell me why he felt this way and what gave him the strength to keep going and ask for help. We had a long talk on this day. He said:

There are days where I go by and—there are some days where I go by at standstill, and I'll go through the day, and I'll feel sometimes like my purpose is not—like what I'm doing here is not—is overlooked. So today it was kind of reassuring that I talked to my boss today. I let him know how I felt, and he reassured me that my presence here is not overlooked. And just those little words gave me hope—because every now and then I need reassurance, just like everyone does.

Asking for help was something Richard was not accustomed to doing. Richard was intimidating. People crossed the street when they saw him, so for him to ask for assistance was an indication of growth and a newly learned behavior. He learned this behavior by being in this community, though this was not behavior that was learned in class, necessarily. He continued:

For me it's critical because there have been past times where I didn't get the recognition of any duty that I was doing and it's kind of—it was a negative decision that I made after that. So today I grasped on to little things as far as like—yeah, you know what? Just because I haven't said it directly to you just know that . . .

Angel also told me about how he saw himself. He told me, "I see myself in a better light now. I don't look at gang banging anymore and going back to my neighborhood as a last resort anymore. It's given me hope and life for a better future."

He continued to tell me that, if he wasn't at Homeboy Industries, he would be in the hood or in prison: "It's changed a lot because a lot of them are my enemies and now I go to work with them here." Angel told me once, "Gang banging leads to prison." He said that he missed "spending time with them [his children] and being happy, because [he hadn't] really been in their lives due to all the time [he spent] in prison."

Angel reflected on a life without the influence of Homeboy Industries: "I would probably be on the streets gang banging or doing drugs, in prison, or in jail." Homies said that the gang "makes one lose oneself." Angel said:

I'm finally loved a little bit now. Now it's been thirty days, and I look back and say, "Man, I really do respect myself" because the person who I was, I'm not today. I'm not at all. I was a person that was lost as far as in the world."

The gang had him feeling lost. He mentioned how he felt alive now and how he could see a better future because of it.

Gang involvement took away many of the homies' family members, friends, and dreams, but I saw a light in their eyes when they compared their past gang lives to their current dreams and to what they could become. Angel said:

I want to be a counselor—like a person that directs the youth—like talks to the—counsels the youth as far as—that's my dream right there. Talk to the youth and let them know my gang experiences, what I went through, so they don't have to go down that—go through that pain and the suffering and they don't have to get manipulated by the wrong people that are living that lifestyle out there. That's one of my dreams to accomplish—to be a counselor for the young children, the

kids growing up. And right there in the projects and East Los Angeles—to get them out of that state of mind as far as being on the streets doing drugs.

The homies perceived my interviews as insightful, not only for this study but also as a tool for them to look at themselves and their future. Alex liked to tell me about his future and how he now saw himself. I said, “Well, you seem happy. Why? What’s going on?” He said, “Because I’ve—like I told you, I have hope for a future now and I didn’t before.” I asked him, “Five years from now—five years from today, where do you see yourself?” He responded, “I plan on having my own house, my family, and maybe a better job.”

Another example of having meaning today came from a “Thought of the Day” offered by Adam. Even though he was still a young man, he had spent a long time in prison. He said, “I feel like I am someone today and, although they tried to break me in prison, I came through.” He wrote a poem entitled “Dreams”:

“Dreams”  
I wasn’t supposed to dream  
Especially going up a stream  
That every time I got knocked down  
I took those hits so extreme.  
Yet I got back up  
Even if deep inside I had to scream  
So many foul words, foul persons, and vile teams  
Said to me I would never reach my dreams  
That I would be just another low-life gang member  
That I was going to die in prison  
Or get killed on the streets.  
I tried to validate their point  
Without acknowledging my point  
That my opinion was concealed  
From how you served me  
For my personal traumas  
And all that extra good shit we call drama.  
So in return  
Seeking our identity

Because I was too hurt to deal  
With my own identity  
But when I heard the word “dreams,”  
It wouldn’t hit me  
Until we jumped that stream  
That stream so extreme  
But when you fall, never give up  
Reaching for your dreams

In this poem, I saw many examples of homies’ dreams that were yet to be fulfilled or, at the very least, the hope and aspiration of dreams to be fulfilled.

### **Practicing Love**

The practice of love was something new to the homies. It was first experienced when they walked through the doors of Homeboy Industries. They were asked whether they were on probation or parole. If they answered yes, they were told, “You qualify for a job here at Homeboy Industries.” It was the first sign of love. They were not rejected, but were welcomed and encouraged to come back and keep coming to a place where they could learn to practice love. The same thing happened to Joey, when he said that Father Boyle would never turn him away, but would redirect him when Joey came in with his rage.

It is also part of the Jesuit practices of love and loving one another as Christ loved us. Early in his career, Father Boyle worked in the projects of Eliso Gardens. They were dangerous because he could have been caught in the crossfire of gang rivalry. The Catholic Church would have preferred that he not work with homies in the projects. Rather, they wanted him to practice love in the sanctuary and not in the streets. Father Greg related:

Years ago, I was riding my bike in the housing projects, and I was surprised that when I came to this one area there were no homies there. I figured maybe cops

had been hot that night, and everybody went inside, but then I looked and I saw this kid, Luis, a 16-year-old gang member sitting on the stoop right in front of his apartment. So I rolled up on my beach cruiser, and I said, “Luis, what are you doing?” and he said, “Praying.” But he said it in a way that didn’t want to bring attention to him. It was kind of remarkable. Then, he said, “It’s funny. Right now, I was asking God, give me a sign that you’re as great as I think you are,” and then, you showed up.

### **White Picket Fence**

One of the themes that emerged in our conversations was the notion of a white picket fence, the desire for a house with all the trimmings and life in a perfect state. The homies wanted to live in a neighborhood where they could let their children ride their bikes without fear of violence and gangs. Richard said, “It’s a lot of things. It’s happiness. Its love, compassion—all those things I’ve never felt before. It’s hope; it’s having the house with the white picket fence.”

The white picket fence represented all the things that Homeboy Industries represented. It was the ideal living situation of the homies who had suffered and had been judged unjustly. The white picket fence symbolized the life of a “productive member of society,” as the homies liked to say. It was the culmination of their hard work to recover and to establish themselves with the larger community of Los Angeles and the world.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter painted a picture of what I saw and experienced at Homeboy Industries and how the communities of practice changed the situated learning experience

of Latino male gang members and their perspective and affiliation with gang life. The following results chapter analyzes this data and makes recommendations for practice and future studies.



**CHAPTER V**  
**RESEARCH ANALYSIS**

**Introduction to Findings**

This section details the findings that emerged from the data presented in Chapter 4. This qualitative study answered the research question: How does the situated learning experience of Latino male gang members at Homeboy Industries affect their perspective about and affiliation with gang life? The findings are arranged in themes that reflect the answer to this question, clustered around the “kinds” of learning experiences that the participants shared. The data revealed that while homeboys actively participated in the structured learning experiences that were provided by Homeboy Industries (i.e., education, job placement, tattoo removal), there were instances of other, deeper lessons that occurred in their particular communities of practice and affected their perspective about and affiliation with gang life. These learning experiences form the focus of this findings section. In addition, as was mentioned in Chapter 2, Gándara and Contreras (2010) have suggested that lack of educational achievement and attainment are prime indicators for gang membership. This lack of educational success led to the high drop out rates of young Latino men and provided fertile ground for them to be lured into a gang lifestyle, eventually landing them at the doorstep of Homeboy Industries.

However, the homies quickly understood the trap of gang life. Once they saw an opportunity to leave, some took it. Homeboys provided this opportunity. At Homeboy Industries, each of the participants had broken ties with his previous gang life and felt a kind of freedom because of this. Their movement into the Homeboys’ culture and community had impacted them in ways that they did not expect. Much of the learning

that took place for the homeboys constituted an internal journey. They expressed changes in attitude about how they viewed their past, present, and future, and how these changes had affected their perspective about gangs and their affiliation with them. In particular, the homeboys were able to focus on their feelings. In some cases, they were able to move away from the hair trigger fight response they learned from the gangs and move toward a more conflict resolution model of dealing with everyday problems. In other cases, they were able to acknowledge their feelings in ways that they had previously not experienced. This acknowledgement—and the outpouring of feelings that they shared with me—proved profound and impacted me deeply. Perhaps the most significant change I observed occurred in their language about their own spirituality and relationships with their God. For each, it was a God of their own choice, but, nonetheless, they committed to a spirituality in themselves and others that they had not experienced before Homeboy Industries.

The participants attributed all of these life changes to Homeboy Industries. They understood that it was not only what they *did* there, but also what they had *become* there. It was not just *doing* at Homeboys, but *being* at Homeboys that made the difference. Their commitment to this place, this practice, this way of life, allowed them to look to a future they once thought not possible.

The themes that emerged from the data revolved around the kinds of “learning” the homies experienced. While some of the knowledge they acquired focused on practical aspects of living outside of the gang, most of what I discussed with the homies focused on a kind of intangible knowledge acquisition that they embraced. The themes in this chapter reflect this deeper, more profound kind of learning. The chapter addresses

the emergent themes of “Learning from the Past,” “Learning to be Family,” “Learning about Self,” “Learning to be Present,” “Learning about the Spirit,” “Learning about Community,” and “Learning to Leave.” Recommendations based on the findings follow the discussion of themes joined by suggestions for future studies. The chapter concludes with a personal reflection about my dissertation journey at Homeboy Industries.

### **Theme 1: Learning from the Past**

One of my major findings was that the homies neither wished to shut the door on their past nor to forget it. They actually saw the past as a benefit and a tool to use to become their best selves. Combined with this desire to use the past as a strength and the unconditional love found at Homeboy Industries, a culture emerged that encouraged individuals to see themselves and others as persons of worth. Homeboy Industries embraced and met the homies where they were and lifted them up through a series of spiritual practices, academic classes, 12-step meetings, and life skills courses. These ideas are foundational in the writings of Father Gregory Boyle (2010).

The homies were surprised when they walked into Homeboy Industries and the first thing that they were asked was whether they were on probation or parole. This question—a question about their past—might scare anyone, knowing that revealing their status might mean denial of employment, something brought up by Pedro Noguera (2008). However, at Homeboy Industries, homies who answered this question with a yes were immediately told that they qualified and were offered an application. This was not what the gang members expected, and they were introduced to this community of unconditional acceptance and forgiveness, something they had not experienced in gang life.

The basic belief in the homies at Homeboy Industries proved to be something foreign to them. Latinos have been told to study hard, and that they would be rewarded with a white-collar middle class lifestyle (Suarez-Orozco & Páez, 2009). However, the homies experienced something vastly different. Gang members struggled to achieve and to be accepted into the society of mainstream America. They were so accustomed to being rejected, looked down upon, or locked up by society that when they were welcomed and offered jobs, they felt shock (Boyle, 2010). At Homeboy Industries, everyone received a job, and this belief in who they were and the acceptance of their past did not hinder them, but rather benefited them. Their past, no matter how dark, was their entry into Homeboy Industries.

Because dealing with their pasts gave them strength and cautioned them about what lay ahead, should they falter, the homies learned that their pasts proved useful. They understood that their past was a living reminder that history can and could haunt them if they chose to ignore its lessons and return to a life they were happy to leave. As Richard once told me in conversation, if it were not for his past, he would not be where he was today. The culture of Homeboy Industries understood this, embraced their past, and taught the men that the past was not something to run from, but a part of their lives from which they could learn. Counseling sessions, self-help sessions, and the spiritual practices I observed showed how the past can be a tool for forward movement. Homies discovered that they were the sum of their experiences, which included their pasts. The homies were happy to be where they were in life at Homeboy Industries, because it proved to be a place that protected them from the outside world—until they could manage on their own.

## **Theme 2: Learning to be Family**

The family and the notion of the family were important factors to the homies. Latinos grow up with a strong sense of family, and embrace extended families, but the homies that I spent time with had lived in dysfunctional families. According to Rodriguez (2005), gang members may even have older family members in gangs. This endless cycle of family involvement in the gang—along with drugs, violence, and incarceration—creates what Rodriguez (2005) called the dysfunctional gang incubator for young gang members. The homies I talked to were part of this cycle.

This negative experience of the past created in them a desire to have the “perfect family,” along with the home and the “white picket fence.” This unrealistic notion of a traditional family was an aspiration but also a curse. There are no perfect families, and for homies who have difficult and fractured pasts, the perfect family was an ideal that was especially out of reach. However, having the aspirational ideal that they might one day have a family that did not experience the trauma of their own past created a hope in them for their future. Living without the daily gang pressures and dangers, was the first step toward having a proud family life. The first family that Homeboy Industries presented to the homies was Homeboy Industries itself. The program was a community and, within that community, there was kinship. That kinship was fostered and cultivated so that it could be transferred to their families. This impacted their ideas about the family and made them more committed to their own families. Father Boyle told me, “They learn to love their children more than they hate their enemy.”

At Homeboy Industries, the former gang members learned two important things about family. First, they learned the “hard” skills about how to be fathers, how to control

their temper, and how to sustain employment—all skills necessary to developing and nurturing family life. These practical skills were learned in the “how to” classes that homies attended while at Homeboy Industries. The second, perhaps most important, thing they learned about family came from the community of practice consciously created by Father Boyle. The community modeled family every day, starting with the morning “Thought of the Day” reflections. By example, Father Boyle showed them how to be the head of the family. He was the unspoken head of the family at Homeboy Industries; he practiced unconditional love with every homie; he offered forgiveness to every homie.

This was especially evident in his encounter when he repeatedly turned away a gang member (Joey), who was raging out of control and on drugs in the center. Each time the homie returned, Father Boyle would gently turn him toward the door and ask him to return when he had calmed down. That homie, who was one of my participants, said that he knew that Homeboy Industries would be there when he was ready.

This community of practice had, at its core, values that encouraged affirming the members of the community and values that could be transferred by the homies to their own family life. Being at Homeboy Industries taught them how to be family on many levels. In it, members would come and go, travel within communities and form new communities, but it all started with the foundational principals of acceptance and forgiveness espoused by Father Boyle, the head of the Homeboys family. Without him, several of the homies said there could be no “Homeboy Industries.”

### **Theme 3: Learning about Self**

Homies talked about searching for and finding themselves during their time at Homeboy Industries. Finding one’s self meant getting in touch with feelings that had

long been suppressed while in the gang—an idea formulated by Rodriguez (2005). Richard found himself through feeling for the first time in his life the unconditional love at Homeboy Industries as well as hope that was new and foreign to him. He said he learned about himself and liked the self he met. For Richard, coming to Homeboy Industries was the first time he had ever felt anything; previously, he had no feelings, no remorse, and no guilt about what he had done. Actually having feelings was something new to the homies. Feeling was something with which they needed to learn to deal. Learning to deal with their feelings was achieved at Homeboy Industries because homies witnessed the examples of the caring and loving personnel, other homies, and Father Boyle.

Through skill development—but also in part through a community that allowed vulnerability and provided a safe place to be authentic and share real feelings, Homeboy Industries helped homies understand their emotions. In the gang, members were always posturing, pretending to be “tough,” pretending to be brave, when, in fact, they might have been fearful of leaving a violent lifestyle. When they joined Homeboys, they dropped their defenses, opened up to who they really were, what they really felt, and—for the first time—began to know who they were and what they could become.

One feeling that had been previously foreign to them was hope. They were taught that there was hope in their lives and that the future held great things for them. They were treated by Father Greg and the Homeboys community as if this were true. This feeling of hope was a renaissance, a rebirth to them, giving them insight about themselves and the opportunity to see themselves in a new light. It also allowed the homies to understand how others could view them in a reflective or restorative manner. In other

words, they were able to look in the mirror and see the real self and began to work on themselves.

#### **Theme 4: Learning to be Present**

Many people find it difficult to live in the present. We think about the future or live in the past. I found homies to be consciously living in the present. The homies had experienced so much in their lives that running away from the present was what they knew. The homies explained to me that they would drink or use drugs to escape and to forget their troubles. They would do anything to not think about what was happening in the present. In addition, they were high school dropouts who had few marketable skills and little social capital from which to parlay into a job. Gándara and Contreras (2010) discussed the impact of this deficit and its socioemotional and economic consequence for the Latino male. Homeboy Industries understood this need, offered to fill in the skill gaps with its programs, healed the socioemotional scars, and built social capital with the community experience in which it engaged.

However, one of the requirements of working at Homeboys was to be clean and sober. Drug testing was ongoing and was random and frequent. Being free of drugs enabled homies to learn to be in the present. Without the escape of drugs and alcohol, they were able to face the present, and with the help of Homeboys the present was not the fearful, dreary place it was when they were in gangs.

In addition, homies learned not merely to live in the present, but to *be present*. One example was when Angel said to me, “I just love knowing that I’m free and working here at Homeboys’. It’s like I’m in heaven.” “How so?” I asked him. He said, “I can feel the wind in my face and I look at the sky and see the sun and hear the birds.” “What



does that make you feel?" I asked him, and he said, "I feel present, I am alive, I can feel love, pain, happiness, I know that I am sitting here in front of you talking to you. I can answer your questions honestly and without fear about what I say." This exchange is the kind of effective qualitative inquiry proposed by Merriam (2009).

This was where the change happened, and the more the homies participated in the activities at Homeboy Industries the more aware they became of the importance of being present. Richard told me that he and his fellow homies needed to be present to have God in their lives. He said that God lives in the present and to be anywhere else was not to have God in your life. So for the homies, they had to be present to be aware of the humanity that surrounded them. Richard offered a play on words. He said, "I have to be present, because that is where the presents are."

### **Theme 5: Learning about the Spirit**

The homies attended 12-step programs and were introduced to a God of their own understanding. They called it a Higher Power in the program of Alcoholics Anonymous. Whether it was in the Alcoholics Anonymous meeting or from the teachings of Father Boyle, the presence of God was revealed to the homies. When the homies did well in daily activities, these successes were celebrated by the entire staff and coworkers; such achievement was considered a grace from God. The Lord was introduced in the "Thought of the Day." It was inspirational, it was a daily practice, it asked for guidance for the day, and it prompted participants to reflect throughout their activities.

These techniques, modeled after the Ignatian exercises, were explicitly taught and modeled. The homies spoke about miracles, and how they saw themselves as miracles. They could not have imagined feeling the way that they did, they could not have

imagined having a job, and they could not have imagined embracing the opportunities they currently had.

The homies were also taught by the Spiritual Exercises that they were sinners and that they were forgiven. They experienced forgiveness while at Homeboy Industries by kind and loving treatment. The writing of Ivens (2004) introduced me to the Spiritual Exercises, which I found useful in my own life.

The homies were later introduced to the concept that all were sinners, not just the homies, and that all were forgiven through Christ. This was a specific component of the Spiritual Exercises—the contemplation of sins—which was what Father Boyle meant by the “brokenness of everyone in this room.”

Another component of the exercises focused on the importance of the guide. The guide was required to be gentle and kind, to give courage and strength for the future, and to encourage the sinner to prepare for consolation. This was exactly what Homeboy Industries inspired in the homies: hope and faith that all would be well, no matter how far down life’s road they had been. Father Boyle and veteran homies taught the message of forgiveness through “Thoughts of the Day” and in everyday modeling of a kind a gentle manner, always preaching the importance of strength and hope for the future.

### **Theme 6: Learning about Community**

The community at Homeboy Industries was unique because it consisted of former enemies. The former gang members previously only knew how to resolve conflicts through violence; at Homeboy Industries, they had to learn a new way. Through the practice of unconditional love, demonstrated by Father Boyle, the homies learned to love and to be loved. They practiced being vulnerable and feeling their actual feelings. This

new emotional life was facilitated in great part by Father Boyle, who had introduced a modified form of the Jesuit spiritual exercises into the practices of Homeboy Industries. Also written about by Ivens (2004), the reflection and personal spiritual growth model embedded in the spiritual exercises created a nonthreatening environment full of love and compassion, supporting the former gang members and teaching them how to be productive members of society.

The coexistence of former enemies at Homeboy Industries taught them to love and to practice kinship and forgiveness. At Homeboy Industries, there was a new kind of learning taking place: one in which former enemies taught each other and learned from one another. This unusual practice took place at Homeboy Industries, where it was taught to the homies in a kind and loving way.

When I asked them specifically how they felt working alongside former rival gang members, the homies said that they were able to do so because they saw them as people, not rivals. This acceptance of others—even former enemies—came from the leadership of Homeboy Industries and from Father Boyle.

Homeboy Industries, as Father Boyle said to me in my final interview, was “soaking with love.” From the first moment a homie arrived at Homeboy Industries, he was shown love. The next step was getting a job, where they were taught in a kind and loving way how to show up every day. The counselors and the therapists were sensitive to the homies because they had been injured in many ways and they did not need more mistreatment. In one of the self-help meetings, I heard one of the homies say “that they are no longer door mats for others to clean their feet on.” A sense of pride in their work and hope in life was the first sign that they were becoming part of a greater community

and contributing members of society. In a way, living alongside rival homies expanded their horizons, helping them understand that they might be able to get along with all types of people in this world in order to be successful. They must reach out and try to understand others before judging them. Through the work of the community, the homies' affective filter was brought down so that learning could take place, wherever they were.

The community of practice at Homeboys revolved around the motto found in all of the Homeboy Industries literature: "Jobs not Jail." There was something valuable about working, producing, or serving, and this was part of the practice at Homeboys. Giving the homies a job as they walked in the door was, in part, to show forgiveness and love but was also to help them accomplish other important life skills. They learned to show up on time, to stay the whole day, to do the work assigned, to stay off their cell phones, and to start to work with other gang members. Many of the first jobs were janitorial in nature, but, nonetheless, the homies mentioned how proud they were to have these jobs. During one of the "Thoughts for the Day," Joey said, "I told myself I was going to be the best toilet cleaner that Homeboys has ever had." Working as a practice in this community was an important part of building a sense of pride that they have never felt before.

### **Theme 7: Learning to Leave**

While being at Homeboy Industries was transformative, the end goal for former gang members could not be to remain at the site for the rest of their lives. For Homeboys to be truly successful, it had to find a way to have the homies venture out into the real world, where unconditional love and acceptance were sometimes rare occurrences.

The structures and programs in place at Homeboy Industries allowed the homies to learn to move out as unmarked individuals into spaces and places previously unknown to them. For example, tattoo removal was offered at Homeboy Industries. Having tattoos removed took the marker off the gang member. They could divorce themselves from their gang identity and join mainstream society. They could move about in the world unidentified as former gang members, and avoid the negative stereotypes that that image brings. Homeboys gave the former gang members the tools to do tasks that were once very challenging for the homies. Much of this effort would be a way of claiming some social capital for the homies—an element they completely lacked Gándara (2010).

Some homies, however, were tattooed for life. Some homies were so completely tattooed—for example, full facial tattoos—that no amount of tattoo removal would eradicate the marks. One homie who had had the tattoos successfully removed was my participant Angel.. I once told him that I could no longer see his tattoos. His response was one of gratitude and happiness. He was honestly appreciative, and I enjoyed seeing his demeanor. I would not have been able to say this to Angel had I not been accepted as part of the community and perceived as someone who was trying to understand and help the homies. He, too, was emotionally prepared to accept the compliment and be able to do something positive and healthy with it.

The ability of communities to provide gang intervention and develop safe and trusting environments allows for open communication that facilitates an individual's transition away from a life of participating in violent and destructive behavior toward a more productive and healthy lifestyle (Boyle, 2010). Homeboy Industries allowed the homies to think of themselves for the first time as worthy community members of

society, not as gang members. I saw that the confidence and poise that Twin, Angel, and Richard had as a result of Homeboys was greater than the physical building or the programs or the people. The mere fact that some of these men had recently exited prison and were thinking toward the future, contrary to their way of thinking just a few months earlier, felt miraculous.

This study shows that, with Homeboy Industries, former gang members were able to live without the gang and in the journey find themselves. This life change impacted them significantly, so they could become self-aware, and helped them understand that they were becoming fully conscious. Homies lived in a community of practice, practices that I have detailed. They included (a) forgiveness and acceptance modeled on the life of Jesus, (b) the importance of work and the value of the individual who does it, and (c) the centrality of family and significance of human connections that support people both practically and spiritually. Living out these practices and living in a community was critical to the success of the gang members at Homeboy Industries.

### **Recommendations**

First, I recommend that policymakers look at Homeboy Industries as a possible alternative to incarceration. If Homeboy Industries were to be provided the same funds used to keep someone in jail for the same period of time, it would pay dividends. The cost per client at Homeboy Industries was considerably less than what is required to incarcerate a person. It costs \$1,300 to \$5,500 to have a homie go through a one-year program, depending on his needs at Homeboy Industries, and it costs \$31,000 to \$46,000, depending on the county, to house someone for one year in jail (Homeboy Industries, 2014). I recommend that the courts consider Homeboy Industries as an alternative to

immediate incarceration for gang members. There are people who fulfill community services hours at Homeboy Industries, but it is used as an afterthought, not as a primary course of action or intervention by the courts.

Second, my research indicates that Homeboy Industries is an institution that works and is impactful in many ways. It would be profitable to have other Homeboy Industries around the nation. Father Boyle has told me and has mentioned publically that he does not want to franchise Homeboy Industries. However, based on the research that gang rehabilitation centers need to be in major urban and rural areas (Boyle, 2010), I believe that the Homeboy Industries model would be valuable in other parts of the nation. It is true that gang centers are best when tailored to their respective communities; however, I do believe that the tenets of Homeboy Industries would be successful working in many underserved communities where gang activity is a problem. I was reminded by Father Boyle that Homeboy Industries does not work with gangs, but rather gang members. Thus gang rehabilitation centers that work with individuals and treat each individual with respect and care—as does Homeboy Industries—should be piloted in other parts of the nation to help gang members get out of the gang lifestyle.

### **Future Studies**

I have several ideas for future studies that may complement the work I have conducted.

- Complete a study on the separate parts of the Homeboy Industries program to determine which services are more or less impactful. For example, look at tattoo removal, parenting or life skills classes, and GED classes alone and together to see if they work independently or in concert with one another.

- Replicate a similar study at another gang rehabilitation center with similar services, but without the Ignatian component. The spiritual component is interesting, and I would like to see how another program operates without that focus.
- Complete a similar study on females who were former gang members and could be studied at Homeboy Industries.
- Look at another racial group besides Latinos and see if there is a difference in their perspective and affiliation with gang life.
- Complete a study of alumni of the program; that is, Homeboys who have moved on in their lives and are now “productive members of society” but are not affiliated with Homeboys anymore (except as alumni) and determine from them what aspects of Homeboys were most impactful.

### **Conclusion**

One of the things that I found most interesting was the insider’s perspective that I was able to attain. Not only did I navigate the site and collect the data; I had to learn how to learn to be a researcher at Homeboy Industries. As I mentioned earlier, I was told by the Homeboy representative, Eileen, that other researchers who had been to Homeboys had seemed “voyeuristic.” The participants had mentioned to Eileen that they felt comfortable talking with me, unlike how they had felt with previous researchers whom they had felt were intrusive and opportunistic. Future researchers need to know what I learned: how to be authentic and negotiate Homeboy Industries in a respectful and careful way. The homies are like everyone else underneath; the trick is to get underneath. Being



authentic, being tactful, and most of all, being honest at all times in dealings with the homies is key to understanding them and helping them.

I changed in many ways as a result of my studies at Homeboy Industries. I am more compassionate toward people whom I formerly feared. I learned that people join a gang out of necessity to survive in the *barrio*. I also learned about myself, and the importance of perseverance. I learned about the process of writing and how difficult it is for me.

Most importantly, I learned to trust other people and, in trusting them, I saw their humanity. I hope this scholarly work will begin to change the way the world looks at homies or former gang members. Gangs are and have long been a major challenge to society, but if we remember that homies are not running toward something but are running away from something, we may better address their ills. This dissertation is my way of saying to the homies that they matter.

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